

No Time For Politics

*James McMillen Owen
2835 North Highway A1A # 903
Indianapolis Florida 32903
407 777 1901*

No Time For Politics

1

May 1

Johnny Ropp's mind was made up, "That does it. State law says we can't recall the bastard. Looks like I'll have to run for congress." He didn't want Tucker's opinion, but he telephoned and asked for it. Johnny was seeking Tucker's approval. Instead - he was greeted by a shock of disbelief, "Johnny - did I hear you right? You're telling me you're going to run for congress?"

"Yes - what do you think?"

"You're crazier than a loon. Without moleycoddlers - minions and money you don't stand a chance.

"I have one of the senior editors of the Washington Post in my hip pocket."

"In a pigs eye you do."

"You mean you won't support me?"

"Me - yes. The Post - no. You've been away from DC too long. Have you forgotten? The power structure of the Post leans a little to the left of Lenin. Don't you remember the last Presidential election? We supported a liberal serial misogynist instead of a moderate secular conservative."

"I thought the secular conservative was supported by the religious right."

"When the votes were counted the religious nuts cast just enough votes for a pedophile to win. Then the third party squirrel split the secular vote and we're stuck with a megalomaniac for four more years."

"That's the nut of it. That's why I decided to run."

"What good can I do in DC? Most of your native Euphorian voters can't read let alone subscribe to the Post."

"I'm looking for your support not Pravda on the Potomac's."

"I'll give you mine even though I think you're crazy. What made you decide to be certified?"

"The slick ones economic package raised my ire."

"Not Jefro Wilson Clampet - our lay of the day President?"

"Big Bubba finally got under my skin with his economic double speak. He went over the top when he began to take credit for economic decisions made by the Federal Reserve."

"Better not die - or he'll show up at your funeral and claim to be your closest relative. So - you take exception to our fat boy president from the Great State of Ignorance telling the country he's reducing the deficit when the Fed is doing it through lower interest rates."

"Right, but the deficit is still climbing."

"Are you a single issue candidate?"

"No - my second issue is the decline of our military. Jefro reduced Defense spending - cut back on people - decided to be an internationalist and increased our commitments overseas. When he leaves office our military won't be able to defend Lake Eire from the Canadians."

"He needed the Defense money to spend on his economic program of Bread and Circuses."

"Bread and Circuses? The old Roman political scam is our new opium of the American proletariat?"

"Thanks to Jefro Wilson Clampet it is. He's wants to be our new Caesar."

"More like our new Caligula - wallowing in overindulgence and sin while he carries his bible to church."

"He's not the only sinner who failed to understand history - so we're condemned to relive it. When the Roman Empire was prosperous it was the populus who put the Caesars in power and sowed the seeds of the Empires destruction. Didn't you get enough government nonsense when you lived in McLean?"

"I forgot about endless committee meetings that compromise good ideas into oblivion. When I was up there - if push came to shove country came before politics."

"Not with J. W. Clampet. Truman said, 'The buck stops here.' Jefro's motto is, 'The buck comes here.'"

"And he is first among comers."

"You can't get rid of him by running for Congress."

"I can stop his raid on the public purse. Our Congressman is sucking up to Clampet - not paying attention to his voters and handing Jefro the key to the Treasury."

"Who is he?"

"A. Brown Nose."

"Congressman Nose? The one who walks in Jefro's shadow?"

"If Jefro ever stops short - Nose will disappear up Clampet's ass hole."

"Which primary will you run in - Barefoot and Pregnant or Tax and Spend?"

"I'm forced to run with the Barefoot and Pregnant ones."

"You won't be able to keep your secular conservative stance. Those folks are militant in Euphoria. You'll have to join their crusade. Why not try Tax and Spend?"

"A. B. Nose is their candidate and as much as I'm opposed to the government controlling a woman's body - I'm more opposed to a government controlling our pocketbooks."

"The first question you'll be asked is, 'Are you for life or against it.'"

"Sort of like when did you stop beating your wife. It's not one of issues."

"It's the only B&P issue. It's their litmus test."

"I'm against abortion, but I'm opposed to a government making that decision."

"You don't stand a chance. What district does congressman Nose represent?"

"I live in Euphoria's Flat Earth district - the Sixty-Sixth."

"Flat Earth?"

"Most of my constituents are ultra-conservative Christians who hold the Book of Revelations to be absolute."

"And the Pentateuch?"

"Filler until you reach their part of the bible. You wrote

a series about religious sects in Appalachia. When they built the interstate the ones who could read road signs migrated to Euphoria."

"The kind of religious folks who believe they'll fall off if you sail out past the Gulf Stream? Any snake handlers?"

"Not that I know of, but we do have more than our fair share of expatriates from Mountain Momma. The ones who could afford to pay tolls on the roads south."

"I'm on deadline. Tell you what. It might be time for me to write an everyman against the establishment series. Will your local paper pick it up?"

"Owned by Gannett and they have lady editors running amok."

"Strike two. How do you plan on financing your campaign?"

"Remember the travel books on how to see Europe on five dollars a day?"

"Strike three - you're out. More like two hundred now. If you try to run a populus campaign - bend down - place your head between your legs and kiss your ass good-bye. Money is truly the mother's milk of politics. Without it no one will believe you're serious."

"You sure have come a long way for a guy who used up all nine lives in Nav school."

"I might have used up my nine lives, but you've got three strikes against you and you haven't even come up to bat. Lets see - you're going to run for office in the Barefoot and Pregnant party and advocate freedom of choice. You live in a one newspaper district that only supports woman candidates and liberals. And you won't accept big dollar financial support. Talk about spitting into the wind. Unless you join the crusade against women - or get all the money you can steal - or change your sex your candidacy is doomed."

"I'm in tune with the electorate. If I can get out among them and get my message out I'll have a fair shot."

"There ain't no free lunch out there - Johnny. You'll be lucky if your local paper spells your name right in the obits. Haven't you noticed? There are no town centers."

They've been replaced by shopping malls. You've got no free place to politic. I have only one piece of advice - don't do it. When are you and Bobbie Jean coming up for a visit?"

"Fall - when it cools down and a cold front sweeps the hot air and pollution out of DC. Besides - it's hotter in DC than it is down here. Come visit Bobbie Jean and me."

"Why should I visit your southern swamp in the middle of summer? When the snow flies I'll spread my wings and fly down with Lisa. Listen to my advice - think twice before you decide to run for office."

"I have that stubborn idea that your second law doesn't apply to me."

"It applies to all politicians. Ignorance and Superstition will always win out over Science and Fact. Give me a call when you fly our way. I'll give our larcenous Sergeant friend your best."

"Is Bidwell behaving himself?"

"With J. W. Clampet in the White House - Bidwell looks like a saint. Not many political card players since Mr. Sam and Harry died."

Johnny hung up with a sinking feeling, "I should have flown up to DC and talked to Tucker in person. This decision is too important to handle over the phone. He's probably right. Maybe I have been in the State of Euphoria too long." Johnny Ropp's decision to enter politics had its genesis after he wrote a letter to Congressman A. B. Nose. He inquired how Nose was going to vote on Clampet's economic package. This turned into a self fulfilling prophecy. Johnny all ready knew how Congressman Nose was going to vote before signing his letter. However - he did expect a polite response. When none came he phoned Congressman Nose's local office. A very pleasant lady responded, "We're sorry, but we received too many letters of nonsupport for the president's economic package. Congressman Nose has decided not to respond to letters or phone calls. He has decided to poll

his constituents. Call back and I will let you know the results." Johnny should have left well enough alone. But - he had to get in his two cents worth, "Bubba's economic package has raised the hackles on almost everyone I know in Mosquito County."

"We don't address our president as Bubba - Mr. Ropp." She slammed the hand set down - terminating their discussion.

Bobbie Jean looked up from her morning newspaper, "Who was on the phone?"

"A lady from congressman Nose's office.

"She hung up on you?"

"Yes."

"What did you say to get her mad?"

"I called our president from the State of Ignorance - Bubba."

"You certainly have a lot to learn about the south. Bubba is brother and he certainly isn't yours."

"I should have called Bubba a redneck?"

"His neck is red, but no. He's the type of politician from the south we call a scalawag."

"What's a scalawag?"

"Originally it was a carpetbagger, but now it's a Southerner who would sell out his constituents for political gain."

"That's both Jefro W. Clampet and his lackey - A. B. Nose.

"You've been watching too much C-SPAN."

Jefro Wilson Clampet was the first president to come out of the State of Ignorance. A State where elections are not won by offering voters a chicken in every pot. Jefro won his elections by offering his Ignorant voters an outhouse in every yard. Congressman A. B. Nose - a trial lawyer by profession and a full time shyster by practice decided to hitch his wagon to Clampet's star. When he polled his voters less than a third approved Jefro's economic package. Johnny called Nose's local office to find out the poll results. The answer came back, "We don't have the results available here.

They're in Washington." This was the same answer Johnny received when he asked what facts Nose considered when he supported militant feminists in their support of the Career Criminal Act at the Supreme Court. Now - not all congressmen are considered to be career criminals. If the truth be known - more than a few are legislators who at times place the common good above party and politics. When J. W. Clampet and his supporters - like A. B. Nose - appeared on the national scene - common sense flew out the door of the capitol and landed in the outhouse.

May 23

Bobbie Jean folded this morning's edition of their local Mosquito County newspaper - Euphoria Toady and poured Johnny another cup of coffee, "It's been over three weeks. Are you still serious about running for congress."

"I'm dead serious."

"Is it because you have tennis elbow from attempting to hit sand shots out of beach sand at the military golf course?"

"You're saying that I have too much time on my hands?"

"You're playing golf three times a week."

"Idle hands are the devil's playground."

"Well if you're thinking about running - sit down and write out your political philosophy and why you should run."

"When do I have to turn my term paper in."

"Very funny. You may make a good politician in spite of your naiveté. You never answered my question."

"Which one?"

"Should I sell my interest in our Arlington restaurant?"

"Sam's is turning a healthy profit and it gives us an excuse to visit."

"Absentee ownership is a shortcut to bankruptcy."

"Jefro's Capital Gains tax will devour your profits."

"Didn't think about that. I was going to reinvest here."

"You don't need money from Sam's for that."

"Write down your political philosophy."

Johnny sat at his desk - staring out the window at the Mosquito River lagoon - wondering why it was called a river when it was nothing more than a salt water backwash. He looked down on a blank sheet of paper - still without his political philosophy on it. He wrote, *Barefoot and Pregnant* and stared out the window again, "Why am I a B&P? Mother's side of the family wasn't. They were lifetime Tax and Spend and so was my Father's family until he lost his teaching job because of a hidebound T&S School Board. And I'm not a religious nut - so I fail their litmus test." He continued, *Fiscal Conservative from the Teddy Roosevelt branch. Not a laissez-faire free trader. Like Teddy - just enough regulation to promote competition and prevent unfair practices. Free trade where trade is truly free and import restrictions where it isn't. A favored nations policy promotes unfair competition and pricing. International economics is simple - If we can't sell there - they can't sell here. However - like after World War II when a Marshall Plan is needed - draw one up. But - don't do it on a continuous basis. To do so is a disservice to other nations and our taxpayers.* Johnny lifted his pen and looked out the window. A minute later he wrote, *Follow the Constitution and listen to my constituents. Morality is the prerogative of the Church - not the State.*

Bobbie Jean scanned Johnny's political philosophy, "I'd vote for you, but how do you determine what's too much or too little regulation?"

"We're supposed to elect representatives to make the economic decisions."

"Do they."

"No. Unfortunately we elect lawyers to craft economic law."

"Who's doing the deciding?"

"Ivy league professors - economists and bankers."

"And not one had to scratch out a living in business?"

"Law is too important to allow lawyers to write the rules and business is too important to be run by bean counters. Do we allow criminals to manage our prisons?"

"You didn't write down why you're running."

"We have a president who believes forty percent is a mandate to rape the treasury - a congressman who refuses to listen to his constituents and a congress willing to sell out their country for short term political and economic gain."

"Which one set you off?"

"A. B. Nose voted for an economic package that none of his constituents were allowed to see. So - Jefro is going to tax and spend when he should eliminate programs that no longer function and departments that are no longer useful."

"If he wants to raise revenues - he should cancel the last tax increase. It sent us into a recession. The luxury tax put a lot of good workers out of jobs. It's a good thing we didn't invest in boat building. What did Tucker say?"

"He said I was crazy, but he'd support me."

"Do you think you can win?"

"Yes - maybe. I was certain, but now I'm not sure."

"Why did Tucker say you were crazy?"

"I support a woman's right to choose and won't accept more than a five dollar political contribution. I'm counting on free publicity."

"Tucker is right - you are crazy. Our local newspaper will never support you. They won't even damn you with faint praise unless you advertise. How much money do we have to contribute to your political suicide?"

"My shoe leather and not more than five thousand dollars."

"If it gets you out of the house and out from under my feet - go for it."

"Do you think I can win?"

"I couldn't buy enough influence to purchase a liquor license in Mosquito County on your campaign budget."

"I just might walk the district."

"It's larger than most eastern states."

May 24

Fortified by the knowledge that his wife would support his political aspirations and he had qualified support from Tucker - his Washington Post friend - Johnny embarked on the second step of his fledgling political career. A survey of opposition within and without his party. Bobbie Jean wanted to know, "Who are you going to contact?"

"We're not connected here - so I'll call the county offices of both parties."

"Why don't you attend a few meetings before you jump in and scare the hell out of our local politicians?"

"I'll call and find out when and where."

Johnny wondered how the T&S party would respond to an opposition phone call, but not for long. After three rings their answering machine activated, "You have reached Mosquito County Tax and Spend Headquarters. No one is in the office. At the tone - please leave your name - phone number - a short message and we'll get right back to you." An eternal optimist - Johnny left name and number and a message, "I am willing to support anyone who will run against Congressman Nose." He hung up, "If they respond - I'll have an idea who my opposition is." Johnny followed the same procedure when he called the B&P office. Ten rings later an answering machine responded, "You have reached the offices of the Mosquito County Barefoot and Pregnant Party. Our office hours are ten to four - Tuesday - Wednesday and Thursday." Johnny checked his watch, "It should be open." He attempted to leave a message, but couldn't. When the tone came on the machine shut down. He dialed again and the machine again refused to take his message. "So much for my opposition research. Our political parties are protected by answering machines that screen phone calls."

Bobbie Jean stuck her head in the door, "Coffee?"
"Don't mind if I do."

"Any luck with your political survey?"
"Called the offices of both parties."
"Did they give you encouragement?"
"No - all I got was their answering machines."
"Did you leave a message?"
"I left one with the Tax and Spenders. Couldn't with the Barefoot and Pregnant ones. Their machine is broken."
"What did you say?"
"I offered to support anyone who will run against A. B. Nose."
"You can forget about them responding. It's ten-thirty in the morning on a Wednesday and no one is in either Party office?"
"Machines have taken over."
"Is that what is meant by machine politics?"
"Must be Mosquito County's definition."
"Better write letters."
"I will. I'm beginning to understand why voters have given up on politics. No one in charge will respond."
"Not like the days of precinct politics?"
"Do you know the name of our local contact for either party?"
"No - we're new here, but I get your message. We should have been contacted when we registered to vote. When we decide to open a restaurant - I'll call our County Commissioner."
"How will you get by her answering machine?"
"When we arrived I gave her a large campaign contribution."
"Money is the lifeblood of political influence?"
"It's better than being a relative."

After resigning from the agency and a long year of being underfoot in their restaurant in Arlington Virginia - Johnny agreed with Bobbie Jean, "It's time to move south."
"Thank heaven. I'm so upset with Virginia's taxes - I'm ready to join a Potomac tea party. We pay more in personal property taxes on our autos in Virginia than we pay on our property in Biloxi Mississippi."

"Do you want to return to your home there?"

"Not after I've seen Paris and Washington DC. I'd like a place on the ocean with sun - waves and no taxes."

"That's Euphoria."

"Lets drive south and explore."

"Do you want to live in a home or a condo."

"In a condo we can turn the key and travel."

"And our twins will have a pool I won't have to maintain."

May 25

Johnny waited until after ten the next morning before calling the B&P Party office again. The result was the same - a message that was in error and a machine that wouldn't accept his name and telephone number. He decided not to call the T&S Party office. After waiting twenty-four hours for a response he did not expect one. And after careful thought - Johnny came to the conclusion that A. B. Nose would run for the same congressional office again. Bobbie Jean asked, "Aren't you going to write the County Chairman?"

"I don't have his address and I'm not going to send a letter to an office that isn't open."

"Call the Board of Elections and ask for his phone number and address."

Johnny grinned, "So that's why you get the big bucks and I'm always underfoot."

"No - I had to work with politicians - you had to deal with generals."

Johnny telephoned the Mosquito County Elections Office. A pleasant sounding lady answered his question with, "I'm not allowed to give out telephone numbers - or addresses."

"Can you at least give me his - or her name?"

"I'm not sure. Can you hold while I check?"

"Roger that."

"What did you say?"

"Sorry - I slipped into military speak. I'll hold."

"Sorry to keep you waiting. His name is Charlie Compromise."

"Can you at least tell me the area of the county where Mr. Compromise lives?"

"No - it's against the rules."

Johnny looked for C. Compromise in his phone book and found it Under Water - a small barrier island community across the Mosquito River Lagoon from Mosquito County's major central city - Swamp Harbor. Charlie Compromise's answering machine responded, "No one is in. Please leave your name and telephone number. I'll return your call as soon as possible." Johnny left his name and telephone number and hung up. Bobbie Jean stuck her head in the door. She noticed his frustration, "Not going well?"

"I'm not getting anywhere. Answering machines have taken over the world. I'll write Mr. Compromise."

"Is he the B&P County Chairman?"

"He must be - he has an answering machine."

May 26

Johnny wrote -

Dear Mr. Compromise,

I have been unable to contact your headquarters office. No one has been in during office hours and your answering machine will not take my message. I have come to the conclusion that it is broken - or your office manager is dead - or incapacitated. You may wish to send someone over to see if he - or she is lying on the floor unable to get up.

Knowing that the Mosquito County Barefoot and Pregnant Party is waiting for me to ride in on my white horse - I have decided to run for the

sixty-sixth district congressional seat occupied by A. B. Nose. I would appreciate any information you may possess on how I should go about this task. Respectively Yours -

Johnny Ropp

Bobbie Jean looked over his letter, "You haven't lost your sense of humor. Mr. Compromise must live down the beach from us. Do you think he'll answer?"

"He might phone."

"Why don't you toss in the towel."

"What and leave show business. If the political power structure has any smarts they'll be more than cooperative. If they aren't - my dander and curiosity will climb. I'll follow this course until I get answers."

"My - we are a feisty one this morning."

"I'm getting closer."

"You're beginning to squeak."

"Maybe I'll get greased."

June 7

Bobbie Jean asked, "Have you received a response to your letter yet?"

Johnny answered, "No. I've been so busy watching Jefro's economic package winding its serpentine way through the Senate it slipped my mind."

"Will they vote it out?"

"It'll be close. I phoned the S&T Senator's office and asked how he'll vote."

"What's his name and what did his office say?"

"Senator Graham Cracker's lady said he was going to poll his constituents."

"That's the same response you received from Congressman Nose's office."

"The S&T Party must have passed out a script to their elected officials and ordered them to follow it. If that's the way they play politics in Washington DC it's not my cup of tea. It looks like supporting Jefro's programs takes precedence over supporting constituents."

"You have to admire a president who has his party marching in lock step."

"The last time this happened - the party in question was marching in goose step."

"You're not comparing Jefro with Adolph are you?"

"No - just tactics. In a democratic republic - legislation is supposed to come from the legislature and not from the administrative branch."

"As the leader of the party - doesn't he have the right to set policy and the agenda?"

"Yes, but writing law is the prerogative of the legislative branch in our country. And usually it's done by the majority party with participation of the minority. This package came down from Jefro and it's going through on railroad tracks - unchanged by human hands."

"Isn't it wonderful what our Washington legislators can do with their feet."

June 8

Over breakfast coffee - Bobbie Jean smiled, "I see we still have no response to our letters and phone calls." Johnny smiled back, "At least I'm beginning to see the humor of it. What do you recommend?"

"Give it up."

"Its a matter of principle."

"You all ready gave up one life for your country. If you want a response from a politician - you must contribute the maximum amount to their campaign funds."

"I want them to vote for the public good."

"Money will buy influence - not principle. Euphoria's elected officials are a more than a quart low on principle."

"I'll call Euphoria Toady and register my disappointment."

"Waste of time. Our local newspaper is a proactive supporter of Jefro's economic plan. You have to admit the stock market is up and unemployment is on the way down."

"Only if we factor in minimum wage service jobs. There are four fundamental long term problems that Jefro's economic program fails to address. One - our basic industries are going overseas. Two - new industry startups are machine intensive not labor intensive. Three - our trade deficit is climbing. And four - our major exports are commodities and scrap metal."

"Call, but remember my warning."

Euphoria Toady's answering machine came on after the third ring, "No one is in to take your call. Normal business hours are nine to five Monday through Friday. Please call back then. If you wish to call the news desk - wait for the instructions." Johnny listened. The editorial page was the only section he recognized. He pressed one. The phone rang and no one answered. The answering machine kicked on, "This is the Euphoria Toady editorial section. No one is in right now. Leave a message at the tone and we'll get right back to you." Johnny hung up. He wandered back into the kitchen, "You're right again. Calling our newspaper is a waste of time."

"It's ten in the morning. Isn't anyone in?"

"Their machine said business hours are nine to five."

"If I'm reincarnated - it will be in the newspaper business. They have wonderful hours"

"And no heavy lifting."

"And from their editorials - no heavy thinking either."

"I don't want to reincarnate at Euphoria Toady."

"Why not - it sounds like a retirement home."

"They give preference to female gender when they hire."

"Isn't that affirmative action?"

"Or gender discrimination."

"Write another letter and request a contact."

"Roger that."

June 9

Bobbie Jean asked, "Who was on the phone? Did one of the local politicians - or our newspaper finally return your telephone calls?"

"No - a lady college student from Euphoria State University.

"Is it located in the outback?"

"Yes - a town called Never-Never."

"What did she want?"

"She is conducting a survey for the state B&P Party for college credit. I answered her questions and she answered mine. She gave me the names of our B&P state committeeman and committeewoman and suggested I contact them."

Johnny searched for the telephone number of the B&P state committeeman and couldn't find it. He checked with information and discovered it was unlisted. He had more luck finding the number of the committeewoman - I. M. Vulture. He dialed her number and was connected to an answering machine, "I am not available at the present time. Please leave your name and number at the tone and I'll return your call as soon as possible." Johnny did and she didn't.

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny his mail, "You received a letter from A. B. Nose."

"The anticipation of his response to my letters is sending chills up my spine."

"Don't get your hopes up. It's a form letter. I gave his signature the wet finger test."

"Then you can save me the trouble of reading it. What did Nose have to say?"

"For the good of the S&T Party - he voted for Jefro Clampet's economic package."

"He's not going to run again."

"He didn't say that. How do you know?"

"He sold out a conservative district for a liberal package that was against the wishes of his voters. And he was among the last to come to Jefro's support. He's been promised a job by Jefro."

"If you're going to run - you better change your mind on five dollar contributions."

"I said I'm going to run a populus campaign and I will. If the voters want me - we'll win."

"If you don't advertise - no one will know who you are and what you stand for."

"Truth - Justice and the American way."

"Look! Up in the air. It's a bird! It's a plane!"

June 12

Understanding the danger of being mistaken for a long distance telephone company - Johnny called the B&P County Chairman at dinner time - anyway. He asked, "Did you receive my letter?"

"Yes - I've been busy and didn't have time to respond."

"Your office recording machine isn't working."

"We don't have anyone in the office."

"I have time on my hands. I'll be glad to put in a day."

"Thank you for the offer, but it won't be necessary. My dinner is waiting. Call the elections office and they'll tell you how to become a candidate."

"Isn't the B&P Party interested?"

"You'll face stiff competition."

"Not from anyone in our Party. If we can't beat A. B. Nose we've been running a dufus against him."

"Mountain Billy ran a real close race."

"He ran twice and lost both times."

"He has strong support from our Christian conservatives."

"That's why he lost. We can't win without female support."

"It's the linchpin of our Party Platform."

"It's connecting us to a losing cause."

Bobbie Jean listened in on the tail end of Johnny's phone call, "A little hot and heavy?"
"Close - Tucker said I ought to be certified."
"What are your plans?"
"No decisions. A two week vacation to New England with you and the twins. We'll see a little history."
"You're out of politics?"
"Until July."

July 1

Bobbie Jean - in the middle of unpacking from their New England trip called out, "Remind me never - ever to fly into Boston airport again. I thought Washington DC traffic was a problem. Boston is at the top of the traffic totem pole. When are you going to call the United We're Twits people?"
"Boss Ears impressed you that much?"
"I like his economic platform."
"Almost impossible to run as a third party candidate. But - I'll check into it. Do you have their Texas phone number?"
"It's on the pad next to the kitchen phone."

Johnny returned to the master bedroom, "No luck. The UWT headquarters doesn't open until ten - Texas time."
"You're not giving up - are you?"
"I'm not calling those twits again. Any political party that doesn't show up until ten can't be serious."
"And a candidate who won't accept any contribution over five dollars is?"
"Touché. Why are you pushing me to join the Twits?"
"When I grew up in Mississippi it was against our religion to swear - say Yankee without damn in front of it and lightning would strike if I ever uttered the words Barefoot & Pregnant. Us Southern folk believe you Yankees have backsides covered with green stuff that grows on the north side of our lolly pine forests."
"I don't have a choice - it's B&P or Independent."

"If you won't call the Twits - go ahead, but lets not tell Mother. She will die if you announce as a B&P. Having a Yankee son-in-law in her family is burden enough."

"I'll call the local elections office tomorrow and we'll go from there."

July 2

Bobbie Jean poured coffee and a question, "Do you have any reservations."

"We'll be tied down for a year."

"It's better than having you fly away to God knows where."

"Don't worry - that's all behind us. Tell you what I'll do. Lets let it simmer for a few days before I call for guidance. Who knows - my Party Chairman might come up with a candidate I can support."

"Pigs will fly and Jefro Clampet won't lie. If you do run as a B&P I won't be able to vote for you."

"Why not?"

"I'm a registered Tax & Spend."

"You'll have to change."

"Can't do that. I was taught in Mississippi - if I pulled a lever on a voting machine for B&P my arm would fall off."

"Don't worry - the Sixty-Sixth is a flat earth district. We sign our ballots with an X and it's for more than marking it to be counted."

"Seriously - is there a plus side to being elected?"

"Good pay - no heavy lifting - free food and drink and if Jefro's campaign reform becomes law - after I'm elected the taxpayers will fund my future campaigns."

"We don't need the money - or the aggravation and I'm worried that you might explode when your gullet fills with hubris. And - aren't you the candidate running on a platform to get the federal government out of our pockets."

"I am, but I couldn't pass up a straight line."

"Finish your breakfast and get out of those pajamas. We're going location shopping on the beach."

"We're going ahead with your restaurant?"

"Can't find a decent meal out at a fair price."

"We can drive to Sulfur Island or Palm Swamp."

"Two glasses of wine and attempting to negotiate Sheriff road traps on A1A?"

"How close to our condo?"

"Within a mile - we can walk home on the beach."

July 8

Bobbie Jean covered the telephone mouthpiece, "Bidwell's on the phone. He's calling from Sam's."

"Eight o'clock in the morning and he's at work?"

"Don't you remember - he owns fifty-one percent."

"Bidwell - Bobbie Jean says you're at the office. I'm looking out the window to see if three camels are swimming in from the east."

"Someone has to watch the store while you're vegetating in Euphoria. Tucker stopped by last night. He says you're going to run for congress. Have you lost your mind?"

"It's unanimous. All three of my closest friends are trying to get me committed."

"Tucker said you're running as a B&P. The religious nuts will crucify you."

"I'm not sure. They're in the a minority."

"But - they do have their hands on the reins. Can I do anything to grease your path?"

"Get the Party Bosses to answer my phone calls."

"Have you contributed to their coffers?"

"No - not even to one of their political campaigns."

"You're spitting into the wind. Money is the Vaseline of party politics. I can get you a phalanx of politicians in DC and Virginia and on occasion a senator or congressman. But - you're on your own in Euphoria. I have no influence in a state that believes orange is a primary color. Who are you running against?"

"Congressman A. B. Nose."

"If you win the B&P primary - he'll be easy. He's so close to Jefro and his wife the politicians up here are beginning to wonder about a threesome."

"How's Sam's?"

"Great since I've got you out from underfoot. Did you find a location for our new venture?"

"Several. Bobbie Jean is working the problem."

"While you're out chasing windmills - Tucker says you plan to run a populus campaign."

"Roger that. How to run for congress on five dollars a day."

"You'll have plenty of time to get underfoot in our Mosquito County restaurant. You don't stand a chance in a state where politicians live on political cash and the old boy network is controlled by Bubbas."

July 12

Johnny telephoned the Cow Pasture elections office in the new Mosquito County government complex - on land mostly vacant and renowned as an exceptional breeding ground for love bugs. The lady who answered was quite pleasant, "We don't have that information here. You'll have to call our office in Titus."

"Titus? Isn't he Fred Allen's comic character from Maine on Allen's old radio show?"

"Which station is Mr. Allen on?"

"Mr. Allen passed away several years back. Where is Titus?"

"North of Cape Confusion. Titus was our county seat until we moved it to Cow Pasture."

"You still have offices in Titus?"

"We're growing to give you better service."

Johnny wondered about Mosquito County's so called better service after being forced to make a toll call to Titus for information that should have been available at the central office. The lady who answered was quite pleasant, "We have some information here, but it won't do you any good until you

contact the Department of State."

"Where is it."

"In the outback at Euphoria's state capitol - Never-Never."

"Isn't Never-Never the home of Euphoria State University's Tennis Shoe Moccasins - known as the Fighting Illiterates?"

"You may wish to think twice before you decide to run for political office in Euphoria. Football is fundamental here."

"I thought that was religion."

"You are learning."

"Slowly - slowly."

July 13

The lady who answered the Euphoria Department of State telephone was quite pleasant, "Do you have a question on business taxes - or regulations?"

"Neither - I need information on how to run for political office in the Great State of Euphoria."

"We don't do that here. I'll connect you with the proper office."

Johnny was about to make small talk by commenting, "How about those Fighting Illiterates," but didn't. She might be a fan of the University of Euphoria's Conniving Crocodiles - known as the Cracked Crocks.

The lady who answered the State Elections office phone was quite pleasant, "Yes we have that information here. Are you going to run for city - county or state office?"

"None of those - I want to run for congress."

"You'll have to contact the Federal Elections Commission in Washington DC and request forms."

"Then can you help me?"

"After you send in the federal forms - they'll send you an identification number. After you have your number - call me back and I'll send you our forms and pamphlets."

"Washington DC sets the rules for state elections?"

"Until you have a number."

"That's why I'm running - they have my number."

"You might need theirs to return a call."

Johnny copied down the FEC's 800 number.

July 14

A very pleasant lady answered the FEC's 800 number, "I don't handle registration and forms. If you'll wait a few minutes - I'll transfer your call to the office that does."

Johnny waited for five minutes before a very pleasant lady asked, "So you want to run for congress?"

"If I wasn't so stubborn - the system would have worn me down by now. What do I need?"

"I'll send you a package of pamphlets and forms."

"The State of Euphoria told me I'll need an FEC ID number before they'll send me their pamphlets and forms."

"After you fill out our forms - we'll send you one."

"Is this system designed to eliminate all opposition to an incumbent?"

"Most candidates have lawyers that handle our procedures."

"It's not designed for the individual?"

"Of course not. Our rules are for committees."

Johnny wandered into Bobbie Jean's office, "How is your restaurant survey coming?"

"About the same as your political survey. There are backs to be scratched and hoops to jump through before we can break ground. What did the State of Euphoria say?"

"They sent me to Washington DC."

"Are you on the Washington Merry-go-round?"

"Yes. Believe it or not - Euphoria can't help me until the FEC sends me an identification number. The FEC is sending my committee a packet with instructions."

"You don't have a committee - or a campaign manager."

"Remember my Border collie?"

"Ralph? We buried him in McLean a year ago. You wouldn't leave Virginia for Euphoria while he was alive."

"Ralph B. Collie is going to be my campaign manager and my entire committee."

"Your dead dog is going to enter politics?"

"He's perfect. Ralph won't lie - cheat - or steal - or bark behind my back. Remember that old saying?"

"If you want a friend in Washington buy a dog."

"If dead people can vote in Chicago and Texas - my dead dog can run my political campaign."

"He'd respond to your voters more often than the politicians around here do. What's your next step?"

"Not much I can do until I receive my FEC package."

"Why don't you fix dinner."

"Roger that. Which restaurant?"

"You pick."

July 15

Johnny dialed the local B&P office from the kitchen phone to see if anyone answered. The answering machine came on, "Our new office hours are 10:30 to 4:30 Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you wish to leave a message please dial 666 - 3636." Johnny dialed 666 - 3636, "This is Mountain Billy's residence. No one is available. Please leave your name - phone number and a short message at the tone." Johnny hung up, "Looks like I'm playing in a political game against a stacked deck." Bobbie Jean looked up from reading Florida Toady, "Welcome to the civilian world - soldier."

"The good news is - the B&P office fixed their answering machine. The bad news is - they diverted incoming calls to the home of the guy who lost the last two elections."

"They play hardball in Mosquito County - don't they? What do you plan to do now?"

"I'll call the B&P Party Chairman at home after I receive my forms from Washington."

"Mail came early. Your forms are on the kitchen table."

"Better read and understand - first."

July 19

Johnny opened the *FEC Campaign Guide For Congressional Candidates and Committees*. He flipped through the title pages to the first chapter - *The Committee*. He skimmed the page to the making of a candidate, "An individual becomes a candidate when campaign activity exceeds \$5000 in contributions - or expenditures." The rest of the guide was written by lawyers for lawyers. Except for the \$5000 threshold - the campaign guide was a guided tour of loopholes and pot holes. Johnny skimmed through page after page of don'ts before tearing out the forms enclosed. *FEC Form 1* - a statement of organization for the candidate's committee and *FEC Form 2* - a statement of candidacy. Johnny read and reread Form 2 and discovered that eighty percent of it covered the conduct and establishment of his committee.

Bobbie Jean placed her arm around Johnny's shoulders, "You look down. Are their rules that depressing?" "Washington puts committees before candidates." "What do you have to do?" "Fill in the forms and send them in. I need a campaign manager - custodian of records - a treasurer and a separate bank account for the campaign." "Ralph B. Collie is your campaign manager. Are you going to hire more dead dogs?" "Might as well. How about Lassie Legree for treasurer?" "Great and Rolly Retriever can be our custodian of records." "Tucker said I'll need mollycoddlers and minions. Mine will be perfect. They don't exist." "Do you want to reconsider joining the twits?" "Don't feel like kicking over rocks looking for them. Did I tell you I'm can't be a candidate until I have \$5000 in money - or kind?" "Can't expect to have campaign reform when the rules use

money as a guide."

"I better call the elections office in Never-Never and see how I can become a candidate if I don't intend on spending \$5000."

"Think twice before you leap. You haven't worn a tie since we left Washington."

"You're right and I'll have to wear leather shoes instead of deck shoes."

"Deck shoes? You're barefoot unless we go out."

July 20

Johnny couldn't get through to a live person in the Euphoria State elections office at Never-Never until late in the day. And when he did - he began to wish he didn't. He discovered that it was a whole lot more expensive than \$5000 to become a political candidate in the state of Euphoria. It would cost \$10070 to get on the ballot - or 4778 registered Barefoot and Pregnant voter signatures on petitions. If he went the petition route - he couldn't write for them until after the first of the year and of course - whatever he wrote had to be in a specific format and certified by the County Supervisor of Elections. Then - petitions had to be turned in by the middle of April. Johnny grinned at Bobbie Jean, "Talk about a shafting. Euphoria incumbents have done everything but spread broken glass in a challenger's path. Three months to get almost 5000 petitions signed is going to be really tight."

"Can you buy your way on?"

"For ten grand I can."

"Go for it."

"The populist way is by petition."

"You can either be rich or popular and you certainly won't be popular with the thin lip Christians."

"I'll go the petition route."

"How to get to Washington on a five dollar contribution?"

"I'm a quart low on brains."

Bobbie Jean picked up the FEC campaign guide, "It must weigh three pounds."

"I can always use it to improve my upper body strength."

"They must have destroyed a small forest to print this book.

One more time - are you sure you want to go through with this foolishness?"

"One of the things they caution candidates about is raising money. That's my flaw. I don't like to hold a tin cup out - shouting - 'Alms - alms for the needy politician.'"

"Mother says that all politicians are prostitutes."

"Which one would she rather have in her family - a politician or a prostitute?"

"How can you tell the difference?"

"Most prostitutes work for a living."

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and having nothing to do : once or twice she had peeked into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?"

August 1

Johnny punched in the telephone numbers of the Mosquito County Elections Office and looked at his watch, "Boy am I pushing the limits. It's barely after seven. No one will be in this early." On the second ring a man answered,

"Elections - can I help you?"

"A government employee at work before eight?"

"An old Army habit."

"And I thought our Army's creed was - don't run when you can walk. Don't walk when you can stand. Don't stand when you can sit. Don't sit when you can lie down and don't stay awake when you can fall asleep."

"Were you Army?"

"Not good at walking or swimming. Air Force."

"What can I do for you?"

"I need a map of the Sixty-Sixth congressional district."

"You're out of luck. There isn't any. I know. I've written and called, but no one has bothered to make one up."

"That figures. No one in the State Elections Office will tell me what it takes to be a candidate in Euphoria."

"They'll let you know where to send your money. I patched a map of the Sixty-Sixth together before the last election - only because I was nosy and couldn't find one. You're welcome to copy it."

"Do I need to make an appointment?"

"Come in any time and ask for Able Baker Charlie."

"Are you serious - is that really your name?"

"My Father was infantry."

"Is the Sixty-Sixth more than one county?"

"More like four. Besides Mosquito County and our southern neighbor - Backwater - it includes half of Swamp County to the west and a small piece of Lost County halfway across the state, but it doesn't include Lost City."

"Sounds like an Abbott and Costello comedy routine."

"You've just described Euphoria's candidate selection process. Our election laws were drawn up when Euphoria was a one Party state and Tax and Spend was in charge."

"To prevent outsiders like me from running?"

"You're learning. Incumbents set the rules. Their motto is - *No one will challenge me until I decide to leave office.* That's why Euphoria's Primary is held less than two months before the General election."

"The Snow Birds don't return until after Thanksgiving."

"You broke the code. Let em live here, but keep those Damn Yankees from voting. If we were fair - our Primary would be held in March - not September."

"I know I'll be swimming upstream. What do you think of my chances?"

"Which Party?"

"B&P."

"Are you against women?"

"No. They're equal and have a right to choose."

"Strike one. How about financing."

"Populus. No more than five dollars a person."

"Strike two. Do you have B&P support?"

"Haven't talked to anyone."

"Strike three. If I were you I'd forget it. Why don't you back someone who supports your ideas."

"Can't find anyone who does."

"You've found our Achilles heel. Most of our candidates are religious nuts or self serving hypocrites. You might have a chance with adequate funding, but five dollars a day? I'll give it to you straight. Your chances are slim and none."

"And slim is out of state."

August 2

Johnny found Bobbie Jean drinking her afternoon coffee on the lanai - looking out on a flat summer ocean - without waves. He sat next to her, "The Atlantic Ocean looks like Lake Erie on a summer day. Would you like a glass of wine?" "Too early. How is your political survey coming along?" "More like going. The State of Euphoria is using the Julian Calendar and the phases of the moon to set election dates. I can't get the exact time span we have to get petitions signed or the dates for voting."

"Julian? Sounds to me like your getting a Gregorian Chant. What else is a mystery?"

"I have to file an unspecified State form - declaring my intentions during an unspecified time frame in May of next year."

"Intentions? If you meet all the rules and are considered a candidate - isn't that enough."

"Not in Euphoria. Don't know why, but there has to be a reason for it that favors incumbents. We'll cross that bridge in May."

"What about petitions?"

"I have to turn mine in on an unspecified date in April to the Supervisor of Elections in all four Sixty-Six counties."

"And they are?"

"Lost - Mosquito - Backwater and Swamp."

"Lost County Euphoria? How did it get it's name?"

"When Lost was settled - people traveling through would ask where they were and the locals would call out, 'Lost'."

"And the County Seat is?"

"Lost City."

"How can you turn in petitions to four separate County Seats in one day? Your District is the size of a small state and there are no interconnecting roads across the swamps."

"We'll cross that swamp when we come to it."

"Touché! Are you going to continue through this maze?"

"If I knew all of this at the beginning - I wouldn't have

begun. But the run-around we've been getting has me pissed off. My odds of winning are worse than a hundred to one, but I'm going to slug it out anyway."

"Diogenes snuff out your lamp. I've found an honest man."

"And a fool. Tomorrow I'll send in my FEC forms."

August 3

Johnny carried his completed forms into the kitchen,
"Have to have a name for my committee. How about *Sons of Liberty?*"

"It'll make you sound like an alumnus of Liberty College."

"I thought it brought up images of patriots throwing bags of tea into the harbor - protesting taxes."

"By the time you finish explaining it - you'll lose your audience. You have three nonexistent dogs on your campaign staff. Use a canine theme."

"How about *Three Dog Night.*"

"Jerimiah was a Bullfrog."

"My campaign song."

"If you plan on asking for five dollars a day - it should be
How Much Is That Doggie In The Window."

"*Three Dog Night* it is and we'll see if anyone can figure out the origin of it."

"Now that your forms are filled out and you've named your committee - what's the next step?"

"Drive to Winn-Dixie - reproduce my forms and send the originals to the Clerk of the House of Representatives."

"Eureka! So that's how Congressional incumbents keep track of their opponents. I bet you have to send all of your financial reports to the Clerk - too."

"He gets everything."

"Nosey will be able to track his opponents - friends - contributors and how much money is being collected for their campaigns."

"No wonder it's so difficult for an outsider to win. The incumbents use their institution to win."

"And don't forget they have free use of a Government Printing Office and Postal Service."

"If Nosey runs - he'll be hard to beat."

"Convince him that he can't win."

Johnny called Euphoria Toady and asked the editorial staff for their political reporter. The response was swift, "We don't have one. Quickly Smith is filling in until we hire one. I'll transfer your call."

"Quick here - can I help you?"

"I'm Ralph B. Collie - campaign manager for Johnny Ropp. I'm announcing his candidacy for congress."

"Which Party?"

"B&P."

"Send in a bio and an issue paper."

"How soon will it appear?"

"Within two weeks."

"Don't you want a photo?"

"We'll send a photographer out if we decide to use one."

August 4

Johnny handed Bobbie Jean his list of issues, "What do you think?"

"Let me read them first."

Three Dog Night Issues

1 Johnny Ropp will listen to his constituents. If he doesn't respond to your letter or telephone call - you can rest assured he's either in the hospital or dead.

2 Less government is better government.

- 3 *Lower taxes and raise revenues.*
- 4 *Reduce spending and lower the national debt.*
- 5 *Encourage manufacturing and reduce the trade deficit.*
- 6 *Free trade must work both ways.*
- 7 *A citizen earning a living is not on welfare.*
- 8 *Boarding schools and group homes instead of handouts.*
- 9 *Treat drug use as a medical problem not a criminal one.*
- 10 *NASA lacks vision. Space flight requires new lift systems.*
- 11 *Apprenticeship and vocational training as complimentary paths to higher education. Universities are for thinkers. Practical education is for doers.*
- 12 *Johnny Ropp is a compassionate conservative. Everyone has freedom of choice - including women. A government that tells a citizen what to do with his or her body is totalitarian.*

Three Dog Night - A Committee - Johnny Ropp For Congress
Ralph B. Collie - Campaign Manager

Johnny asked, "Well what do you think?" Bobbie Jean shook her head, "They're going to eat you alive on several of your issues. What do you mean by boarding schools and group homes instead of welfare?"

"Welfare hasn't worked. I have yet to meet a graduate of an orphanage that has failed in life. We need to feed and educate the youth of the poor. Those that are not able to function in society should not be given handouts. They should live in group homes - be provided with a work ethic job - or training if they are able to return to society. The functional mentally ill should live in supervised group homes - not be allowed to roam the streets in rags. It is our national shame to have abandoned the unfortunate ones who are unable to function in our society. "

"Pretty strong language. How did we get into this shape?"

"Civil libertarians have litigated us into this mess and our government has failed to address the problem. We throw money at it and turn our backs. We have abandoned the institutions that worked because of the few that didn't."

"You sold me. You want to treat drug use as a medical problem. Tell me how?"

"Our prisons are overflowing with inmates who either sell drugs or were caught stealing to buy them. We have tried to stem the flow of drugs at the growing - distribution and retail end with money and slogans. As a result we have more drugs and drug users than ever. We must attack the problem at the users end. Treat those who are treatable and place those who are not on a maintenance program. We have failed to recognize that a drug dealers best friend is youth peer pressure and that most dealers sell to maintain their drug habit. If a user-dealer can be placed on a maintenance program he or she won't have to sell drugs to support their habit. If we do this in a humane way - prisons will empty and property crimes will drop significantly."

"You're a utopian! What about vocational education?"

"Follow the German model. We're graduating millions of Art

History and Music majors when our society needs engineers - mechanics - computer techs - bankers and plumbers. Only a few should go on to Universities."

"Who goes where?"

"Philosophy - Humanities - Literature - Genetics - Physics - History - Abstract Math and other abstract studies fit tongue and groove with University training. Doctors - Bankers - Pilots - Carpenters - Computer Programmers - Mechanics - Engineering - Plumbers - Artists and Nuclear Science can all be trained at vocational schools in apprenticeship programs. We do this now on a haphazard basis after most students waste four years on undergraduate studies in our universities. Our education system was designed for the nineteenth century. It is not meeting society's needs."

"What about Navigators?"

"I had two years of vocational training after graduating with a major in History and I wasn't qualified to be a Historian - carpenter - or Navigator."

"Medical Doctors?"

"By the time they finish medical school - they're too old to practice. Vocational training should begin after the eighth grade. We might have doctors that still have dexterity when they open a practice."

"You mentioned Art History."

"The Smithsonian advertised for one Art Historian and received a hundred thousand applications. I rest my case."

"I'd vote for you, but your ideas are a bit off the wall. Be prepared to answer off the wall questions."

August 5

Bobbie Jean asked, "Is your announcement in Euphoria Toady?"

"Not one word."

"Here's a penny. I found it on the sidewalk."

"My first campaign contribution."

"What's in the newspaper."

"Our Nosey congressman claims to have given two million of our hard earned tax dollars to Spaceport Euphoria Authority."

"What for?"

"To modify a Trident launch pad for small rocket commercial launch vehicles. Air Force is going to kick in four million and Euphoria is contributing one point three million."

"Is it supporting our local work force?"

"Not certain, but two out of state contractors are euphoric - Orbital Sciences from Virginia and Lockheed in California."

"What do you plan to do today?"

"Not much - thought I'd work on Campaign slogans."

"For what - you won't have enough money to advertise."

"Thought about small roadside Burma Shave type signs. How about -

When you vote

Take your time -

We'll make smoke

To save your dime -

Ropp For Congress -

Three Dog Night - B&P

"That is pure unadulterated nonsense, but I get your drift. It might work. Why the tag sign at the end?"

"Required by the Federal Election Commission."

Later that day - Bobbie Jean brought in the mail, "You have a letter from the Euphoria Department of State." Johnny opened it, "It's from the Chief of Election Records." He gave the signature a wet finger check, "Machine generated - getting spooky when machines learn how to sign letters. They spelled my name wrong."

"What else is new. Good news?"

"They're informing me that they'll inform me on how and when to file for office - take an oath and what I'll have to pay."

"An oath?" Are you giving testimony?"

"Politic talk. Do you think it's tell the truth - the whole truth and nothing, but the truth?"

"To campaign for political office?"

"You're right - must be to uphold the Constitution."

"Jeffro took the oath and failed to do so."

"Big Bubba kept his fingers crossed."

Later that evening - Charlie Compromise - the B&P County Chairman telephoned, "One of our members of my Executive Committee is going to run for congress."

"What's his name?"

"Little Boy. He's giving a presentation tomorrow night."

"Has he announced?"

"He will. Better plan on spending at least two-hundred and fifty thousand if you decide to run against him."

"What's Little Boy's platform?"

"Doesn't have one."

Johnny listened to a few more discouraging sentences before hanging up.

Bobbie Jean asked, "Who was on the phone?"

"Charlie Compromise. He called to tell me that Little Boy is going to run."

"He's trying to scare you off. Did you talk to him about the local newspapers?"

"Said to forget about the Mouseville Guard and that Euphoria Toady is in A. B. Nose's pocket."

"Tucker warned you."

"Doesn't come home to roost until you've been scorned."

August 6

Johnny checked this morning's Euphoria Toady. His announcement wasn't in the paper. He telephoned the editorial section. The answering machine responded. He left a message for Quickly Smith. A little after ten - a news

associate returned his call, "Ralph Collie?

"Yes - isn't Quickly Smith in?"

"He won't be in until later today. Can I help you?"

"I sent a news release to him. I'm checking on it's status."

"He just received your copy at his desk. Can you have your candidate call him? We won't place his announcement in our paper unless he writes - or phones. Otherwise we'll have to attribute everything to you." Johnny disguised his voice, "Looks like I'm barking up the wrong tree. I'll have Johnny call this afternoon."

Johnny handed the paper to Bobbie Jean, "Euphoria Toady hates dogs. They only respond to people."

"Wasn't it W.C. Fields who had a comic routine?"

"Yes - something like - 'Anyone who hates children and dogs can't be all bad.'"

"Did you read the letters to the editor?"

"No - is there an interesting one?"

"A lady from Titus wrote that she sent a request to our congressman's office. She wanted to know how Nose voted the last four years on budget and expenditure authorization bills. And his office sent her a one page photo copy of the congressional record that covered one vote."

"I've been following his voting record. I don't blame Nosey for not fessing up. If his constituents discover he's sold out to the Clampets they'll lynch him."

"His photo is in the paper. Looks younger than I thought he would. Take a look."

"It's a color shot. He's wearing a sincere suit - the kind we wear to weddings and funerals. The last photo I saw of him - his shirtsleeves were rolled up - the defender of the common man."

"Nosey is covering all the bases."

"Image is everything."

"And substance?"

"Hope the voters have short memories."

Johnny telephoned Quickly Smith at Euphoria Toady, "My campaign manager said you wanted to talk to me."
"Is Ralph B. Collie his real name."
"Is Quickly your real name?"
"You're learning to answer a question with a question. You are a politician. I have your campaign manager's press release in front of me."
"Will you publish?"
"Within the next two weeks."
"Are you interested in further press releases?"
"We are caught up in the fairness ruling. Unless you decide to run naked through the mall at high noon - we won't publish any of them. Otherwise we'd have to give fair treatment to all candidates."
"I was under the impression that's what newspapers were supposed to do. Is your paper Tax & Spend?"
"No - we're centrist - nonpolitical."
"Like the socialist in congress says he's independent?"
"We are proactive?"
"What does that mean?"
"The public good."
"Pro bono publico. Your newspaper supports lawyers?"
"I'm on deadline. I'll get back with you."

August 7

Bobbie Jean brought the mail into Johnny's office, "You have a package from the Great State of Euphoria." Johnny opened it. Inside a manila envelope was a one hundred and six page loose leaf bound book titled - *A Compilation of the Election Laws of the State of Euphoria from the Division of Elections - The Euphoria Department of State.* A letter was included that eliminated a 1.5% assessment on contributions to candidates campaign. The Supreme Court of Euphoria ruled that this assessment was unconstitutional. Johnny scanned through the pages - highlighted the important items and wandered through

their condo looking for Bobbie Jean. He found her upstairs - working in her office, "Looked all over for you. You would think that in a place this small we could find each other. What are you working on?"

"Going over the pros and cons of the properties we surveyed for our new restaurant. What's in your loose leaf notebook?"

"The Euphoric election laws. An entire school of lawyers had to write this foolishness. Do you have a minute? I want to read a sentence from page 15 - 99.061 (1).

"Yes - page 15 - 99.061 (1)?"

"Yes and I have no idea what 15 - 99.061 (1) means."

"Meaningless - obfuscated lawyer speak. Read on - Macbeth."

"I won't give you the whole shovel full. 'The provisions of any special act to the contrary notwithstanding - each person seeking to qualify for nomination or election to a federal - state - or multicounty district office - other than a judicial office as defined in chapter 105 - shall file his qualification papers with and pay the qualifying fee - which shall consist of a filing fee and election assessment and party assessment - if any has been levied - to the Department of State - or qualify by alternative method with the Department of State at any time after noon of the first day for qualifying - which shall be as follows: the 120th day prior to the first primary - but not later than noon of the 116th day prior to the date of the first for persons seeking to qualify for nomination or election to federal office ...' and it goes on for forty-four more words."

"Is that all one sentence?"

"Yes and I had to take four breaths to read it."

"The incumbents really don't care for outsiders - do they?"

"They play hardball in Euphoria."

"This is exactly why lawyers should never be allowed to write law. This document isn't compilation of laws - it's a joke book."

"Will Rogers beat you to that punch line. How would you write this law?"

"If you desire to run for political office - please inform us which office and send in all applicable fees between one and ten May. If you don't have money to pay fees - please notify us that you will collect signatures on petitions. In either case - we will send you the guidelines on request.' My high school English teacher would wash out the mouths of the authors who wrote this set of laws with soap."

"Is the rest of the book like that sentence?"

"The gibberish goes on for ninety-nine pages."

"The constitution and bill of rights take up less than ten."

"Shows you what farmers and merchants can do when they sit down to write the law of the land."

"My Daddy in Mississippi had a saying, 'no town should have more than one lawyer.'"

"And the meaning is?"

"It takes two to sue."

"Maybe we should eliminate this jargon and institute dueling as the means of qualifying for elective office."

"If you want to continue with this foolishness - you'll have to play the game. You don't want to sound stupid - or look ugly."

"I'll continue on, but it looks like we have a new generation of politicians. Ones who have picked up the torch of liberty with sticky hands and twisted thinking. And in the State of Euphoria - work expands at the same rate as the rate of increase of lawyers."

"I checked the newspaper - Quickly Smith did not insert your announcement of candidacy. You can still drop out."

"Not until my last dog is hung."

August 8

Bobbie Jean looked up from this morning's Euphoria Toady, "You should have announced that you weren't certain if you're going to be a candidate. They've written an extensive article about our Governor. Rabid B. Koon is indecisive. He's not sure if he'll seek a second term."

"He's Tax and Spend and I'm Barefoot and Pregnant. I'll have to pay for newspaper space."

"Have you worked out details on your Foreign Trade plank."

"Still working on it."

"Give me what you have."

"I'm biased toward free trade with a modifier."

"You're beginning to speak like a politician."

"Have to be careful. The political game is to selectively quote from your opponents platform. Cut him to pieces with half-truths and innuendo. My modifier is - if another country desires to sell manufactured products here - they'll have to buy manufactured products from us."

"Explain."

"We should sell washing machines and cars instead of scrap metal - plywood and board lumber instead of cut trees - crackers and bread instead of wheat. Give the rest of the world six months to get their act together. After that - stop imports until trade comes into balance."

"So - we are a third world country? We sell commodities and import hardware. How did it happen?"

"Our manufacturers clamored for protection. When they didn't get it - they moved their factories overseas and over the border. Remember the movie - *Soilent Green?*"

"The government fed ground up dead people to its citizens?"

"Our current trade policy is its equivalent. We are in the process of economically devouring ourselves."

"We're killing the goose that laid the golden egg?"

"We'll soon have a work force that produces only information and fast food. Our money is backed by our material wealth - not gold. When our trade debt reaches where we'll have to pay for it in foreign currency - we'll be bankrupt."

"Can we count on the rest of the world to forgive our debts as we forgave our debtors?"

"And pigs will fly."

"The Twits are right on this issue."

"I'll give Boss Ears his due."

August 9

The Clerk of the House sent Johnny a set of instructions on how to complete a Financial Disclosure Statement From The Committee On Standards Of Official Conduct - U S House of Representatives. Bobbie Jean asked, "Did you read all of it or just scan through the meat?"

"Seventy-two pages to fill out one set of forms? I scanned. The good news is - I don't have to report until I pass the threshold of five thousand dollars in contributions. The bad news is - I have to list all of my contributors."

"I wouldn't worry. With seventy-two pages to fill out a set of forms - congress had to build in a series of loopholes."

"Anything in Euphoria Toady?"

"If you mean your announcement - no."

"Think I'll give their executive editor a call."

"Be nice - shouting will cut off all possibility of ET news coverage of your campaign."

"ET? Entertainment Today?"

"You've read what they print. It can't be news."

It took three phone calls, but Johnny finally got the big cheese - Euphoria Toady's executive editor. Johnny introduced himself, "I'm Johnny Ropp and I'm running for congress." The lady responded, "You're the one with a dog for a campaign manager?"

"Do you have a political reporter I can talk too. I've been dealing with Quickly Smith and have been unable to get my announcement of candidacy in your paper."

"Hell no! Talk with Quickly" and she hung up. The ringing in Johnny's ear continued for six minutes. Johnny punched in Quickly's telephone number. The news associate answered,

"You want who?"

"Quickly Smith."

"He no longer works for us."

"Can I have the staff reporter who is handling politics?"

"No - we have none. Why don't you call back in two or three

months. Can anyone else help you?"

"Who has picked up Quickly's tasks?"

"No one."

"What do you do?"

"I copy material from the wire services for our news."

"Doesn't Euphoria Toady have reporters?"

"No - we have staff writers."

"How do you get your news."

"From the wire services - or free lance writers."

"No reporters in a million reader market?"

"Don't quote me, but we save money if we don't have to pay medical benefits and retirement."

"What about my announcement?"

"I'll slip it in when no one is looking."

"Am I that out of favor?"

"You're running against Mosquito County's power structure."

"I thought it was T&S."

"The labels change, but the names remain the same."

August 10

Another day and another Euphoria Toady newspaper and still no story announcing Johnny Ropp's candidacy. There were several flattering reports on Saffron V. Poverty - Jefro Clampet's Vice President. At times Saffron reminded Johnny of Walt Disney's Pinocchio - a puppet on Jefro's string. At other times Poverty reminded him of Foulfellow Fox. His big con was posing as a poor boy from Tennessee when his silver spoon wasn't gold plated - it was eighteen carat solid gold. Bobbie Jean asked, "What did you think of the House of Representatives debate on Jefro's budget reconciliation bill last night?"

"Looked like a Gypsy wedding - with accordions - pigs - geese and tambourines dancing around the well of the house. Does the paper carry any complaints from Nosey's constituents?"

"Only from old folks - people who drive cars and businessmen. It's ten to one against Jefro's bill in Mosquito County."

August 11

Bobbie Jean laughed, "Still no article announcing your candidacy for congress in Euphoria Toady. Are you sure the news associate said she was going to sneak it in?" "She will - soon. Said she would when no one is looking."

"It will be on a Monday - when no one is reading."

"Conservative Monday?"

"Now you understand. There is an article about a candidate in Swamp County. She may be fined twenty-seven thousand dollars for illegally disbursing campaign funds."

"That doesn't sound right. Did she pay the wrong people?"

"No - she didn't use campaign account checks."

"They really do play hardball in the Sixty-Sixth District."

"There is another article about a war room Clampet has set up in the White House."

"Does Big Bubba plan to march into the Sudetenland?"

"If it would divert attention from his actions he would. It was set up to change public opinion on his policies."

August 12

Bobbie Jean rubbed Johnny's shoulders, "Still no story on your candidacy?"

"Not one word."

"Don't you think that our local newspaper prefers the status quo?"

"The way the B&P Party is self distrusting - it might not make any difference."

"Your Party keeps running antiabortion candidates and the T&S guy wins. If Euphoria Toady gives you exposure - you might upset the political apple cart."

"I've decided."

"To do what?"

"I'm going to run for congress, but not spend much doing it."

"We can use two hundred thousand from our account."

"Foolish. I don't plan on spending more than two-thousand."

August 13

Bobbie Jean called out to Johnny, "You're wanted on the phone. It's Euphoria Toady's executive editor." Johnny picked up, "What can I do for you?"

"It's more like what can I do for you. We'll publish your announcement August 16th."

"Monday?"

"Right. What do you think of the new county administration buildings out in Cow Pasture?"

"A monument to the separation of government and constituents. So far out of the way very few taxpayers will go there."

"What do you think of the United We're Twits?"

"I won't vote for him again. Started as a good idea, but wound up like both major parties with a few insiders trying to maintain control. I've attempted to contact them at the local and national level and they don't respond. Too many paranoids seeing black helicopters flying at night - blue helmets and aliens from space."

"How about Boss Ears?"

"I've met him. A decent enough fellow, but he lost his credibility and a chance for a major new political party when he walked out and came back in. The Twits are treading water instead of party building. Too exclusive - not inclusive and too much hubris at the top."

"Do you think they'll stay the course."

"Not good at foretelling. I didn't think Scientology would outlast E. Ron Hubbard."

"How do you stand on abortion."

"I don't need one."

"As a political issue."

"None of my business what women choose to do."

"Are you for freedom of choice?"

"I support the constitution. It comes down pretty strong on the side of liberty and justice for all - not just men."

"You're dancing around my question."

"Look - we can't prevent people from jumping off bridges if

they have a mind too. And we can't prevent a woman from terminating a pregnancy if she has a mind too. To attempt to prevent either is a waste of the taxpayers money and the judicial system's time. This comes under the heading of legislating morality."

"How about religion in schools?"

"We should teach morality and religious morality should be taught in moderation. Wouldn't hurt to post an up-to-date version of the Ten Commandants over the blackboard in contemporary English, but religious instruction should be left to the churches."

"How about prayer?"

"Why not? As long as we don't impose our religious views on others. The overly religious are as soporific as the anti religious."

"Soporific?"

"Tedious - boring. You didn't ask questions about economic policies."

"Will you be accessible to your constituents?"

"I'll have a live signature on the bottom of each letter and a live person answering each phone call."

"What do you think your chances are?"

"Don't know. How about you?"

"You're new at this game. How do you plan on financing your campaign?"

"Running a populus campaign. Won't accept any contribution over five dollars."

"You'll be lucky if you get five cents. Get out before you waste our time and your money."

Bobbie Jean refilled Johnny's coffee cup, "You were on the phone for a long time."

"She asked a lot of questions."

"Did she give you her best political opinion?"

"I'm wasting her time and my money."

"When will your announcement be published?"

"Monday - buried in the back pages on conservative Monday."

"Time for another reality check."

"I'll stick with it."

August 14

Tucker was on the other end of the phone line, "Guess where the Post sent me last night?"

"To the White House for dinner?"

"Close. To the Vice President's mansion for a reception."

"At the Naval Observatory?"

"No - the family mansion in Maryland."

"I thought he lived in Tennessee."

"You do have a lot to learn about politics. Tennessee is only his hangout for photo ops."

"Where is it located?"

"Drive north out of DC on River Road past Burning Tree and Congressional Country Club to Potomac. It's just to the south of there on the river."

"How does Saffron live?"

"Makes Rockefeller's place on Rock Creek Drive look like an outhouse. The billiards room in the basement held two bus loads of reporters with room to spare."

"Where do dirt poor tobacco farmers from Tennessee get that kind of money?"

"Pays to be a Senator. Truman was the last one to leave here like he came and retire on a government pension."

"How was the reception?"

"Most of the A folks were out of town. That's why we were asked in. Typical for Washington. Everyone hustling for business where there is none. Enough lobbyists to fund all the congressional campaigns."

"Was Jefro in attendance?"

"Of course - he hangs out with Pinocchio like Foulfellow Fox. I have a new law for your records. The eastern elite and rich are Tax and Spenders. And the middle class gets taxed so the eastern elite can spend."

"Who catered this affair?"

"The purple truck folks. Food wasn't bad."

"You'd eat sawdust if it had sauce on top."

"Still running for congress?"

"A low key populus campaign."

"You'll be hiding your light under a bushel basket."

August 16

Under Water citizen Johnny Ropp has announced plans to run for our Sixty-Sixth congressional district seat held by our congressman A. Brown Nose - T&S Sulfur Island. Ropp will run as a Barefoot and Pregnant candidate. His platform includes freedom of choice and less government. He will not accept any campaign contribution over five dollars.

Bobbie Jean carried the paper in - laughing, "They buried your announcement in the local news section."

"What do you think?"

"You'll create quite a stir among the radical Christians with your freedom of choice plank. Why don't you give Able Baker a call at elections?"

"Able Baker Charlie - can I help you?"

"Johnny Ropp - here. Did you read my announcement?"

"You're causing quite a stir among our Radical Christians. They want that seat and you might interfere with their election plans."

"Don't they follow the tenets of Christ? Turn the other cheek and love thy neighbor?"

"Not our Christians. They believe that smite was in the sermon on the mount. I thought you were calling for information on how to recall congressman Nose."

"Is that today's blue plate special?"

"I've had five calls on it this morning. Our T&S folks have

written that law so that only municipalities have the right to vote for recall."

"Doesn't the constitution give us the right to petition and redress?"

"Doesn't apply in the Great State of Euphoria. Our good old boys have covered their tracks. Only way to get them out of office is to wait for them to quit or die."

August 17

Bobbie Jean asked, "Who was that on the phone?"

"A lady reporter from our local UHF TV station. Wants to do a three minute interview on the news this evening."

"Have you ever watched it?"

"Once and only by mistake when I was surfing. We have eighty channels on our cable system."

"Are you going to do it?"

"Might as well. It will give me practice. If I can find the station."

"Where is it located?"

"In Mosquito County's largest city - Crooked Town."

"Why do is it called Crooked?"

"The local citizens elected a convicted felon to the mayor's office."

"That's not unusual."

"Most politicians are convicted after they're in office. The lady who is going to interview me said she interviewed Little Boy yesterday evening."

"Better call the B&P County Chairman and let him know you're going to do it."

Charlie Compromise wasn't a happy camper, "It's too early to declare."

"To late - my announcement was in Monday's paper."

"We may have six candidates beating each others brains out in the Primary - wasting money that is better spent on the General Election."

"Simple - tell the others to drop out."
"Most of them have paid their dues."
"How long has Little Boy been a member of your committee?"
"I don't know Little Boy."
"He gave a speech to your committee."
"Oh - him. He joined last month. You haven't spoken with our executive committee."
"Give me the time and place and I'll be there."
"We're not letting candidates speak. It's too soon."
"Can you give me a data dump on Little Boy?"
"I don't know anything about Little Boy or who is supporting him. We did not select Little Boy."
Johnny heard an audible click on the other end of the phone line. Charlie Compromise had hung up.

Johnny looked around inside the foyer of the television station. The receptionist desk was empty. He wandered down the hallway and peeked inside the one and only studio. A very young lady came over, "You must be Johnny Ropp. I'm an intern here. You'll be on halfway through our newscast. Sit over there" and she pointed at a chair. I'll take a sound check and a picture check."

"How did Little Boy do last night?"
"He looked good, but I can't remember any of his answers. Hold still while I attach a mike."
"Should I talk."
"The same way you would when you're answering questions. We have our sound check. Don't move your chair. Our newscast will be on the other side of the studio" and she pointed at three chairs. "You'll be on right after the weather."

Johnny sat quietly as three TV newscasters handled the first half of the newscast flawlessly. The two men were dressed in jeans on the bottom and coat and tie on the top. He surmised that the top half would be on TV. The blonde anchorwoman in charge wore a red business suit. The skirt

was long enough to be sincere and short enough to show two good looking legs. When the weatherman moved in front of a blank blue screen - she walked over and sat in the chair next to Johnny. She didn't speak to him. She reviewed her notes. When the intern signaled that they were on she turned toward Johnny, "I'm talking with John Ropp - a B&P candidate for congress. What made you decide to run?"

"The cold war is over. We need economic responsibility in congress. We need to pay down our national debt - not just slow down its growth."

"Will you vote to raise taxes."

"I'll vote to reduce taxes."

"How do you stand on abortion?"

"I'm against it, but I'm also against the government telling a woman what to do with her body. The religious folks are trying to make a secular issue out of a religious one. This issue violates separation of church and state - the bill of rights - the pledge of allegiance and common sense."

"You oppose right to life?"

"I support right to life and the right to choose."

"That's all the time we have" and she turned away.

Back home - Bobbie Jean met Johnny at the door with a glass of wine, "I thought you were great."

"If I need the Coalition's support to win - I've lost before I begin."

"You did come on pretty strong. Did you talk to the lady interviewer before you went on."

"No and not afterwards - either. Have a feeling I was a filler. Probably couldn't find a diving jackass."

"They found a sitting one."

"Touché!"

"Oh you received a call from a retired Air Force Colonel. He wants you to call him after ten tomorrow morning."

"Did he say what he wants?"

"To talk about your candidacy."

"Did he listen to the interview?"

"I don't think so. He phoned just before you went on."

"I might have found a supporter. What's his name."

"Source - Colonel Source."

"First name?"

"Colonel C. T. Source. Be careful - Source said that he was fighter pilot."

"A miracle - one that knows how to use a phone, but he can't be a real fighter pilot."

"I don't know. His wife may have dialed for him."

"Fighter pilots don't refer to themselves in the past tense. A real one would have said - 'I am a fighter pilot.'"

August 18

Johnny checked his watch - it was after ten. He punched in the number Bobbie Jean gave him last night. Colonel C. T. Source answered, "Colonel Source here." "Johnny Ropp here - returning your call."

"Why are you running for congress?" The pompous tone of his voice got under Johnny's skin like a festered pimple on a teenager's neck.

"For the hell of it."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course - don't you have a sense of humor?"

"Don't have time for your nonsense. I'm busy yes very busy. Have to work - work - work. Answer my question."

"Which question?"

"Why are you running."

"Country needs adult leadership if we're going to pay down the national debt."

"We all ready have a good candidate."

"Are you the chosen one?"

"No no - I'm busy - too busy Mountain Billy is my candidate."

"He lost the last two times out."

"How do you stand on abortion?"

"I don't. It's a non issue."

"Non issue - non issue? It's our litmus test - the main plank in our Barefoot and Pregnant platform."

"If it is - it has termites. Time to move on."

"Do you have military service?"

"Yes."

"I was a fighter pilot."

"I'm not."

"Are you right to life?"

"Yes and I'm also right to choose."

"Not an answer - not an answer. Won't do - won't do. Get out - get out. We don't want your kind. Right to choose indeed - not an answer - not an answer. You're just another newcomer trying to get inside. There's no room for the likes of you. Won't have it - won't have it" and hung up.

The table was a very large one - but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it.

"No room! No room!" they cried out when they saw Alice coming. "There's plenty of room!" said Alice indignantly - and she sat down in a large armchair at one end of the table.

3

August 19

Bobbie Jean looked up from this morning's Euphoria Toady, "You're still mad - aren't you?"

"I'm burning a bit, but Colonel C. T. Source is the mad one. He still believes Mountain William lost the last election because of vote fraud."

"Vote fraud isn't an uncommon experience in swamp country."

"The supervisor of elections is Barefoot and Pregnant."

"That would be very uncommon - indeed."

"Anything of interest in today's paper?"

"Your hero - Barry Goldwater is quoted in as saying the B&P is in danger of becoming a single issue dinosaur."

"He's right - I talked on the phone with a B&P carnivorous reptile yesterday."

"Why don't you call Able Baker and see if you can find out who C. T. Source is and where he came from."

Able Baker answered, "Claims to be a retired test pilot from Eglin Field up in the Outback."

"If he is - his job was to shoot down drones when they go out of control."

"Drones - model airplanes? C. T. Source chased after model airplanes? To here him tell it - he won the war with his briefcase."

"Can you give me a brief rundown on his political clout. I think I alienated him yesterday."

"Don't worry - you're all ready alienated. C. T. and Mountain Billy march arm-in-arm together. They're on my office all the time. They still think Hill William lost the

last election through vote counting fraud."

"Do they have a case?"

"I was there when the votes were counted. The only case those two have is a case of rampant paranoia."

"Will his nonsupport hurt me?"

"Won't help - but shouldn't hurt if you win the primary. As much as they may dislike you - they dislike the T&S folks more."

"Don't these two work?"

"At being professional gadflies. C. T. and Mountain William live at our county meetings as self appointed consciences of Mosquito County taxpayers. When they're not busy harassing elected officials - they tie up our B&P executive committee meetings with points of order and long winded dissertations over by-laws. By the way - the litmus test on abortion? The thin lipped ones have chiseled it on stone tablets into our B&P by-laws."

"So - I can count on C. T. Source's support if Hill Billy doesn't run?"

"If you believe half-truths and innuendo are support - you'll have it - unconditionally."

"How about executive committee support?"

"It's in turmoil. The Christians are trying to gain control and shove their agenda down the Party's throat."

"Who is in control?"

"Mountain Billy has the administration - the Coalition has the chair and the majority is disenchanted."

"How about funding?"

"Dried up. B&P is being run without clout or funds. The insiders won't let the fund sources or the mainstream in. They're afraid the majority may be allowed to speak and then they'll lose control."

"They're losing it to the thin lips."

"Happens when you attempt to run a closed shop."

"Is C. T. Source really mad - or playing games?"

"He's a frustrated ticked off gerontocrat

August 20

Bobbie Jean furrowed her brow, "Words - words - words! Now I remember why I don't like politicians. It's talk - talk - talk until you lose your voices. You're either on the phone - or being interviewed - or dreaming up responses to questions."

"You know that old saw about doers do and talkers talk. Us politicians are all promise and no action."

"You have another request for an interview."

"So that's what got your dander up. Who wants a piece of my mind this time."

"The Swamp Harbor big band music station."

"I'll go. What time?"

"If you can't make it by ten this morning - he wants you to call and reschedule."

"I'll make it - what's his name?"

"Johnny West Key."

Johnny found the radio station standing alone - a concrete block building near the Swamp Harbor docks. Johnny West Key met him in the lobby, "I'll record your interview and we'll play it in short segments tomorrow. Little Boy was here yesterday."

"Did he reveal his platform?"

"Evasive on every question except abortion and NASA. He is right to life and wants our government to increase funding for technology."

"What does he do for a living?"

"Works for a technology company."

Johnny West Key adjusted the microphone sitting on the desk between them, "Don't worry - it's very sensitive. Are you ready?"

"That's all there is to it? No sound check? No technical preparation."

"We've come a long way since vacuum tubes. I'm speaking with

a B&P candidate for congress - Johnny Ropp from Under Water. Jefro Clampet has a new universal health care program before congress. A. B. Nose is supporting it. Where do you stand?" "Tinkering with health care is akin to defusing land mines. The quandary is - how do we insure we receive adequate health care at a reasonable cost without destroying the worlds best medical system? Jefro proposed that our federal taxpayer pay for the uninsured. Right now it's being paid for by the insured - rich - charity - goodwill - Medicaid and Medicare. The poor - the old and the rich are reaping medical benefits while our working middle class is getting hit and miss health care. That's one problem. Another is - when doctors lived in the same residential community as their patients they were paid about twice the salary of common folk. Now they live in gated communities and receive more than five times more than their patients. Our medical system is now a profit driven industry. Hospitals charge up to a thousand dollars a night for a room when we can stay at the Holiday Inn for sixty nine."

"Do you have a medical program?"

"No one does. We need to take health care off line from politics. Bring in the best minds and hammer out a solution. When we find a system we think will work - we need to test it in a variety of settings - Large city - country and small towns. If it works implement it. If it doesn't - revise it and come up with something else."

"How about the poor?"

"I lean toward reestablishing the Public Health Service for the poor and for the public good. Our citizens need to be protected from epidemics and imported diseases. We need better disease prevention. And there are a great number of doctors who are willing to administer to the poor As an added benefit - Public Health Clinics provide a medical alternative to incarceration for drug addictions."

"We are lobbying congress for a VA hospital. Will you work toward getting one for Mosquito County?"

"I'll give you a political bombshell. Eliminate Veteran's Hospitals and Clinics. They're not where our veterans are. Most are ancient - in disrepair - or too expensive to operate. And we have an oversupply of civilian hospitals and clinics. Replace our current VA system by providing medical cards to military retirees and veterans. Allow our war heroes to get their medical care from a doctor - clinic or hospital of their own choosing."

"Will you support funding for NASA?"

"For legitimate space exploration and aeronautical research."

"Do you support the space station?"

"Not in its present configuration. We're building a sand box for our astronauts and engineers to play in. It has no scientific purpose."

"You don't support manned space flight?"

"Of course I do, but it's a quarter century behind because of our efforts to fund the space station. We ought to spend our money on development and testing of new lift vehicles."

"Lift vehicles?"

"Rockets or futuristic systems to lift man into space."

"If you were going to cut funding to NASA - what would you eliminate?"

"The Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the other laboratories in Cleveland - Maryland and Sunnyvale. They don't do research. Most of their work is monitoring contracts. Headquarters can do that. Eliminate the middle man and use the money saved for R&D. Can you imagine the stupidity involved in the decision to place our astronauts in Houston and the launch pads and runway in Mosquito County. And we repair our space shuttles in California at great expense when the facilities are here. NASA has turned into a political money sump."

"Where do you stand on abortion?"

"I don't plan on having one."

"Do you want to make it illegal?"

"Why should I do that?"

"It's a major issue. Are you pro choice?"

"Our constitution gives us the right to choose. God gave woman the perils of choice. We all have a right to life - or death. It's a moral issue better left to the churches and out of government. The last two political groups who told women what to do with their bodies were the German National Socialists and Chinese Communists."

"Why are you running for congress?"

"Our district needs representation from a representative who is pragmatic - not an ideologue. Someone who will listen to his constituents and not put party before country." Johnny West Key turned off the tape recorder, "You sure weren't afraid to answer my questions. Are you sure you want to run for office."

"That's why I'm running."

August 21

Bobbie Jean turned up her nose, "There is an article about you buried in the back pages of Euphoria Toady's local section. Want me to read it to you?"

"Am I being damned with faint praise?"

"More like being praised with faint damns. *Retired Colonel fights back by seeking political office. 'Vote for President Clampet's economic package and I promise to work against you Ropp warned his congressman.'*

It goes on about your campaign and wonders where you're getting funds for such an early start. Oh - listen to this, *Colonel Ropp is a new arrival to Mosquito County.* That's a polite way of saying carpetbagger in the New South."

"I've had two articles in Euphoria Toady. Which is one more than I expected. Wonder why they're not interested in local political contests."

"They are - just not your kind. A pragmatic B&P candidate is a threat to the status quo."

"I may have found the chairman of the B&P candidate selection committee."

"The lady who called you this morning?"
"She wants to interview me at her house this evening."
"Sounds fishy to me. I'll go along to protect my interests."
"If she's Barefoot & Pregnant - I doubt if she's a spring chicken."
"You're not a spring rooster yourself."
"Touché again. Interview is at seven. Dress is casual."
"Where have I heard that misinformation before."

As they drove away from the interview - Bobbie Jean shook her head in disbelief, "If she represents the B&P - we might as well register as independents."
"Some people really believe that black helicopters fly blue helmeted troops at night."
"She wasn't the head of the candidate selection committee."
"She's a member of the executive committee."
"Executive committee. Can't be more than a dozen. At least you didn't alienate her."
"It wasn't easy. Some of her questions came right out of a time represented by poll taxes and segregation. I had all I could do to not laugh. I'm a northern conservative - strong on liberty - freedom and equal opportunity for all. If I get her drift - southern conservatives favor government control of social behavior."
"You do have a lot to learn. A southern conservative is a reformed democrat. We're still fighting the civil war and it was over and done with seven score years ago. Roe versus Wade is nothing more than a hiccup on the southern time line."
"Barry Goldwater is right - again."

August 22

Johnny received a package from the Never-Never State B&P Party in the mail. He leafed through clippings about A. B. Nose. None flattering. He smiled to himself, "State Party support to B&P candidates must be in the form of a clipping

service. Wonder what they do with the rest of the funds they solicit from party members? Must spend it on trips - meals - hotel rooms and administration." The phone rang. It was the executive committee lady who had interviewed him last night, "Are you doing anything for lunch?"

"Don't have any plans."

"Stop by the Republican Men's club luncheon. I'll arrange for you to give a five minute speech to introduce yourself and cover central issues from your platform."

"Is anyone else on the agenda?"

"Little Boy is giving a speech." Johnny telephoned Able Baker, "What do you know about the Republican Men's Club?"

"I'm the President."

"A lady from the executive committee says I'm supposed to give a five minute introduction speech to your group at noon today."

"News to me. Little Boy is scheduled for our allotted time. I'll have to schedule you at a later date. Who's the lady who said you were scheduled?"

"Magnolia Belle."

"I talked with her this morning and she didn't mention to me that you would like to speak."

"She called me too. Said I was to introduce myself in less than five minutes. Is this a run-a-round?"

"Magnolia is absent minded. Why don't you stop by at 11:30. You can work the crowd."

"No introduction?"

"No introduction."

"Where is it?"

"The Leftover Cafeteria in Swamp Harbor Mall."

Johnny arrived early. Excited to be at his first live political meeting. The first one there - early birds arrived twenty minutes later carrying trays of Leftover food to the back room. Johnny decided against standing in line selecting food from metal trays heated by steam. Reminded him too much

of a high school cafeteria. He didn't feel out of place. Most of the early birds were older retired guys dressed like he was in polo shirts and shorts. However - it wasn't easy to work a crowd with its head down in the trays - more intent on eating than talking. Precisely at noon the sincere suits walked in. None carried trays, but all were dressed in dark blue suits with red ties. The style Johnny wore to weddings and funerals. Little Boy walked in wearing the same uniform. Able Baker introduced Little Boy and sat down. Little Boy looked confident and spoke assuredly - fast as a New Jersey second - with the same accent. Johnny couldn't remember a thing he said - except he worked for Engineers Are Us. A technology company highly dependent on government contracts - located in Mosquito County. It was Little Boy's stage - so Johnny faded away after the meeting adjourned.

Bobbie Jean asked, "How did your first speech go? Was it well received?"

"I didn't give one. Little Boy had the stage - so I made like an East German and voted with my feet."

"The powers that be in B&P are sending you a message. What did Little Boy look like and how did he come across?"

"Looked and spoke like he was from one of the new states. Slicked back dark hair - medium build - slick presentation Uptown - not a southern mold."

"Any support in the men's group?"

"Not for him - me - or anyone. If I read them right they're believers in self and no one else."

"Mail came. You have a three page letter from the FEC."

"Anything important?"

"FEC is alerting you to several errors made by your fellow candidates."

"What are they?"

"Don't accept over one thousand dollars per individual per election, but you can give yourself unlimited funds. You can't change your gift to a loan at a later date."

"How about you?"

"I'm limited to the one thousand dollar minimum, but our boys can each give you a thousand. Per election means we can give you a thousand for the primary and another thousand for the general election."

"Looks like congress is closing the Joe Kennedy loophole."

"The real clincher is - you have to identify each contributor who gives you over two hundred dollars by name - address - occupation and employer."

"Occupation and employer? That's one step too far. It has to be a tracking scheme. An incumbent can threaten your employer if he has a mind too and more than a few politicians have been known to lose their tempers. This election law was written by Mafia lawyers."

"Did you notice? Your FEC letter has only three pages."

"When they play hardball - our government can be concise. I have come to a conclusion. The only way our free society can conduct a fair election is throw out these archaic rules and eliminate the FEC. Let the courts take care of cheaters."

August 30

Bobbie Jean hung up the phone, "We own a commercial beach parcel."

"When do we break ground?"

"Not sure. I have to get architectural approval and a bunch of permits. Take a look at our plans and tell me what you think."

Johnny spread the drawings out on the kitchen table, "Kitchen is on the first floor?"

"That and offices - overflow dining and a casual bar."

"Main dining room is on the second floor?"

"And a more formal bar for after dinner coffee and deserts."

"Crescent shaped. Is that to give a better view?"

"Yes. Our second floor will be high enough for a full ocean view. Notice the entrance is on the ocean side. All the service elements will be on the highway side."

"With our main dining room on the second floor - what about handicapped access?"

"High speed elevator. Most of our investment will be on the second floor. First floor is designed to break away if we have a storm surge from major hurricanes. Second floor will be safe from anything except a tsunami or asteroid strike."

"Kitchen will be a hefty investment."

"Didn't think about that. I'll have to redesign the second floor for it."

"Add it on to the highway side and open it up to the dining room. You can keep the dumbwaiter for serving the overflow dining room on the first floor."

"Cuisine as performing art. I like that."

"Liquor license?"

"Going to be a problem."

"Wine and beer?"

"Not a problem. We'll have a license when we open."

"Are we within the Under Water city limits?"

"We're in Mosquito County - between three major hotels. And if you know standard hotel fare - we'll have a built-in supply of new customers."

September 2

An FEC video tape arrived in the morning mail along with a questionnaire from the State of Euphoria B&P. The video was titled *Why Me* - which was a good question since Johnny hadn't bothered to purchase a VCR. The questionnaire asked, "Why are you running?" The only answer Johnny could come up with that didn't sound trite was, "I'm pure of heart and have the strength of ten." They requested an 8x10 photo. Johnny called Sears and made an appointment for a studio Christmas special. Good news to him - his radio interview finally made it on the air. As advertised - each question and answer was used in a separate segment. Bobbie Jean called out, "Johnny - come to the kitchen. We might wind up with two acres of

vacant beach front land. Our environmental impact statement is being held up for Scrub Jay review."

"Scrub Jays? They're all over the place. Do we have any on our property?"

"We have to wait for an environmentalist to certify that we don't."

"What happens if one stops by for a rest on his way home?"

"We're in big trouble."

"Talk about going through a governmental looking glass. Why don't we join the environmental movement and create a Scrub Jay habitat?"

"And build a restaurant? Not possible."

"Move the land up - build a parking garage underneath. Put the habitat on top of a man made hill. If we have a storm surge - it will go through the garage. And both floors of our restaurant will be free and clear. And our first floor will be where the second one is with an ocean view."

"You are getting the hang of civilian life. Good idea. We have to build on cement columns anyway. It should be doable. The only problem will be drainage."

"If the first floor is our parking lot garage - drainage will be the same. And if we landscape for jays and keep people off - you should sail through your impact review and have more parking."

"I wonder what it will cost?"

"Not anymore than the covered parking we were going to build. And think of the storage possibilities. And you can build the kitchen on the first floor as you planned."

"Yes. We'll have to revise our revised plans."

Johnny received a supplement in the mail to the campaign guide he received from the FEC yesterday. It appeared to be a rehash of the three page letter he had received before the campaign guide. One item caught his eye. If a contribution is undesignated before the primary it can only be used for that election - not the general. As most incumbents run

unopposed - their contributions are automatically designated for the general election. "Damn - Incumbents win again!" There was an escape clause for the well funded. Contributors can redesignate their contribution after the primary. Johnny hauled the FEC supplement to Bobbie Jean, "Look it over and see if I missed something. Each time I receive a new set of instructions I get a queasy feeling. One that tells me a new restriction is coming on."

"You should feel violated. Federal campaign laws are crafted to curtail freedom of speech."

"Any rush to comply?"

"Since none of your contributors will cross the two hundred dollar threshold - no."

"According to Euphoria Toady all of Washington DC is on vacation until after Labor Day. For one brief moment - we have Camelot. Our political world is safe from lawyers - lobbyists and legislators."

"Whoops! NASA lost contact with their Mars probe. Another billion dollars down the drain."

"Did they say what happened?"

"They don't know. All contact was lost as it closed in on Mars orbit prior to landing."

"Shows you what thirty year old technology can do. Say - do you thing the little green men from Mars shot it down?"

"Don't you remember. We have all of the aliens locked up in Roswell. Congressman Nose says we need to build a better - faster - cheaper space program."

"Beam me up Scotty. As long as our space program is driven by politics - there'll be no intelligent life in funding our NASA space program."

"He equates rocket science with a hunt for a cancer cure."

"Beam me up again. Rocket science is a study of ballistic trajectories and thrust. There is no comparison. Our congressman is living proof. There is no intelligent life in our Tax & Spend congress. The layers of over-management in our space programs is thicker than limestone in a quarry."

"How many centers do they have?"

"More than we need. We have launch and landing facilities at Cape Confusion - a lab in Cleveland Ohio - one in Sunnyvale California - a jet engine lab near LA - an unmanned space center in Maryland - a manned space center near Houston - a rocket lab in Alabama and at least two headquarters centers in DC and Maryland. Each site is protected by two senators - a governor - a congressman and a phalanx of contractors."

"Nose is playing all the angles. He'll have a big campaign chest. Be tough to unseat."

"He screwed up when he spoke conservative and acted liberal."

"Voters have short memories."

September 4

Bobbie Jean peeked in through Johnny's open office door, "Time for us to walk on the beach."

"Where too?"

"I want to look at our lot again and see if our plans match up with the real world."

"How windy is it."

"Blowing the leaves off my plants on our ocean side lanai, but it isn't moving the pots around. Why?"

"Need to wear a straw hat to keep the sun off. If the wind is up - I'll wear a baseball cap." Bobbie Jean gave Johnny a dig to the ribs, "A straw hat for the tenderfoot?"

"More like tender skin."

Nestled between two hotels and separated by parking lots on both sides - Bobbie Jean's vacant land gave the impression of a wild palmetto and sea grapes sanctuary. Johnny climbed the steps to the south hotel's dune crossover, "What if our overflow decides to park in the hotel parking lots? Won't the walkers destroy our Scrub Jay habitat?"

"I'll work with the hotels and build a habitat crossover deck like their dune crossovers."

"An elevated boardwalk won't keep the Mosquito County yahoos

from walking through our habitat."

"True, but a fence on both sides and signs warning of pygmy rattlesnakes will."

"We don't have pygmy rattlesnakes."

"You know that and I know that, but the yahoos who can read won't."

"That will make them use the crossover."

"Me too - especially at night."

"Will your plans work?"

"Like a charm. Everything fits."

"Do you think the environmental folks will approve?"

"If they don't - I'll post a guard out here with an air rifle to make sure that passing Scrub Jays won't nest."

"Is that why they're endangered?"

"What would you do if you owned property and were restricted in selling it - after the fact?"

"Buy an air rifle."

September 5

At breakfast - Bobbie Jean whistled in disbelief, "They really do play hardball in Euphoria."

"What is it now?"

"Three former congressmen are under fire for improper use of left over campaign funds."

"What's the proper use?"

"On expenses related to their local offices - donation to charity - donate it to other political committees - or for other lawful purposes."

"That's the loophole - other lawful purposes. What did our three incompetents do?"

"One of them used his leftover funds for personal expenses and failed to pay income tax on it."

"That's a no-no. Unless he is connected - he'll go to the slammer. How about the other two?"

"Your right - he got three months. Another one gave his grandson a thousand dollars from his campaign fund."

"Bet he gets off Scot free. And the third one?"

"Euphoria Toady's writer doesn't say. With the limit you placed on contributions - you won't have to worry."

"How so?"

"You won't have enough campaign funds leftover to steel."

"Were they Barefoot and Pregnant or Tax and Spend?"

"Tax and Spend. Not many former B&P congressmen in the Great State of Euphoria."

September 7

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny this morning's Euphoria Toady, "Read what A. B. Nose says about B&P."

Johnny glanced at the front page story, "He has three pork barrel projects in the appropriations bill. Dredging Cape Confusion's shipping channel - beach renourishment and new housing at Prop Wash Air Force Base. The power of the incumbency to take credit for the obvious. The channel has to be dredged for nuclear submarines. New housing? They haven't filled the housing that's there and was just redone. And we need beach renourishment because the channel blocked the natural flow of sand from north to south. There it is - he says that no B&P congressman representing the Flat Earth congressional district could have achieved what he has. Talk about an ego trip. He's a walking ad for term limits."

"You missed an item. He's taking credit for moving the proposed new Veterans Hospital from Mouseville to Cow Pasture in Mosquito County."

"Only if T&S maintains control of congress. The congressman in Mouseville is Barefoot and Pregnant. If the B&P takes control of congress Mosquito County's VA hospital will never be built. We'll get payback time and our veterans will be without medical care. Should have left it in Mouseville."

"And he says one more thing. Cape Confusion's funding is dependent on his presence in congress."

"Looks like he's not only running - he's saying he reinvented the wheel."

"Nosey lists his occupation as a lawyer and journalist."
"Both rated lower than real estate and used car salesmen."
"What are you doing for your campaign?"
"Staying current on Washington politics and boning up on issues."
"What would you do about NASA?"
"Attempt to close down half of their centers and consolidate manned space flight activities at Cape Confusion."
"Not in our lifetime."
"Have you studied your opponents?"
"None to study - except Nosey."
"What about Little Boy?"
"Like a fox escaping hunters - he's gone to ground."

September 9

Bobbie Jean laughed, "We took delivery of the Mouseville Guard just in time. There's an article about Mountain Billy in it."

"What do they say?"

"Trouble in B&P land. Mountain William - perennial B&P loser in the Flat Earth congressional district campaigns is trying to take control of Mosquito County's B&P organization. A thin lipped conservative woman hating faction is close to taking over the Mosquito County B&P committee. Nothing would please the Tax and Spend Party more."

"They're right about that, but I doubt that Hill Billy is in bed with the thin lipped Christians. If he is it wasn't a true conversion."

"What have you got against the antiabortion folks?"

"They're socialists. They want the government to legislate morality. And they're not Christians. They worship man in the form of the unborn."

"Are you in trouble. Those people you call thin lips are not very stable. They fire bomb clinics and shoot doctors. Do me a favor."

"Your wish is my command."

"Don't give out our address to the County B&P."

"The Chairman may have it."

"He threw your letters away."

"We live on the top floor of a concrete ten story condo."

"I wouldn't put it past those people to fire bomb our condo from an airplane."

September 11

Bobbie Jean came into Johnny's office bursting with news, "All three bids are in and guess what? They're thirty percent lower than what I anticipated and each is within two percent of the others."

"I smell collusion. That's too close to be real. I'd send them back and ask for another bid."

"What should I tell them?"

"That you found discrepancies, but you wanted to be fair and give them another shot at the contract."

"And if they ask what the discrepancies are?"

"Tell them you're not free to disclose items - or materials."

"And when I see the changes we'll know what was wrong with the bids."

"You're learning fast."

"Each contractor recommended a pass through walkway in the garage - under the habitat instead of a crossover - to connect to the hotel parking lots."

"Is the entrance still on the oceanside?"

"Doesn't it make sense to enter by the interior steps or the elevator. It will keep our customers out of the wind and rain. They can still enter on the oceanside or go out on the porch for drinks. We might even have an outside bar with cafe tables and chairs for those who want to take in an ocean breeze before dinner."

"Have you decided on the menu?"

"Pork roast - steak - lobster - one fish and one pasta dish."

"How about one style of pasta with different toppings?"

"You're learning and a different pasta each night."

September 12

Bobbie Jean asked, "Did you read Euphoria Toady this morning?"

"Just glanced at it. Anything important?"

"Little Boy's announcement made the paper. Want me to read it to you?"

"Yes. This comes under the heading of opposition research."

"At least you'll know where he is coming from, 'Swamp Harbor engineer bids for House Seat. Little Boy - a senior engineer at Engineers Are Us has announced his candidacy for the seat held by A. Brown Nose. Little Boy - a recent graduate of Furniture University in Quiet State was born in New Noisy. Little Boy is a recent arrival to Mosquito County. He has over thirteen years of experience in government contracting. Little Boy will make space funding and reducing government regulations the key issues of his campaign.'"

"Does the article say how old he is?"

"Thirty-one."

"And he's in government contracting since he was eighteen? Has to be a whiz kid or he's stretching his resume."

"I managed a hotel when I was seventeen."

"You are a whiz lady!"

"Balanced news today. They have an article about A. B. Nose. He says the current heavy lift rocket may not be up to the job. He says, 'Clearly we must do something. Our country needs a simpler - rugged - reliable launch vehicle.'"

"And how long has he been in congress and done nothing to resolve this problem? We have eaten our cake - funding the space station. There is no leftover dough to make a better rocket. If taking credit for programs you have no part in and pretending not to be an active participant in the outcome of a committee you're a member of is a congressman's creed - I don't want a part of it."

"Wrong attitude. If you want to be a successful congressman - a winning politician doesn't just sit around and watch the parade pass by. He grabs a baton - jumps out in front and

pretends he's the leader of the band."

"Jeffro Wilson Clampet is a drum major."

"And a consummate politician. Test time again - to see how your boning up on issues. What is your stand on term limits for congress?"

"We limit Presidents to two terms - eight years. What makes congress so special? If it takes five years to be vested under the House retirement plan - I'd limit both the House and Senate to twelve years. Six terms for congress and two terms for the Senate."

"Why so many terms in congress?"

"Fairness - it takes awhile to get your feet wet in the lower house. And the years come out the same."

September 15

Bobbie Jean met Johnny at the door, "It's almost eleven p.m. I expected you home by nine - nine-thirty"

"So did I. Forgot it was a committee meeting and you know how those can drone on and on and on."

"Did they ask you to join?"

"No. Guess how many members they have."

"An executive committee? Not more than six to ten."

"There are over one hundred and fifty and not everyone was in attendance."

"How did it go?"

"I met the Mosquito County B&P state committeewoman. I introduced myself and gave her a list of my platform issues. She handed it back to me when she got to a woman's right to decide. Only words she said were, "Baby killer."

"Is she the one who didn't return your phone call?"

"She's the one - Ima Vulture."

"Your kidding me. Is that her real name?"

"I guessed on the Ima part. Her name is I. M. Vulture."

"How did the meeting go?"

"Everyone had an agenda. They were on a witch hunt to find out who talked to the Mouseville Guard reporter until they

were reminded that their meetings were open. Mountain Billy lurked at the rear of the hall - taking it all in. He was attempting to change the by-laws. I guess it's been going on for over a year. Everyone got pretty animated."

"Have the inmates taken over the Asylum?"

"Almost - they're about a half-a-dozen votes short."

"Why so many members?"

"Each side is packing the committee to either maintain or lose control, but the thin lips have won."

"How so?"

"The party has bought off on the Coalition's antiabortion plank and they're pounding it into every issue and speech. The battle is continuing, but the war is over. The B&P Party has sold its soul for a few votes."

"Are the crazy Christians really that bad?"

"More so. Reminds me of how the communists take over labor movements. Hang in there until everyone , but them gives up and goes home. Every single one of them is a former T&S in sheep's clothing. These folks are really scary up close. Blank faces and blank eyes. Reminds me of the living dead. They're on a lockstep evangelical mission to overthrow a Supreme Court decision."

"Are they that good at organization?"

"Yes - they can't be more than twenty percent of the party and they have literally taken control."

"Did you get to meet Colonel C. T. Source?"

"He was pointed out to me. He and Mountain William were standing up in the back whispering and grinning."

"Are you going to attend any more meetings?"

"I'll have to when I begin a petition drive. I must fish where the registered voters swim."

September 17

Johnny opened Euphoria Toady to the editorial section. The lead article was about the space station. He read it out loud to Bobbie Jean, "'Without the space station there will

be no ongoing mission for the space shuttle. Without the shuttle there will be no manned space program. And without a manned space program - soon we will have no space program. The loss of the space station would have devastating consequences for Mosquito County. There would be fewer people buying homes - fewer people buying gas - fewer people getting their clothes cleaned at the local dry cleaners and all that would add to the devastation of the local economy. Very strong stuff."

"They're drawing a conclusion without looking at all of the evidence."

"Chicken Little reigns supreme at Euphoria Toady. By building a space station - we don't have enough funds for replacing an ancient and cumbersome space shuttle - which isn't. If I remember - it was supposed to have a fast turnaround like an airplane. It doesn't. Traveling back and forth to a space station in an outdated lift vehicle can be down right hazardous. We have pushed the envelope."

"Which one?"

"The one that limits how many engineering studies can be made on a given system."

"I'm still trying to understand how our dry-cleaning business can be any more devastated in Mosquito County than it all ready is. Our climate alone is devastating. Tee shirts and shorts don't spend anytime inside a dry-cleaners."

September 19

Bobbie Jean asked, "Congressman A. B. Nose is sponsoring a job fair at MCCC. What is MCCC?"

"Mosquito County Community College, but it should be Civilian Conservation Corps. Most of its graduates aren't trained for the real world."

"You could say that about any college."

"I have. His campaign theme is going to be jobs. How many companies has Nosey strong-armed into showing up?"

"It says just short of sixty, but there is a problem."

"All fast food chains?"

"Doesn't say, but they're looking for companies who will hire not just fill a booth slot."

"If it is politically driven and not industry driven - all the companies who show up will be taking names - not hiring."

"It's going to be held at the Queen Center on the Cow Pasture Campus. Before you ask - it's named for the MCCC president - Cantankerous Queen."

"He's still alive."

"Of course - hubris is alive and well in the Great State of Euphoria. All of its buildings and bridges are named after living - in office politicians."

"And none of them would be after they left office or died."

"Only the prisons."

September 20

Johnny - all dressed up in his best sincere blue suit drove to the job fair late in the morning. Volunteers were everywhere wearing *A. Brown Nose Citizen* tee shirts. Nosey had a table set at the entrance to take names and addresses of those in attendance. Johnny looked around. He had arrived late. There were over five thousand out of work middle management employees in business suits in lines stretching as far as his eyes could see. He looked for the supermarket that had signed up, but it was a no show. He was going to apply for a bagger job. None of the technical companies here were hiring. At least the people representing the Mouse Company were honest. They admitted they weren't hiring. Johnny spoke with a sampling of those who were in line. He was surprised by the talent that was available - engineers of every type - computer programmers - marketers - physicists - chemists and scientists from every field. And no one was hiring.

He joined Bobbie Jean for a late lunch, "What a mob. I

wouldn't want to be in Nosey's shoes."

"Why not? He had a big crowd."

"That old saying about a lover scorned. No one was hiring except a door to door cosmetics firm and a pizza chain that was looking for cooks."

"Whatever happened to the society of achievement?"

"Went to the same black hole as all of those computer jobs. The ones that were supposed to replace hardware bending."

"Well - it's beginning to look like the only technical house our country is building is a house of cards."

"It's beginning to look like every new tech job we create is going overseas with the hardware jobs."

"Why don't you write a letter to each one of the companies that participated? Ask for equal time."

I'll do one for the Mouse Company. You take a look at it and we'll see."

September 21

Johnny handed Bobbie Jean his letter, "Hope I offended them:"

Dear Mouse Company

Love your logo. If we are what we say then you are what you sell. Met your Reps at congressman A. Brown Nose's Job Fair. Tee shirts advertised A. B. Nose at every table and in every line. Didn't realize your outfit was politically active, but since you are - would you mind loaning me a few of your cartoon characters to hold my signs when I campaign against congressman Nose? Hey there - high there - ho there for fair play. Magna est veritas et praevalabit!

"I understood everything, but the Latin."

"Truth is mighty and will prevail."

"Seems out of context."

"It is, but I like the phrase. Congressman Nosey is trying to move his constituents attention away from his voting record with nonpartisan - non programmatic services."

"Those aren't your words."

"I borrowed them from Morris Fiorina. Providing these services blurs the influence of friends and enemies."

"And all with taxpayer's money."

"And nothing can be done because it was the mayor's son."

"Aren't you worried about the Mouse Company coming after you?"

"I'm too small a fish. One of their lawyers might send me a nasty note, but nothing will come of it."

"Why are you still upset by his job fair?"

"There were nine thousand job seekers and no work - just promises. Raising expectations when there is no work can be cruel. It was a transparent I love me scheme by a liberal congressman who believes government can create jobs."

"It can by reducing taxes."

September 22

Congressman A. Brown Nose was a guest of Mary Queen on the Clampet News Network talk show - along with congressman It from the State of Paradise. It - a transplanted Fruits and Nuts State flower-child grinned - a transfixed listener while Nose patted himself on the back for his government sponsored Job Fair. In his State of Paradise - a one party state - a wooden dummy could win on the Tax & Spend ticket. And some compared It's fellow congresswoman to a small feisty female hog - right out of Animal Farm. The State of Paradise had long since taxed business out of business and its workers into unemployment. Jobs were now available only from the service sector - fast food - real estate - hotel maids or government. Sons and daughters of Paradise were forced to seek employment on the mainland. It was salivating over a government sponsored Job Fair since no business would sponsor

one in his district. Bobbie Jean asked, "How did they get on Mary Queen's program.?"

"Has to be a payoff for their active support of Clampet's health care and economic programs in the House. It must need face time. His seat is secure as long as he stays alive."

"It is an ugly one. Looks like he hasn't had a haircut since high school."

"Reeks of the unwashed left. But - I have a suspicion he is trying to divert attention away from his growing bald spot. Nosey is advocating a Job Fair in every district. If every congressman has the same result as he did - there will be another Cox's army of unemployed middle managers marching on Washington DC."

September 25

Bobbie Jean wondered, "As long as you're not gaining fans or support in the Barefoot & Pregnant Party - why don't you give the local Twit group a call?"

"Able Baker Charlie gave me the phone number of a lady who is active in Crooked Town's Twit chapter. She's also a member of the B&P executive committee. I'll give her a call."

"What's her name?"

"Patty Pollyanna."

"Not Betty Boop?"

"Might be. I'll let you know after I meet her."

"I'll go along and see for myself."

Patty Pollyanna invited Johnny to the United Were Twits meeting tonight at the Crooked Town library, "Seven o'clock tonight."

"Are you a card carrying Twit?"

"We don't have cards, but I am on the membership roll."

"Who's going to speak?"

"I'm not certain. We don't usually have a formal agenda."

"Able Baker Charlie said you're a member of the executive committee. Can you belong to both?"

"The Twits are organized as a nonprofit foundation - not a political party."

"Do you expect a big crowd?"

"Yes - we won't compete with anyone else on Monday night. Nothing else is going on."

Bobbie Jean asked, "What did she say?"

"I'm invited to the local United We're Twits chapter meeting at the Crooked Town library tonight."

"During Monday night football? Those folks are either crazy or overly serious. The Washington Native Americans are playing the New York Ogres tonight."

"I'll leave before nine. The Twit meeting begins at seven. Are you going with me?"

"I'll pass on this one."

Johnny thought he had arrived early in a driving rain storm. He had not. He was the last of twelve others to arrive. A councilman - the Chief of Police - Fire Chief - Director of Parks/Recreation and Director of the Department of Roads were present to defend a tax increase and renewal of a current mill levy on the November ballot. At issue was a ten percent increase on property taxes to build paved roads in Crooked Town. The roads were needed, but the tax was to go on in perpetuity at a reduced rate after three years and the Crooked citizens were up in arms. He watched intently, but none of the city officers seemed upset at briefing only twelve Twits and Johnny.

Bobbie Jean asked, "How did your meeting go?"

"I was allowed to stand up and wave, but not speak."

"A lot of that going around - lately. Do you get the feeling that they want you to go away?"

"I attended a meeting of the political Outs who have become the Ins and are intent on keeping all others out."

"The Twits are becoming like the other political parties?"

"In spades."

"What else went on?"

"There were twelve disciples and each one had a different agenda. One of them read letters he'd sent out. Another didn't seem to care for the existing city government.

"Did anyone mention Boss Ears."

"Come to think of it - no one mentioned him or his agenda. But - they were all excited about his appearance on Mary Queen's talk show."

"Doesn't it all just sound like a Mad Hatter's tea party."

"Complete with a long eared rabbit."

*"At any rate I'll never go there again!" said Alice,
as she picked her way through the wood. "It's the
stupidest tea party I ever was at in all my life!"*

4

September 26

Bobbie Jean asked, "What's on your agenda today?"

"I need to get face time in the community. CIRA and AFIO are holding a joint luncheon at the Ugly Yacht Club on the 29th. I'll attend and see if I can drum up support."

"You're talking in acronyms again."

"CIRA is CIA Retired Association and AFIO is the Association of Former Intelligence Officers."

"You've had time to sleep on the Twit's meeting last night. Have you changed your mind?"

"No - it's politics as usual with a new set of characters. The Twits have attracted anarchists - no-nothings - white sheets - wild eyed liberals - neo-Nazis - arch conservatives - sheep looking for a leader with more than a few fair minded pragmatics sprinkled in. Their big tent has become an insane asylum for the disenfranchised. We can only hope none of them take up arms."

"Will it survive?"

"Maybe as a fringe party. Too much diversity in the group to hold it together as a major party. And the original message was an excellent one. Unfortunately Boss Ear's quest for a responsible government is lost on a crowd that worries about black helicopters carrying blue helmeted soldiers at night. Some of the folks he has attracted are borderline psychotics. And do you know what is really funny?"

"I've had to hold back my laughter at what you've said so far. The whole scene?"

"They're organizing like a secret fraternity. Everyone talks in whispers with their mouths covered. When a stranger approaches the clique turns silent. I wasn't asked to join and when I inquired about membership - I got the run-around."

"I wouldn't give that group my credit card number. How many cells do they have?"

"One in every town, but if they're like the one I attended - they're limited to a few participants attached by the belly button in a quest for ten seconds of fame."

September 29

Bobbie Jean wandered into the kitchen, "You're home early. How did the yacht club luncheon with your fellow retired spies go?"

"Food was edible. Didn't get a chance to politic. It wasn't the place and I didn't feel right about it. Quite a large crowd though. Didn't know that many retired Intelligence types lived in the area."

"Who was the speaker?"

"Can't remember his name. He's a retired deputy director working as a senior executive for a space related company. His speech was about national issues. That was a mistake. His audience is tuned into twenty four hours of cable news while he's locked away in a corporate office building. They knew more than he did about the national and foreign scene."

"Would you want to join?"

"The retired Intelligence groups?"

"No silly. The Ugly Yacht Club."

"We don't have a boat and to tell you the truth it reminds me too much of Washington cocktail party place. Haven't we had enough of them?"

"I have and we've done too much of it. We have nothing left to prove. And you don't either - so why don't quit this foolishness and drop out of the race?"

"What? And give up snow business? I should, but I won't. I know deep down that I can't win unless I have a ton of money. I face two major obstacles - name recognition and how to get my message out. Without free media - we'd have to buy time and space for both. And there is a third obstacle - the thin lipped ones. So even spending money may not do the trick. I

can do one thing - get my pragmatic conservative message out. It might not win this time, but someone will latch on to my ideas and win with them in the future."

"Talk about hubris!"

"Pride goeth before a fall. Your right. What I think are my original ideas are a composite borrowed from others."

"So you're going to stay the course?"

"Yes - it's something to do until we have our restaurant up and running."

"Promise me you won't make a crusade out of it."

"Name recognition might help us when we open our restaurant. We'll have stiffer competition than we had in Virginia."

"Okay, but know when it's time to pull the plug."

"That time has passed."

October 7

Bobbie Jean smiled, "My-oh-my we are a candidate. The FEC has sent you their magazine in the mail."

"What's it called?"

"The FEC Record. Full of don'ts about using campaign funds for personal expenses. Won't be a problem for you."

"Who knows - it might be."

"It won't - you don't have any."

Johnny leafed through the magazine, "Can't give myself a salary. We can't spend it for household expenses - clothing or entertainment."

"You won't be able to campaign."

"Why not?"

"What you're doing can't win an election. It must be for personal entertainment. What is your total so far in campaign contributions?"

"Counting the money sent in by my friends from up north and realizing I have a five dollar limit - sixty-six dollars and ten cents."

"Where did the ten cents come from?"

"I found it on our daily walk."

"I'm going to help you on your campaign."

"Don't know if you should waste your money on a lost cause."

"One of the B&P candidates for governor is speaking at a luncheon in Pirates Cove tomorrow. I purchased two tickets. You can see how the big boys do it."

"Do I have to wear a suit?"

"No, but you must wear long pants and shoes."

"Euphoria formal - eastern casual."

October 8

Bobbie Jean asked, "What did you think?"

"Burning Bush was pretty impressive. Sincere suit and all. Where did you get the influence? We sat with his wife and one of his sons."

"Still early - he hasn't declared yet and the crowd was small. What do you think of him?"

"Straight talker. I liked his idea of eliminating the State Board of Education. Really relaxed, but our Governor will eat his lunch."

"Rabid B. Koon? He's a border line incompetent who's used political office for personal gain."

"That makes him a hero in the Great State of Euphoria. If Rabid was in a horse race - he'd cut across the infield to win. Burning Bush is too nice a guy. Rabid will trash him just before the voters go to the polls."

"And you're the one who is running an idealistic campaign."

"Touché! An arrow to the heart of the matter - again. What did you think of Little Boy?"

"Tries to dominate the room. Might not work in the South."

"Wore his sincere suit. Looked like a candidate."

"His wife didn't give me the time of day."

"Ouch - it isn't a female thing. She perceives me as minor league. We're not a threat to her husband."

"I don't care for her, but she is right about you not being a threat. Why don't we spend our money and make a race of it?"

"Now who is getting carried away? Able Baker says another

Engineers Are Us employee is thinking about getting into the congressional race."

"Did he say who it was?"

"Someone named B. M. Scotty. He wants to be a bridge between the B&P thin lips and the pragmatists."

"A bridge gets walked on and an active bridge gets trampled."

"I'll try to remember that."

October 9

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny the newspaper, "Look in the local section. The B&P executive committee is meeting is on the 15th. Are you going to attend?"

"I'll Xerox my platform and hand it out."

"Better check with the lady listed in the paper. They may have you arrested."

"Not a bad idea. I'll get free publicity from TV and the newspaper and finally - name recognition."

"Not as my husband! My Mother will disown me if you are arrested. Southern pride is like a hot temper. It's better when it's not aroused. Give the lady a call."

"What's her name?"

"Carrie Favor."

Johnny hung up the phone, "I can hand out fliers as long as I stand outside."

"What if it rains?"

"We'll hold the picnic indoors."

"Did she give you any encouragement?"

"She said Little Boy will drop out if the party selects a candidate. I think she was dropping a hint."

"He must believe he is the chosen one."

"Guess what. Favor is in the pragmatic camp."

"As a counterbalance to the thin lipped chairman. Time for you to make another assessment of your chances."

"I get the impression I'm more of a nuisance than a threat. We've lived here a short time - so I'm a scalawag to the

locals. After two months I haven't picked up one committed follower. I'm not going to get anywhere with the party insiders, but it doesn't pay to moon them. If they pick one candidate - I have a chance. If there is a gaggle - no way. I'll be a certified underpuppy."

October 11

Able Baker Charlie telephoned at four in the afternoon, "You have another challenger."

"Who is it?"

"An ex-Air Force type. Flew transports. His name is G. W. Pylut. Runs an investment firm or something like that. If Scotty throws his hat in - that'll make four of you. Do you know why so many are jumping in?"

"We're like vultures circling a dead prey - A. B. Nose."

"What will it take to get you out?"

"A defeat in the Primary."

October 13

Bobbie Jean dumped a stack of mail on Johnny's desk, "The three pound envelope is from the B&P in Washington." Johnny opened it, "Federal Election Code - Campaign Starter Manual - Campaign Guide - seventy-seven pages of instruction for completing the financial disclosure form - Xerox copies of Nosey's voting record and three inches of trash." He scanned through the manual, "Six items that make a good candidate -

1 Fire in the belly.

2 Ego

3 Organization

4 Finance

5 Vulnerable opponent

6 Power base

What do you think?"

"You have fire in your belly - more ego than you need and a

vulnerable opponent. Looks like you're eligible to be half-a candidate."

"Most of the stuff says if you don't have money and a broad support base - forget it."

"And they're right."

October 14

B. M. Scotty was on the phone, "I'm soliciting funds for our major County B&P fund-raiser."

"I'm willing to contribute. How much?"

"It's the Barefoot & Pregnant Council of six-hundred and sixty-six dinner. Tickets are sixty-six dollars and a-half page ad in the program is sixty six dollars."

"I'll take two tickets and half-a page."

"Bring your ad copy and a check to our executive committee meeting tomorrow night."

Bobbie Jean asked, "What are you writing?"

"Ad copy for the Council of six-hundred and sixty-six dinner. I bought half-a page and two tickets."

"Good - I've always wanted to see if you B&Ps really do have horns. Catchy number for your party."

"The thin lips have taken over."

"I knew those folks when they wore sheets and were stalwarts in the Tax & Spend Party. They do have horns. Let me take a look at your ad copy."

Johnny Ropp For Congress

Are you worn out - tired - run down - walkin' around in a funk. Could it be from supporting the same ol' losing candidate? Do you blame your loss on The Board of Elections for an inaccurate vote count? Do you look on a competitive Primary as a problem? Then buck up - Bunky! Put away old

ideas - stand up on your own two feet - embrace change - jump on a new band wagon. Lets leave the old behind - put our shoulders to the wheel and get the log rolling toward a new day with new ideas. Together we can win back our Flat Earth District Congressional seat.

"They won't put it in. You're attacking the status quo."

"Then I'll put it in the newspaper."

"You don't have campaign funds."

"Then I'll throw a temper fit."

"Do it outdoors. Why are they throwing this party?"

"Since the Christian Coalition came on the scene - the local party has lost all of their major contributors. The new power brokers are the religious right and they're long on preaching and short on cash."

"Maybe it's because the Tax & Spenders were in power here long before the War of Northern Aggression."

"The folks with money are sitting on their wallets because the religious right has frozen everyone else out of the decision making process. They'll support a candidate, but not the party."

"From what I've seen so far - the main source of revenue for both parties is derived from you - the candidates. I wouldn't change a word in your ad. You aren't going to win - so you might as well get your sixty six dollars worth."

October 15

Johnny stood outside the door to the meeting hall - handing out fliers as members and onlookers arrived at the B&P executive committee meeting. Not everyone took one. He surmised that his stance on woman's rights had irritated more than a few of the thin lipped ones. He met with and handed in his ad copy and check to B. M. Scotty. And true to form - he paid for two tickets to the Barefoot & Pregnant Beach Woman's meeting at one of the hotels near his condo. As a

candidate he had to attend, but his conviction was reinforced. Both Parties were dependent on robbing their candidates funds. Moneys better spent on winning an election - not administration. This time he stayed to the back of the room and watched. A lawyer from Mouseville showed up in a sincere suit - testing the congressional waters. Another potential candidate appeared - Vinnie Veteran. And G. W. Pylut was on hand.

Bobbie Jean was at the door with a glass of red wine in her hand, "Thought you might need a drink to cleans your palette after shoveling manure with your fellow politicians. How did it go?"

"It's going to get crowded. More vultures are circling than there are carcasses too devour. Two more possible candidates showed up. A lawyer from Swamp County with his wife dressed to the nines and Vinnie Veteran from Sulfur Island. Met B. M. Scotty and G. W. Pylut."

"How were they dressed?"

"Sincere suits and red ties."

"They're running. Don't you think you should wear a suit and tie to your meetings?"

"This is Euphoria. It's moist - it's hot and it's raining. A polo shirt and shorts should be good enough. At least I'm wearing shoes."

"I meant to talk to you about that. Tennis shoes without socks is not formal campaigning attire."

"Look at it this way. I'll be the only candidate dressed honestly. I do have one physical problem."

"Just one? What is it?"

"They're all younger - taller and better looking than me."

"And smarter?"

"We're running for political office. How can anyone of us be considered intelligent."

"Where do they work?"

"Veteran works at Cape Confusion and Pylut is self employed."

"I have only one piece of advice."

"And it is?"

"Watch who you stand next to. Don't allow your opposition to tower over you. It makes for a bad image."

"I heard a juicy rumor at the meeting. The State B&P paid for a poll that showed Mountain William losing by an even larger margin to A. B. Nose than last time."

"Then he's out. Were you the only one passing out fliers?"

"Until Little Boy's wife saw what I was doing. She sent over his campaign worker to hand out literature."

"What did his say?"

"It was a slick presentation with photos. I'll paraphrase it - I'm running for - I'll talk to you later about issues - I don't like the incumbent - trust me."

"Pig in a poke time. How about woman's rights?"

"So far he is antiabortion. He wants to outlaw a woman's right to control her own body through legislation."

"Is he evangelical about it?"

"I don't think so. Opportunistic is more like it."

"Engineers Are Us must not be a great place to work."

"They low bid on a lot of government contracts."

"Then the salaries must be low. What I meant was two of their employees are voting with their feet. Running for congress takes time - money and effort. Would you have run at the same age as your opponents?"

"No - I had a job I liked doing."

"I rest my case."

"It could be mid-life crisis."

"True. The good news for you is it doesn't look like there is a ground swell of support for any candidate."

"So you think there's a chance?"

"Yes - but don't waste our money on it."

"I wouldn't know where to spend it if we did."

"We have one very expensive newspaper and no local TV station of importance. I'd go with radio - billboards and fliers."

"At least a two-hundred thousand dollar campaign."

October 21

Johnny attended the B&P Men's Club meeting luncheon. He passed out fliers to a more than disinterested throng of thirteen or so. Most of the members were retired - sent out of the house by their wives - looking for lunch with friends. He noted again, "There are no movers and shakers here. I wonder where they hide out?" Johnny chitchatted with everyone except the State Committeewoman - the one who called him a baby killer. Little Boy arrived early - passed out his fliers and left before the speeches began. Except for the baby killer fanatic and Little Boy - most of the members were cordial.

Bobbie Jean met Johnny at the door, "You had a phone call from Beam Me Up Scotty. He's at work. Wants you to give him a call."

"Johnny Ropp? Have some bad news for you. The six-hundred and sixty-six committee has turned down your ad."

"What's the problem?"

"We're trying to use this affair to bring the party together under a big tent. Your ad is divisive. It will create dissension when we're looking for unity."

"Who is the committee?"

"Able Baker - our State Committeeman and me. Why don't you change your ad?"

"No way. Return my check and cancel my tickets for your fund raiser. I won't support a group that stifles my freedom of speech. I have said nothing offensive in my ad and every word is true."

"Are you sure you won't change your mind?"

"No - I must assume that you and your committee have decided to support C. T. Source and his friend Mountain William."

"We're not taking sides."

"You just did. The first thing a candidate must do is separate himself from his competition. You are interfering with the election process."

Bobbie Jean shook her head, "I could hear you shouting on the other side of our condo and your face is red as a beet. What did he say that got you so mad?"

"The committee has turned down my ad and the committee that turned it down was made up of what I thought were the good guys."

"You've got to be kidding. Is the Barefoot & Pregnant Party run by children in high school?"

"It has sophomoric leadership. No wonder the evangelicals were able to take control."

"Why don't you call Able Baker and see if he can get them to change their minds."

Johnny hung up the phone and turned to Bobbie Jean, "And nothing can be done because it was the mayor's son."

"Wouldn't he change his mind?"

"No. Said the Christian Coalition has targeted Mosquito County for a takeover and they don't want to confront them."

"Thank God your friends weren't around during the Spanish Inquisition. You would have been burnt at the stake."

"Interesting tactic on the part of the pragmatics. If they don't look - listen and react - maybe the Coalition will go away. The political technique of ostriches."

"They're all trying to hang onto their little piece of the power structure."

"Big mistake on their part. They are following a bankrupt policy. That's how the German Reichstag tried to deal with Hitler before his takeover."

"What are you going to do?"

"I have no power base. I can't do anything to them and they know it - so I'm the course of least resistance. We have so many candidates - I was thinking about dropping out. Now they have my dander up. So for now - I'll hang around and be as divisive as ever."

"If I know you - you need to get that steam pressure building between your ears down a PSI or two."

"I'll write a letter."

"To Euphoria Toady?"

"No - to the committee."

October 22

Johnny handed his letter to Bobbie Jean, "Read it and tell me what you think."

B. M. Scotty

October 22

Committee of six-hundred and sixty-six.

666 Inquisition Avenue

Swamp Harbor Euphoria

Dear Beam Me Up -

I cannot in good conscious attend an affair that suppresses my right to exercise freedom of speech. Must I remind you that Paul Von Hindenberg as president of the Weimer Republic in Germany led the effort to appease a one issue extremist. World War II and the holocaust were the result of this and Chamberlain's political appeasement. I find the B&P's efforts to appease the single issue religious right equally distasteful and non-productive.

I cannot agree with a platform that advocates creation of a law that gives the state the right to tell an individual what they must do with their body. May I remind you of Article Six of our Constitution - "No religious test shall be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." I consider the religious right's litmus test a violation of Article Six of The Constitution of the United States of America.

Johnny Ropp

Candidate For Congress 66th Flat Earth Congressional District

Bobbie Jean looked up, "You left out - 'When in the course of human events.' Are you leaving the B&P Party?"

"Of course not. I want the fanatics to return to the T&S from whence they came."

"Thou art a tough man - Cotton Mather."

"Would you send it?"

"Not if I wanted Scotty's support. But - you won't get it. He's one of those who is thinking about entering the race - isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Send it. Now about the religious right. I thought you were going to try to finesse their single issue litmus test?"

"I tried, but I can't let them set the terms of the debate. As of now they're posing for life - implying those who oppose them are against life. The issue is birth control or no birth control. Phrasing the debate with an antiabortion bias is an infringement on individual liberty. If you view their position on this issue under the cold light of day - it is a socialist argument for government control of the human body. On the other side is the argument for freedom of choice and individual morality."

"Then the religious right are not conservatives?"

"They are Christian socialists - no more - no less. Our founding fathers signed a constitution designed to prevent one religion from dominating another. They were concerned that the state would impose religion as monarchies did. I don't think they envisioned in their wildest thoughts a radical group of citizens attempting to impose their concept of religious morality from the bottom up."

"Your forgetting Artemus Ward."

"The mid 1800s Chicago columnist?"

"I came across a quote of his yesterday, 'The Puritans nobly fled from a land of despotism to a land of freedom - where they could not only enjoy their religious freedom, but could prevent everybody else from enjoying his.'"

"Where is Artemus when we need him? I have a second letter to the County B&P vice chairman."

"You're letting it all hang out."

"My dander is up. See what you think."

Carrie Favor

October 22

Mosquito County

Barefoot & Pregnant

Executive Committee

As a Christian and an American - I take affront at any attempt to infringe on religious freedom. Our country was founded by immigrants fleeing from religious persecution in Europe. Our B&P office administrator and her husband are a front for an organization who is attempting to take away the freedoms our forefathers fought and died for.

I did not enter a campaign for congress on either side of the abortion issue. However - the religious fanatics in the antiabortion movement have radicalized this issue. Through their distortion of this issue - there is no longer a middle ground. I believe that the state has no right to tell an individual what they can or cannot do with their body. I also believe that the state has no right to pay for elective surgery and this includes abortions. A minority in our Party threaten three freedoms - freedom of religion - freedom of dissent and freedom of speech. It is time to say enough is enough! If this means we may lose an election without their support - I

can live with it. The threat to our liberty by this religious coalition is too great to ignore. "With liberty and justice for all" does not mean men only.

Johnny Ropp

Candidate for Congress

66th Flat Earth Congressional District

"Pretty strong words for a one-eyed fat man."

"You have true grit. Should I send it?"

"They've stuffed you twice. You'll not get her support anyway. It needs to be said. Too many follow the political expedient path. It's time to say the king is naked. Add a post script. Tell her we won't be attending their function and we want our money back."

"Will do. Are you going to go to the beach women's meeting with me tomorrow night?"

"I wouldn't miss it. Your opponents are showing their true colors. Will they attack you in person or kill you with a thousand little cuts?"

October 23

The Barefoot & Pregnant Beaches Women's meeting was well attended by local politicians fishing for support. Most of those in attendance were at the executive committee meeting. Johnny whispered to Bobbie Jean, "Different meetings - same faces." "What about the local politicians?"

"Some new ones here."

"They look too well dressed to belong to the lunatic fringe."

"Able Baker says this group is for women. The Swamp Harbor ladies aren't."

"Are you still talking to Able Baker?"

"My only source of information."

"He gave you a hundred slices on your ad."

"Can't agree on everything."

Little Boy's wife interrupted their conversation. She took

Bobbie Jean aside and whispered in her ear. Bobbie Jean turned away - her face as red as a beet. She took Johnny by the arm and moved him away from the throng. When they were alone she opened up, "I didn't know political opponents attacked wives - too."

"Neither did I. What did Little Boy's wife say?"

"She raked me over the coals for not acting like a candidates wife. I haven't been talked to like that since Nanny caught me sipping Daddy's whiskey."

"And here I thought you were perfect. What did you do or what didn't you do?"

"I haven't been shmoozing with the Party regulars."

"That's easy not to do. If I don't know who they are - how would you. Is that what she's doing?"

"To everyone she can."

"Stay the course. I'm running - you're not and it doesn't matter to me or my election. A wife can hurt a politician's campaign more than she can help."

"You don't want me to come along?"

"Of course I do - your an asset."

"Even though I don't schmooz?"

"Because you don't."

"You're right - it doesn't matter. There are no king makers in a land where everyone wants to be king."

"So that's why this race is turning into a herd of turtles?"

"Don't pick on turtles - they're smarter than politicians."

"It's time for speeches. We better sit down."

After the last speaker sat down, Johnny nudged Bobbie Jean, "Where is the voice of the turtle when we need it?"

"I thought it was pretty interesting."

"Which one?"

"The one about beach erosion and flood insurance."

"How about the charter government speech?"

"A non issue. It's on the agenda because the local T&S Party is now in the minority. If charter government is approved -

local elections will be run without Party affiliation. It will give T&S candidates an advantage they've lost - an opportunity to win."

"Is that good or bad?"

"Both."

October 24

Winter was almost upon Mosquito County. Tropical fall rains caused by a combination of stalled cold fronts and the last gasp of weather disturbances created in the Caribbean announced the change of seasons. Like the pause in the stormy weather that announced changing seasons - Johnny paused to take stock of his quest for political office. He struck pen to paper -

1 If I have to count on Party support to win - I should get out now. I won't get it.

2 The B&P Party has decided to ignore me - hoping that I'll go away and leave them alone."

3 The B&P Party wants to be the king maker, but can't because everyone wants to be king.

4 The B&P Party has an unhealed fissure between its pragmatics and religious fanatics.

5 The ongoing struggle for control of the Party has left an opening for outsiders - like myself - to enter the political fray.

6 As a result of the internal Kabuki dance - five outsiders and maybe more have decided to run for the same office while the Party regulars are distracted.

7 I have an opportunity to win if I am the only pragmatic in the race.

8 Odds of wining are one in five. Not a good bet with my own money.

October 26

The State B&P office telephoned to give Johnny the results of their latest statewide poll. The lady was very polite, "Our voters are concerned about:

- 1 The economy.
- 2 Jobs.
- 3 Health care.
- 4 Government spending.
- 5 Crime and drugs."

Johnny asked, "Can you give me the percentages and the spread?"

"The number one issue was twenty percent and number five twelve - a spread of eight."

"And the remaining individuals?"

"They weren't concerned or didn't care."

"The spread is so close - no one issue will dominate."

"Do you know the makeup of your district?"

"The flat earth district has alligators and swamp to the west - Tax & Spenders to the north - young rednecks in the center and the rich and retired to the south."

"You'll have a hard time finding an issue that will fit all of your constituents."

"Economy and jobs are number one and two in your poll and from my experience - they'll be ours too."

October 28

Bobbie Jean looked up from this morning's paper, "Remember the flood insurance problem?" "At the last meeting we attended? Is there something in the paper about it?" "The Federal government is going to map thirty and sixty year coastal erosion hazard areas. They're trying to reform the Federal Flood Insurance program."

"That means they want to keep the money and not fully pay claims. Big Bubba's voters must not live on the coast."

"Undeveloped property won't be covered by flood insurance."

"Why would anybody buy insurance on a vacant lot?"

"Existing homes won't be effected unless their owners have filed two claims totaling over fifty percent within ten years. Bet they will continue to buyout land in the flood plains along rivers."

"Is that A. B. Nose's photo on the front page?"

"Shirt open at the neck. The image of the common man."

"What's the article about?"

"His office has supplied Euphoria Toady with politically correct answers to politically correct questions on Jefro Clampet's health care plan. If what I've read is true - everyone will benefit and no one will pay."

"Except the old - self employed and the unidentified forty percent who pay almost all of the taxes."

"Smoke and mirror time in the land of Nod. I almost overlooked the flood insurance outlay. Citizens in the Great State of Euphoria have contributed \$1200 for every dollar returned in claims. Euphoria residents have forty-three percent of the flood insurance policies. Taxachusetts has received fifty-seven dollars for every dollar contributed."

"Now that's typical Jefro Clampet economics. Cut coverage to the folks who pay in and increase it for those who contribute the least and benefit the most and of course vote for him."

"What's the issue here?"

"Construction in coastal erosion zones and flood insurance for the buildings constructed there. The real issue has been lost in the noise about flood insurance."

November 1

Johnny shook his head, "Can't advertise by direct mail." Bobbie Jean laughed, "Is there an election law against it?" "Envelopes are eighteen dollars a thousand and a flier is sixty dollars a thousand. If I had a list to mail too - a hundred thousand mailout would cost almost thirty thousand dollars another \$160 for return envelopes."

"Now I see why money is the mother's milk of politics. You could you cut costs by limiting mailouts only to B&P households. The County B&P office should have a list of B&P households."

"Guess what? They don't, but the elections office can furnish mailing labels for each registered B&P voter at two cents each. That's another two thousand dollars."

"Don't do it."

"With odds at five to one I won't, but my hubris is rising. Getting into this game can be a disease - an addiction."

"Are you going to the executive committee meeting tonight?"

"Wouldn't miss it. A year long fight on new by-laws is coming to a vote. Should be a three ring circus."

A normally rambunctious B&P executive committee meeting turned into a wild no holds barred fight over new by-laws. The crazy Christians - who insisted on new by-laws - voted against the new by-laws. They did not get all of the changes they wanted - such as excommunication for any member who didn't agree with them. As a result - the Mosquito County Barefoot & Pregnant executive committee continued to operate under the Euphoria's B&P rules. Instead of getting down to issues - the evening air was punctuated with shouts of, "Point of order! - Mr. Chairman - point of order!" "What constitutes a quorum." "I object!" "I move we ...". "I have the floor!" When the meeting adjourned - Johnny was ready to shoot Mr. Roberts and burn his rules of order.

Bobbie Jean took one look at Johnny and opened a bottle of wine, "You look wrung out. Was it that bad?"

"Worse. I sat next to two evangelicals who watched their leader to see which way they should vote. It was like being among storm troopers at the Reichstag. We had a knock down drag out over the by-laws."

"Who won?"

"I really don't know. The Christians voted against their own

by-laws. All in all it was a weird evening."

"Did you pass out fliers?"

"About fifty to the disinterested and don't cares. Little Boy and I were the only ones passing out fliers. There were three other candidates at the show, but we're the only two who have announced."

November 6

Bobbie Jean poured Johnny a cup of coffee, "And then there were three."

"Who announced?"

"Vinnie Veteran. It's in the local section - color photo and all. I'll read it to you - 'Veteran announces candidacy. Vietnam activist - Vinnie Veteran announces his candidacy for U. S. Congress.' The article goes on to say that he is the past president of the Vietnam Veterans of Mosquito County. Vinnie is quoted as saying, 'I am not a politician.'"

"Anyone who can survive the political infighting inside a veteran's organization and is elected president has to have a little familiarity with political activity."

"Didn't you meet him at the executive committee meeting?"

"Yes - I attempted to discourage him from running. At the time he had a scraggly beard. Looks like he trimmed it up for the photos. All three of us will be a problem for each other. We're all outsiders. Vinnie and I will be attempting to corner the ex-military vote."

"Mr. Veteran has a power base."

"Only if his troops work for him and get out the vote."

"Do you think they will?"

"War has been over for a-score. Long time to hold a veterans group together. Most of them have moved on."

"Outside of the POW issue - the flag and four freedoms - he hasn't revealed his position on any significant issue."

"Might be a whole lot smarter than me."

"A wedge is a lot smarter than a novice politician."

November 14

Bobbie Jean was a reluctant camper at the Banana Beach Barefoot & Pregnant Woman's meeting. She went along to hear another B&P candidate for Governor. She linked her arm in Johnny's as they left the restaurant, "I came along to case out the competition's food. I didn't think the speeches would be as long as they were. After five minutes no one listens unless the speech is about them."

"At least it was off the cuff."

"He won't pass the Coalition's litmus test."

"That isn't his problem. He's running against a well known candidate who happens to be a nice guy. Unless Burning Bush steps in it - no one else has a chance."

"You could be talking about yourself."

"Don't knock it. We have seen more of the area than we ever would if I stayed out."

"Yes - and we've shown the world that the king is naked."

"Do you want me to cancel my organizational meeting?"

"I forgot all about it."

"It's tomorrow evening."

"You and your three fictitious puppies - Ralph B. Collie - Lassie Legree and Rollie Retriever?"

"At least I'm holding it at the proper time for a committee named Three Dog Night."

"Do we have real people coming?"

"Mostly Twits."

November 17

Johnny hoped twelve disciples would show up and ten disparate dissidents arrived for a political caucus. Instead of an organizational meeting - his group decided to hold a lets quiz the candidate meeting. He soon discovered each Twit had a different agenda. Most of those in attendance were the Crooked Town Twit members he met at their last meeting. Bobbie Jean was not impressed, "The only one who

will support you is Betty Boop and several of her friends. The rest of them sound like you're running for an office that belongs to them. You're an irritant who should step aside."

"I got the same impression. Do you know what a Trilateral Commission is?"

"Never heard of it or of the Bilderberger Group."

"I'll have to bone up. Haven't played twenty questions since I was in college."

"Who is the Chiropractor?"

"Red D. Fox - I think. He's definitely not a supporter. If I was a betting man - I'd say he's a candidate."

"I think so - too. He asked questions and didn't bother to listen to your answers. Was he the one who was worried about blue helmeted troops flying in black helicopters at night. Do you know what he is talking about?"

"UN troops on our soil. The one worlders. Not enough evidence to support his fears, but it is a real concern. We have State Department types who push for us to relinquish our sovereignty to the UN."

"In this instance both sides are a little crazy. Your organizational meeting lasted three hours and you still aren't organized."

"My three fictitious dogs and me are organized."

"As long as your in it for the thrill of the ride you are. If you ever get serious - you'll need a campaign staff."

"My dogs have come up with a list of key dates."

"I'm impressed. Can I see it?"

January __ Petitions due from State of Euphoria.

January 5 Swear in at elections office.

January 6 Start Petition Drive.

January 31 Quarterly FEC report due.

March __ Turn in petitions.

April 15 Quarterly FEC report due.

May ___ *Oath and or qualifying fee.*
July 15 *FEC quarterly report due.*
Sept. ___ *Primary election.*
Nov. 8 *General election.*

"What do you think?"

"You'll need help. This is one job you can't do on your own.
How many signatures on petitions will you need?"

"I don't know, but it shouldn't be too hard. Ought to be
able to get twenty-five on a sheet and it's easier to get
people to sign when they see other signatures. It's like
priming a pump."

November 22

A political reporter telephoned from the Quicksand Beach
newspaper and interviewed Johnny over the phone. She had
three questions, "How old Johnny Ropp? Why are you running?
Who will you appeal too?" Johnny couldn't resist using Cary
Grant's answer to the first question, "Old Johnny Ropp fine -
how you." Later - the producer from a local cable political
talk show called and asked him to be on his program, "I'm Tom
Spender - I'd like to invite Vinnie Veteran, but I don't have
his telephone number. Can you get it for me?"

"I'll call around. There are three of us who have declared.
Have you asked Little Boy if he wants to debate?"

"No, but I will. Can you get me his number - too?"

"How soon is the show?"

"Not this week. Our program is set for tonight. If I can
contact the other two - a week from today."

"What's the format?"

"I share the mike with an ultraconservative. You'll get
questioned from both sides."

"Are there any rules of engagement."

"We televise from the waste up."

Johnny located both telephone numbers after an extensive search as both were unlisted. He called Little Boy's number and his wife answered. She was on the defensive from the first word, "My husband is at work."

"Can I have his telephone number?"

"I handle his political affairs."

"A cable TV producer - Tom Spender is offering time on his cable talk show."

"We might not make it. Are you in charge?"

"No - I'm not. I was asked to be on with Vinnie Veteran. As a courtesy - I requested that your husband be invited as we are all announced candidates."

"Why didn't the producer call?"

"He didn't have your telephone number. He asked if I could find it. When I discovered it was unlisted - I called to give you a heads up. If you don't want him to have your number - I won't give it to him."

"I won't discuss this with you. Have him call me. Oh before I forget - my husband wants to caucus with you."

"Caucus? What in the world for?"

"To decide who should be the candidate."

"Who would attend?"

"Why - everyone who should of course."

"In a closed meeting?"

"Yes - we will caucus and decide who should run."

"I'm not certain if I'm interested in a Caucus-race. I'm quite dry as it is."

"What?" and she hung up.

After this experience - Johnny decided against calling Vinnie Veteran. He called Tom back - gave him both telephone numbers and a heads up about Little Boy's wife. Thirty minutes later the producer called back, "Who are these people?"

"Vinnie Veteran or Little Boy."

"Little Boy's wife. She won't let her husband come on the

show unless she has our questions in advance. Presidential candidates don't get that kind of treatment. I don't know what questions we'll ask until after you've made your opening statements. I wouldn't put Little Boy on if he paid me. You're on and Vinnie Veteran is too - if he calls back. His wife answered the phone. He works at Cape Confusion and won't be home until after four."

"A week from today?"

"Yes - consider it set. Be here thirty minutes early."

"I'll be there."

Bobbie Jean - who wasn't listening in - suddenly became interested, "That's Mosquito County's prime political show. Are you prepared?"

"I'll make up a list of questions and answers."

"Run them by me when you're done."

"What I was going to say" said the Dodo in an offended tone, "was the best thing to get us dry is a Caucus-race." "What is a Caucus-race?" said Alice; not that she much wanted to know, but the Dodo had paused as if it thought that somebody ought to speak and no one seemed inclined to say anything. "Why" said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it."

5

November 24

For a lark - Johnny looked up Congressman's A. Brown Nose's home telephone number and couldn't find it. He said to Bobbie Jean, "Looks like I'm going about this all wrong. I'm the only candidate running for office with my name in the phone book."

"And if we keep getting threatening phone calls from radical Christians - I'll get an unlisted number - too."

"We can screen calls with an answering machine."

"I hate those things."

"I do too, but the language our Christian antagonists use makes one a necessity."

"Did you read what Nose said about the space station?"

"Just glanced at it. Anything important?"

"He's invoking the memory of our assassinated president.

'Jack Kennedy believed in the future and the space station represents the future.'"

"The station's cost overrun is over thirty billion and all we have to show for it is paper. The future is expensive."

"You're going to be hammered on programs at Cape Confusion. Give me your thoughts on the space station."

"Outside of being one of our most successful scientific pork barrel projects it has little value."

"I thought it was supposed to be a refueling stop on the way to Mars?"

"It isn't designed for that mission and we haven't designed or built a vehicle to go to Mars and return. There is one other consideration. We know we have a problem sustaining life for over twelve months in a weightless environment."

"Does that impact a mission to Mars?"

"With current technology - a round-trip will take two years."

"What about the scientific experiments our astronauts are supposed to accomplish on the station?"

"With astronauts on board vibration inside the station will negate most of the important experiments. They'll have to tether them away from the station."

"Then they'll be doing scientific work - won't they?"

"Yes, but they won't need a space station to do it. We can accomplish it with the current shuttle or unmanned flights. Our space station's configuration has changed many times - independent of requirements. As far as uniqueness goes - we had a smaller version several decades back and the Russians have just finished a decade of work on a similar vehicle."

"Unless you have a good alternative - you've just kissed your chances of being elected good-bye."

"Well - a space station has been done. And we already know the effects of long duration space flight and it isn't good. So we're building the worlds most expensive engineering sandbox for astronauts to play around in. We own a shuttle which really isn't a shuttle. It needs to be replaced by a real shuttle. One that can turn around in less than six months. The current shuttle is 1960 technologies at best. While were building a new one - some of the better minds at Cape Confusion should build a blueprint for our space program similar to the forecast the Air Force put together in the eighties. However - I have no evidence that the Air Force followed their forecast or that such a program still exists. Hardware and studies get funded - science of the practical type doesn't. We'll never escape our solar system if we continue to fund studies and hardware for the already known."

"Instead of attacking the current program why don't you emphasize the need for a new lift vehicle to replace the shuttle and a new road map for the total space program."

"As usual - you've cut right through to the quick."

"Let's watch the cable show you're scheduled to be on."

After the show was over - Bobbie Jean smiled, "It's sort of like Crossfire without the shouting. You'll have time to get it right or make an absolute fool out of yourself. Have you finished your talking points for next weeks program?" "I'll get them off my desk."

Talking Points

Question Are you for free trade.

Answer Yes as long as it's a two way street. We keep digging a bigger hole when we buy more than we sell. Unless someone has rewritten economic laws - we'll be called on to make good on our foreign debt. And the only way we can do that is with goods or services. We may have to flip burgers for the world to pay off our foreign debt.

Question Mountain William may be your opponent. How do you plan to defeat him"

Answer He's a three time loser. The rule of three strikes and your out should apply.

Question Are you right to life or pro choice?

Answer Both. I believe everyone has the right to life and the right to choose. As for my stand on abortion - I believe it is a moral - religious issue. Article VI of our Constitution says there'll be no religious test for public office. Answering the religious right's litmus test is a violation of Article VI of our Constitution.

Question Will you support POW-MIA efforts?

Answer The Southeast Asian war has been over for a score and more. Damn difficult for anyone to survive in the jungle and swamp for a quarter of a century. I have classmates and friends in this group. We should search for the truth - mindful of charlatans mining grief and loss for profit.

Question What will you do to alleviate Gulf War Syndrome?

Answer As a population our soldiers who fought in Arabia compare in illness with our population as a whole. It rained before the battle. Desert molds create San Joaquin Valley Fever in our Southwest. We should seek the truth, but not bust the bank.

Question Do you have an economic plan?

Answer No. A congressional candidate with an economic plan is like a student telling his teacher how to teach. Our government plans - budgets and appropriates like guests at a Mad Hatters tea party. To allow politicians - economic theorists and lawyers to control economic planning is akin to allowing drunks to manage a liquor store. Like any good scientific effort - all economic plans should be thoroughly tested before operation.

Question President Clampet has health care as a political issue. Where do you stand?

Answer This is another one of those programs better left out of the hands

of politicians. The question is - should the taxpayers pay for universal health care or should medicine be left as a semi free enterprise. We have Medicare and Medicaid. The first is paid for by taxpayers - the second is welfare. We no longer have a Public Health Service. I lean toward reactivating our Public Health Service to administer to the poor - the addicted and for prevention of communicable diseases and eliminate Medicaid as we know it. Make the drug companies compete in the free enterprise system. If a government grant or laboratory comes up with a new cure - let all of the drug companies sell the product and compete in the marketplace.

Question Would you vote to change the current welfare system?

Answer Yes. I would vote to establish group homes for those who cannot compete in our economy. When we provide money instead of food - clothing and shelter we reward a behavior we desire to eliminate. We have designed a system that pays unwed mothers to have children. And now we have a children's crisis on our hands. Money intended to raise children at home is being used for luxury items and drugs. This is too complex a problem to spell out in a sentence or two, but we owe those who are without the means to subsist - food - shelter - clothing - training and a decent job.

Question Will you support the space station?

Answer Reluctantly. If I can gather support for design and development of new space systems and vehicles - I'd rather see funds currently wasted on the space station spent on them. We have frontiers to explore - knowledge

to gain. We owe it to our future to push the envelope of space. The current space station does none of that.

Bobbie Jean put the list down, "You're going to dig a hole on your welfare response. Are you advocating orphanages?"

"Yes. The foster care system is a disaster. As bad as some of the past orphanages were - they're better than the current system. Think of Boys Town in Nebraska. That's what I have in mind."

"Good come back. Unemployment may come up. The paper has an article about twenty-five staff engineers being laid off at Engineers Are Us - all in the fifty-thousand dollar a year range."

"We're importing technical workers from overseas and laying off people here. It doesn't add up."

"And your comment about our trade deficit. That was pretty strong stuff. Can you give me an example of where we're going wrong?"

"We have a governmental program encouraging technology transfer to friendly countries. We give it away and then those same countries underbid our companies on contracts with our technology. We're committing industrial suicide. We don't sell products overseas - we sell commodities and buy manufactured goods in return. And that's the definition of a third world country. As an example - our largest non farm export is scrap metal. We have become a debtor nation. What happens when our dollar is no longer international currency?"

"You're rambling. Too much overkill on your theme. Try to make your answers short and to the point. Your flat earth audience is not blessed with a long attention span."

"Flat earthers who are certain the Book of Revelations is absolute will listen to a long winded politician."

"Only if you're preaching to the choir - which you are not. Keep it short and to the point. Let your audience fill in the blanks."

November 29

After trying two doors which weren't - Johnny walked up to the back door of the cable studio. Vinnie Veteran and another bearded friend were smoking and whispering outside. They nodded in his direction as Johnny said, "Good evening." Is this the right door?" Vinnie grunted, "Yes" and continued his conversation. Inside - Tom Spender - the producer and MC of the show gave Johnny a release form to sign, "We're up next in twenty minutes. We follow another show. I'll ask you why you're running and after that - twenty questions. Where is Veteran?"

"Outside smoking."

Vinnie stuck his head in the door and asked, "Is this the Green Room?"

Tom laughed, "This is the break room for the daytime workers. Sign the form and come to the studio in ten minutes. We'll run through our format."

Inside - Johnny sat where they pointed - behind a table to the left of Vinnie. He was wired for sound and told to look at the camera with the red light on. Before he had time to get nervous - music came up - Tom Spender made the usual introductions and Vinnie was asked why he was running for congress. Mother - flag and country synopsized his response. Johnny followed with, "To serve my constituents. A. Brown Nose is more interested in serving his president than our Flat Earth Congressional District."

Tom Spender asked, "Would you vote to abolish the United Nations?" Johnny - unprepared for this issue - closed a mouth that was so wide open he could catch dragon flies in it answered, "I don't consider the UN to be an issue. However - I won't vote to abolish it. Reform - yes. Remember when it was the hope of the world? Now it seems to be a flock of high living bureaucrats in Geneva - New York and Paris. It's bad enough that our congress is trying to redistribute our wealth. How would you like to have a hundred pauper nations

dividing up our treasury? We pay the lions share of the cost and receive very little in return. I wouldn't like to see it go away, but we can't abide with it the way it is." Johnny - realizing he had spent too much time answering - stopped. The hour flew by. Little Boy called in and asked where they stood on right to life. Both Vinnie and Johnny waffled - though Johnny came off the dime by saying he was against abortion and for a woman's right to make her own decisions. Vinnie straddled both sides of the issue. Johnny came away from this experience with the feeling he had won this battle and lost the campaign. Another caller asked about Trilateral Commission and Bilderberger. Vinnie and both hosts drew a blank. Johnny - who drew a blank the last time he was asked this question now had an answer. Though he wasn't certain if it was the correct one, "The Biderberger is a hotel where members of the Trilateral Commission meet to discuss world economic policies. It is an informal group established by Prince Henry of the Netherlands. David Rockefeller is a charter member. Jefro attended before he became President. They meet once a year. The Dutch use this group to exert influence far beyond their economic clout. Some folks believe this group has a sinister mission - to control the world economy. I don't know enough about this group to make a judgment."

Bobbie Jean greeted Johnny at the door with a glass of red wine, "I taped your performance on our VCR. Not bad, but if you don't loosen up - you'll look as stiff as Clampet's Vice President - Saffron V. Poverty."

"Was it that bad?"

"Dry - you'll never be an accomplished public speaker."

"It's that damned tie. I hate to have one around my neck. Makes me feel as stiff as a board."

"That's the way you came across - stiff as a board."

"How about Vinnie Veteran?"

"He looked good - except for the beard. It has to go."

December 6

Bobbie Jean asked Johnny, "What's wrong - you look like you just lost your best friend."

"Called elections. I can only have registered B&Ps sign my petitions. I thought the only restriction to signing was to be a resident of voting age."

"Call the State elections people and get a second opinion."

"I did and I didn't get an answer."

"Write a letter."

*State of Euphoria
Coven of Elections*

December 6

Dear Chief

John Barrymore is quoted as saying - when he caught his friend W. C. Fields reading the Bible, "Bill - what are you doing? You've been an atheist your entire life." Fields replied, "I'm looking for loopholes."

Reference 18 - 99.05 Alternative method of qualifying. It states - "A candidate shall obtain the signatures of a number of qualified electors equal to at least three percent of the total number of registered voters by which he seeks nomination that are registered within the district." The law clearly states the number and location of electors for the percentage required. It does not say that the signers of petitions must be from the same party. I request your written interpretation. Please sight reference.

Johnny Ropp

Barefoot & Pregnant

Candidate for Congress

December 7

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny the mail, "We have a new newspaper - Reactionary Weekly. Little Boy has an article on the front page. He wants to be an initiator not a repeater."

"Any information about his background?"

"Went to night school to become an engineer. Still nothing on his platform except trust me."

"I wonder. How long do you think he will last on trust me?"

"Longer than you will with your Christian opposition."

"That reminds me. I'm going to the executive committee meeting tomorrow night. Do you want to come along?"

"No. I have to go over construction expenses on our new restaurant."

"Cost overrun?"

"About twenty percent, but half the cost of Sam's up north."

"What's the key difference?"

"Three - labor - land and materials."

December 8

So many evangelicals were arriving - Johnny checked for burning crosses before he entered the room. A hint of gasoline was in the air, but not for the fire he expected. Tonight's burning issue was Fluoride. The Coalition was out in full force - number two pencils flying in support of their leader. He was circulating petitions against adding Fluoride to Crooked Town's water supply. G. W. Pylut cornered Johnny before the meeting, "I'm going to declare in January."

"Do you have supporters?"

"I have a hundred people who have pledged a thousand dollars. Why don't you drop out and join forces with me?"

"And miss out on all this fun?"

"Beam Me Up Scotty is going to run - too. Are you sure you won't change your mind."

"Not tonight. They're finally going to let me speak."

"So you're tonight's entertainment."

Johnny passed on issues and spoke only of why he is a candidate - his background and qualifications. Able Baker said came across as sincere - honest and to the point. He noticed that every single evangelical sat on their hands during his speech as did most of the pragmatic ones. He knew now he would never be the executive committee's favored one, but as he told Bobbie Jean when he returned home, "No one is. Too many kings and not enough king makers."

"How many candidates are there now?"

"As of the first of the year there will be five. Beam Me Up Scotty is going to declare and so is G. W. Pylut. After the first of the year we'll have enough candidates to make up a poker game or a basketball team."

"Why then?"

"Petition drive starts after the first of the year. Oh - tonight's issue was Fluoride. The Coalition believes it will poison our water supply."

"Isn't someone going to throw a net over those people?"

"Remember Tucker's second law?"

"Ignorance and Superstition will always win out over Science and Fact. You are mighty tough on those folks. They believe in what they're doing."

"I would be more tolerant if they spent some of their time and money helping children - the illegitimate - the poor and orphaned. Instead they picket - protest and blow up clinics. And they advocate for more of the poor to be born into this world. A world where these poor are joining welfare rolls at a growth rate four times of our population. A world where we have an average of two children born to each mother after she joins the welfare rolls. The crazy coalition is part of the problem - not the solution."

"You're tugging on Batman's cape again. The coalition is of a single mind with a single issue."

"They are not even a coalition. A coalition is defined as a temporary alliance of distinct individuals - not of the same persuasion - joined together for joint action. They fail

every test except that they're joined together at the mind."
"Maybe they'll disband and just fade away."
"Or run out of gasoline and dynamite."
"Did you finally get to speak?"
"Yes. I stuck to motherhood and apple pie."
"Any reaction from the committee?"
"The militant Christians greeted my talk with the sound of silence and I didn't say one nasty word about them or their crusade against women."
"The silent treatment? Not good. That tactic is tougher to overcome than a shouting match."
"Can't last. If I stay in the race - they'll be fighting an overwhelming Pentateuchal driven desire to smite me."
"Good - then you're still thinking about dropping out. I encourage you to do so and soon."

December 10

Johnny stood in line with toddlers in various states of distress to get his photo taken at a local department store's Christmas special. Bobbie Jean was curious, "Why not go to a professional and get it done the right way."
"The price is right - \$17.95 and I don't want to waste money on a certain loser - me."
"If you insist. You have another invitation in the mail to attend the State Barefoot & Pregnant yearly meeting. It's in Mouseville. I could go shopping."
"If it was free - I would. They charge a fee to candidates who chooses to appear. Political Parties don't support their candidates in Euphoria. Their candidates support them."
"I take it we're not going."
"I'll still take you shopping."
If you want a present you will.
I composed a Christmas poem to send out to local B&P notables."
"Let me see it."

*On the sixth day of Christmas
My Party gave to me -
Six polite turn downs -
Five months of by-laws -
Four opposing candidates -
Three crazy Christians -
Two terrible Little Boys -
And a Mountain William -
Up a right-to-life tree.*

"Don't get mad - get even. Who are you going to send it to?"
"The powers that be."
"Have fun."

December 15

Johnny attended the Mosquito County Charter Commission hearings at the County Council offices in Cow Pasture. The new county complex was impressive and isolated. Instead of 'Build it and they will come it was built where no one could find it. Mountain William - C. T. Source and several other self appointed citizen watch dogs were in attendance. Johnny watched as long as he could and left after two hours.

Bobbie Jean asked, "Did you learn anything?"
"Why I left the government - committee meetings. It's like watching grass grow and half as interesting. Two hours was enough. Can't understand why anyone would attend a committee meeting who wasn't on the committee. Mountain William and Colonel Source are opposed to nonpartisan elections for county offices and they have a point."
"Who is supporting it?"

"The party that's in the minority and concerned citizens."

"Will it make a difference?"

"The Under Water Mayor was caught selling drugs and Crooked Town's mayor is a convicted felon and their elections were nonpartisan. Political Parties may prevent that."

"See what you mean. We lose a filter."

December 20

Bobbie Jean asked, "What is your itinerary for next month. Will you be around or out on the campaign trail?"

"I have to go up to elections in Cow Pasture to execute a candidates oath on the fourth. I plan on beginning my petition drive in Mosquito County the next day and in Backwater County two weeks later."

"You'll be busy until you turn your petitions in. Looks like we won't be able to take a vacation until late spring."

"What is it you have in your hand?"

"An invitation to a B&P school for candidates."

"Where is it?"

"At the Lock Bridge Later Day Hotel in Arlington Virginia."

"When is it?"

"The second week of February."

"How much?"

"Two hundred and fifty dollars for a three day seminar. It will give us an excuse to visit friends and our restaurant and check on our house and Watergate condos."

"We could sell the house. We now have three counting the one in Biloxi."

"No - we might want to return. We have excellent renters. For a reduced rent package they maintain it and the stables. Your friend Tucker says they're doing a wonderful job. Remember what the Realtor in Roswell advertised?"

"There'll always be more people, but there'll never be more land?"

"He wasn't right about Roswell, but he was right about DC and Virginia."

"I'll send in my registration fee. How soon do you want to leave for the airport."

"Noon will be soon enough. Our plane doesn't takeoff until after two. Mother isn't happy."

"The twins wanted to stay at the Scioto River farm. It is unusual though."

"How so?"

"We're visiting them instead of them visiting us on their Christmas vacation from college."

"It was your Mother who convinced them to go to a Methodist college in Delaware."

"You thought a small college would be better for them."

"I thought it would be in the South."

"I have a surprise for you."

"What is it?"

"Your Mother is flying up to Columbus tomorrow. We'll all spend Christmas at the farm."

December 30

On his second day back from the farm - Johnny was interviewed on an early morning radio talk show. It lasted fifteen minutes, but seemed to Johnny to be longer than an hour. He was accustomed to attacks from the religious right, but not from the secular left. As Johnny arrived - he ran into his interviewer outside the studio where he was chain smoking a cigarette. The meeting was friendly and cordial. Inside - when the light came on and he was on the air - the interviewer turned hostile. Johnny was on the defensive - digging out of self made hole from the first - 'When did you stop beating your wife' question. Bobbie Jean needled him after he returned home, "You sounded like a wounded Banshee. What did you do to make him so mad?"

"I showed up. He is a died in the wool Tax & Spender. I wasn't prepared for his hostility."

"You can only hope that no one was listening. He nailed you on your abortion stance."

"I have to learn to defend my middle ground when two extremes refuse to recognize one. With him it was his way or the highway. I expected it from the religious right, but not from the secular left."

"State elections sent a response to your questions."

"Did they agree?"

"They rephrased your questions and then answered them."

"So they didn't answer."

"Not only that - their lawyer told you to stuff it."

December 31

Johnny handed Bobbie Jean his response to the State election's letter.

Euphoria Department of State

December 31

Division of elections

Dear Divided -

I read and reread your response to my questions. It took me awhile, but I finally realized that you didn't answer my question. Instead you made up one of your own and answered it. Very good lawyering on your part. I do agree that we need lawyers to interpret laws. It is to our great misfortune that lawyers have been allowed to write them. We should restrict lawyers to one per jurisdiction and or issue. With two or more lawyers we achieve a critical mass of ambiguity not to mention law suits. The election laws of Euphoria reflect this problem. As it is a conflict of interest and a case of bad judgment - lawyers should be restricted to interpretation of not the writing of laws.

Johnny Ropp

Barefoot & Pregnant

Candidate for Congress

"If it will make you feel better - send it."

"It won't do any good?"

"Once a bureaucrat gives you a written response to a question it is cast in stone. What's next on your agenda?"

"I take the oath on the 4th and have a speech to a Barefoot and Pregnant woman's group in Titus on the ninth. I plan on beginning a walkabout of Mosquito County on the fourth."

"Have you considered how large this county is?"

"There's less than five hundred thousand people."

"That's not the problem. It's over seventy miles from north to south."

"I'm in trouble."

January 3

Johnny's petitions arrived in a large cardboard box. He opened it and moaned, "Have they ever done a number on us outsider candidates." Bobbie Jean picked one up and looked at it, "Everything is spelled out in great detail. What's the problem?"

"To begin with - they want the date - signatories name - address - and the signature block is under a penalty of law statement that all he or she has written is true. If that doesn't scare a citizen away from signing petitions I don't know what else will. Did you notice the other neat little trick our Great State of Euphoria incumbents have done?"

"Each person signs an individual petition?"

"Right. If I could have ten or twenty on a page - it would be like priming the pump. It's easier to get signatures when you see names above yours. This is not going to be as easy a task as I thought it would be. The only thing our Euphoria lawmakers haven't done to impede a challenger is to declare open hunting season on them.

"How many of these did you say you need signed?"

"Four thousand plus good ones."

"Figure in a twenty percent error rate."

January 4

Johnny drove out to the Mosquito County offices in Cow Pasture to take his oath at 08:30 in the morning. Expecting a formal ceremony in front of a flag - Johnny was somewhat surprised when Able Baker administered it to him across the elections office countertop. His formal initiation into the world of politics was as plain as a dish of vanilla ice cream. Able Baker was more interested in who the candidates might be than in the mechanics of making one, "Beam Me Up Scotty was in earlier on his way to work. Wanted to know what he had to do to become a candidate. Looks like there will be five of you for sure."

"How about G. W. Pylut?"

"Hasn't been around, but he's in it for sure. Claims to have big money behind his campaign. Are you still running your campaign on a shoestring?"

"No more than five dollars a contributor."

"Good luck. Oh - the B&P executive committee ordered a disc of newly registered party members in each precinct. Funny thing happened on the way to the Forum - it will only work on Billy's computer and he's not authorized to have it unless he is a candidate."

"Will it be available to all the candidates?"

"Have you gotten anything from them yet?"

"The run-around."

"Expect more of the same."

January 5

Little Boy was on the same morning radio program being grilled by the interrogator that nailed Johnny. Bobbie Jean turned the volume up, "He finally got past trust me. Did you know he is the better candidate because he can relate to the voters and knows the issues. He acknowledges that you're the only other one in the race."

"He's getting nailed. His voice is going from baritone to

tenor and he's talking faster than Mark from Milwaukee."

"You missed his zingers. He is implying that you don't know the issues and cannot relate to your voters."

"Little Boy's going below the belt early. Must be nervous."

"Are you going out amongst your voters today?"

"I'm going to the southern border of Mosquito County and work my way north."

"How long will you be out?"

"Not more than four hours."

Johnny arrived home a little after three that afternoon - dragging. Bobbie Jean asked, "A glass of wine or beer?"

"Beer - it's been an enlightening day."

"How many petitions did you get signed?"

"Twelve. At this rate I'll never make it."

"Did you knock on any doors?"

"Decided not to do it during a weekday. This is Euphoria - no one is home. Everyone is outdoors playing golf - fishing or inside playing bridge. Those who aren't are at work."

"Where did you stop?"

"I stopped at businesses along the major north-south highway. I think I found the mother load of Tax & Spenders. Most of the folks are retired factory workers from the Northeast or native Euphorians - all over the age of sixty. I was treated cordial enough. However - Franklin Delano is worshipped as a God in the southern part of Mosquito County. My biggest walkabout problem is finding a town center where people congregate. There isn't one. Nothing but strip malls - gas stations - bars and businesses going into bankruptcy."

"Mostly because Jefro's regulators are harassing small business owners. Can't go into business anymore without a full time lawyer and a tax accountant. Anything important happen on your walk? Something you want to take to the grave with you?"

"When I opened the door to two bars on the main highway - I was greeted by the musty odor of spilled beer. Reminds me of

the Green Frog in Osborn - or the Whiskey Roadhouse outside the Columbus Zoo."

"I remember the Roadhouse. It smelled awful. What was the petition problem?"

"Remember that crap Network Television news fed us about a complacent - uninformed electorate?"

"Yes - no one outside of DC cares."

"They're dead wrong on both. No one would sign until I gave them my position on issues and if they disagreed - they wouldn't sign. And signers and non signers both took up ten to fifteen minutes a person asking detailed questions. And most of the time after I finished - the person I talked to couldn't sign because they weren't registered members of the Barefoot & Pregnant Party."

"What's the alternative?"

"Paying a ten thousand dollar candidate fee."

"We have the money. Go ahead."

"Odds are five to one against."

"Unless it's an even bet - don't put our money down. What else did you find out?"

"The abortion issue is number one. It's the first question I'm asked. And our voters leave no middle ground. If the person is antiabortion I get a ten minute come to Pat Robertson meeting with the convinced. If they're not I get a ten minute lecture on Robertson being the Antichrist."

"He's not a preacher - he's a media type."

"False prophets come from all disciplines."

"Look at all the knowledge you're gaining."

"All I've learned is - there has to be a better way to get on the ballot."

January 6

Johnny drove and walked along the main highway - just to the north of his previous effort and doubled the number of signed petitions to twenty-four. On his own - there was no easy way he could cover territory without backtracking to

where he parked his car. So he couldn't find a way to speed up the process. The Swampwater Bay manufactured home community looked enticing, but no solicitation signs made him pause. When he returned home - Bobbie Jean had to laugh,

"You're getting a workout. Did it go better today?"

"Twice as many petitions. At this rate - working seven days a week - I'll be twenty-eight hundred petitions short when I have to turn them in. There is no way a little guy can win at this game. I need an organization to achieve six thousand signed petitions. Working a five day week means I need just short of one hundred a day. Impossible to do alone."

"Why don't you fish where the fish are?"

"I would if there was a town center."

"How about in front of one of the local government buildings. Where people pay taxes - get licenses and register to vote."

"Makes sense. Have them come to me instead of me going to them. Can't do it alone."

"Call the lady you met at the Twit Meeting. Didn't she offer to help?"

"Betty Boop? Good idea. She knows the activists. People who aren't afraid to volunteer."

"Are there many of them?"

"Unfortunately - no."

January 7

Tom Spender telephoned Johnny and offered an hour on his TV program. He accepted. Bobbie Jean wondered, "Why did he offer you an hour of air time and no one else?"

"His wife said she would vote for me, but she can't. She's a life long Tax & Spender."

"What did Betty Boop say?"

"She'll join Three Dog Night as my scheduler. She has engagements at a B&P woman's group in Titus - somewhere in the north of Mosquito County. Then a retired group at Swamp Harbor's Senior Center and another Kiwanis. I have a media letter ready to go. Tell me what you think."

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is Johnny Ropp. I'm running for congress from the Flat Earth Congressional District. I have begun a walking campaign the first of this month. I plan on walking Mosquito County first - then Backwater County. Here are a few issues for you to chew on -

*1 Eliminate Medicaid and replace it with a new Public Health Service.
2 Eliminate Welfare and replace it with boarding schools - farms - group homes and a new Civilian Conservation Corps.*

3 Doctors - Medical Facilities and Pharmacies will be required to post prices and provide performance documents. Allow all drug manufacturers access to produce and sell medicines created at public expense .

4 Test all programs before implementing under law. If they don't work - don't implement.

5 Before any elected official can propose a law to give away taxpayers funds to charity he must first prove he has contributed two percent of his gross income to said charity.

6 No elected official may propose or vote on any law that is a conflict of interest with their specialty. i.e. - no trial lawyer can propose or vote on a law within his field of law. Eliminate conflict of interest.

Johnny Ropp

Barefoot & Pregnant

Candidate for Congress

"You just lost all of the B&P folks with money."
"I didn't know there were any. Who did I lose."
"The medical profession."
"Only those amongst them who are charlatans or thieves."
"Where are you going tomorrow?"
"Nowhere - I'm going to give it a rest."
"You're getting discouraged - aren't you?"
"In a nutshell - yes. I need to recharge my batteries."
"When do you go on Betty Boop's schedule?"
"Saturday - tomorrow at the Rebel Diner up in Titus."
"Your first speech!"
"Second. First was to the executive committee. This one is to the Titus Barefoot & Pregnant woman's club."

January 8

Betty Boop gave Johnny quite a critique, "You're too military. Don't stand at parade rest."
"How should I stand?"
"Open - feet apart - one slightly forward. And button your jacket. Get your pitch into sound bites. Don't go into detail unless you're asked a question."
"Anything else?"
"Carry your speech cards in your hand and for goodness sakes don't rattle change in your pocket. One last item - walk toward the person who asks a question."

Bobbie Jean asked, "How did it go?"
"Betty Boop gave me quite a critique. In general - I was an ineffective slob."
"How many ladies showed up?"
"Only nine, but they all signed my petitions."
"That means your only ninety-one short for today."
"It's raining. Think I'll stay around the house."
"Good - when it quits - we'll check on our restaurant."
"I notice that our vegetation was planted yesterday."
"And we have our first scrub jay resident."

January 10

Back on the campaign trail - Johnny walked through strip mall after strip mall and medical office complex after medical office complex. He passed out one hundred petitions with promises they would be mailed in. The count at the end of the day was ten signed petitions and one hundred promises. Not a promising day. Like everywhere else he had been on his extended walkabout - Johnny could not find a town center.

January 11

Johnny drove and walked for six hours before he gave up and drove home. Bobbie Jean met him at the front door, "I'm afraid to ask how it went."

"If you like dead baby photos - it was a good day. Have you ever heard of the New Covenant Presbyterian Church?"

"No - are they a problem?"

"Only if you follow the Old Testament and don't believe in worshipping man in the form of the unborn. That's about as radical a group of Presbyterians as I've ever met. Their church doesn't believe in predestination. They believe in predamnation. I ran into one of them on my walk and he cornered me for over an hour. I didn't want to appear to be impolite so I listened until he became irrational."

"You didn't goad him into a nervous fit - did you?"

"I've got to have some fun."

"How many petitions did you get signed?"

"Ten and I passed out two hundred."

"I wouldn't pass any more out. They'll never return them. Betty Boop called. She has you scheduled to speak at Backwater County B&P executive committee meeting tomorrow night."

"Anything special?"

"It's scheduled for seven in the evening. She wants to arrive early."

"Any special reason?"

"Doesn't trust the Chairman. She felt the directions he gave her were misleading."

"Not a very auspicious beginning."

"Good news. She thinks she can get several volunteers to help walk Crooked Town precincts on Saturday."

"How do we identify the Barefoot & Pregnant party houses?"

"Betty Boop says you'll have to purchase precinct lists from the elections office."

"The B&P office doesn't furnish them?"

"You do have a lot to learn - political party offices are set up to collect - not distribute."

January 12

Just as Betty Boop had prophesied - the Backwater B&P county chairman gave her the wrong address. They arrived ninety minutes early and spent the entire time looking for the meeting hall. They finally found it at a community center near the railroad tracks. After trying to enter several locked doors - they entered the north side of this building just after the meeting began. Before Johnny had time to gather his notes and thoughts - the chairman began his introduction - which consisted of, "We have another candidate for the Flat Earth congressional seat. Johnny something or other" and he handed Johnny the mike. A lady near the front whispered, "He turned off the microphone." Johnny would have lost half the audience if he hadn't turned it back on. And he would have thanked the chairman if he knew his name. But - it didn't matter. The chairman walked out of the room right after the introduction. Afterwards - almost everyone in attendance signed Johnny's petitions - twenty-six except the chairman who didn't return. Almost everyone spoke in whispers. The antiabortionists were in control and would not abide with open and free speech. Little Boy was in attendance - passing out literature. Johnny discovered that he had spoken last month. Johnny asked for, but was not able to enlist volunteers. All in all

it was a cordial experience, but still a little weird. On the ride back he asked Betty Boop, "How did it go?"

"Much better. It was well recieved."

"Will I get support?"

"I don't think so. They'll run someone from their own county. Do you remember Red R. Fox?"

"Yes - the Twit activist that opposed my candidacy."

"He is going to run as a B&P."

"That will make six. Three more and we'll have a baseball team. Do you know why so many are jumping in?"

"The incumbent is vulnerable and the salary is enticing."

"Salary? Don't they know that it's expensive to live in Washington DC?"

"It's three times what they're making now."

"That's as good a reason as any and better than attempting to overthrow the Supreme Court."

January 13

Bobby Jean handed Johnny the mail, "We're getting the Reactionary Weekly. Did you subscribe?"

"No. After they gave space to Little Boy - I sent in an article on my candidacy."

"It's on the front page with one of your black and white department store photographs. They say you're calling yourself a compassionate conservative. The writer makes it sound like you're a liberal."

"Is it fair?"

"They didn't misquote you. Didn't get more than a quarter of it on the front page. It's continued on page seven."

"Does the Weekly have a political agenda?"

"Doesn't read like a militia rag and it covers all of the B&P issues spectrum. Looks like their editorials home in on government land regulations and unfair zoning. More like a developers paper."

"Probably in reaction to Euphoria Toady."

"Their editorial policy?"

"No - their advertising costs."

"Are you walking today?"

"Yes and attending the executive committee meeting tonight.

Do you want to attend?"

"We don't have a decent zoo - so yes."

*"Get to your places!" shouted the Queen
in a voice of thunder - and people began
running about in all directions - tumbling
up against each other: however they got
settled down in a minute or two - and the
game began.*

January 14

Bobbie Jean shook her head, "Your executive meetings are not as bad as I thought they would be."

"How so?"

"No one picked on you when you asked if you could have access to the Barefoot & Pregnant office voter registration lists."

"Charlie Compromise was only generous on the surface. At the back of the hall - Mountain William qualified the offer by saying their new list won't be available until May."

"And your petition drive will be over by then?"

"In mid-April. So - what looks like a generous offer will be a little late."

"And he pretended he was on your side. Didn't Mr. Compromise tell the throng the state registration fees weren't high and any registered voter can sign petitions."

"Our registration fees are a Poll Tax on candidates - the highest in the country. And only members of the B&P Party can sign my petitions. Charlie Compromise passed out enough misinformation to paper a wall. I'll have to pay five cents a page and copy them myself if we use theirs. And their list is two years out of date. That's a lifetime in a the Great State of Euphoria."

"What do you plan on doing?"

"Able Baker can provide lists of specific precincts from his election office files. They're more up-to-date than the B&P's and not as expensive. That is if I target the lists to where we'll walk. If it works I can hold down costs."

"What was on the petition the Christians were circulating?"

"Talk about vindictive. They're attempting to remove our

State Committeeman from his elected state position and from the county executive committee. He's our greatest asset. He provides a check and balance to our crazy Committeewoman."

"What did he do?"

"He's on the Charter Commission."

"That should be an honor. What is the commission up to?"

"Mosquito County doesn't have a charter. So the commission is writing one. Our Committeeman made the mistake of voting for a nonpartisan election of County officials."

"Even so - you shouldn't have asked the Coalition's leader if his white sheet and pillow case were at the cleaners."

"It stopped his nonsense. Did you listen to G. W. Pylut's announcement speech."

"I quit listening after the first five minutes. Pretty much an I love me effort. Tell me - what does being captain of your high school football team have to do with running for congress?"

"Guess it seems important to him. His announcement was lost in the shuffle when the Christians attacked our Committeeman. Doesn't Pylut look more like a senator than a congressman?"

"He does. Reminds me of one of ours from Mississippi. What side did Little Boy take on the issue of throwing out our State Committeeman?"

"He signed the petition."

January 15

Johnny arrived home from a walkabout of Swamp Harbor in disarray. Bobbie Jean asked, "What happened? You look as if you've seen a ghost."

"I ran into my first radical feminist on the first day of my Swamp Harbor walkabout. Made the mistake of entering a divorce lawyer's office. She heard me talking to her receptionist. After she stopped screaming - she threatened to sue me if I didn't leave the premises."

"Another one of life's lessons. The radical left is just as intolerant and bigoted as the radical right."

"Guess I'm a little lucky. I've passed out over a thousand fliers and met only three crazies."

"The problem is that normal people tend to be followers. The crazy ones become leaders. Remember Hitler?"

"Can't mention his name without getting into trouble. It's a red flag to most and will be raw meat to my opponents."

"How is your campaign going?"

"Not well. Swamp Harbor is all malls and gas stations. The town center has been abandoned to the homeless and the cute & quaint shops. I'm reduced to walking into doctors' and lawyers' offices."

"Gut check time again. In business when faced with extreme losses - cut your losses and run."

"I would, but if I'm having this much trouble then the other candidates are too. So it's a game chicken - to see who drops out first."

"And who are the declared candidates?"

"Little Boy - Vinnie Veteran - G. W. Pylut and me."

"I don't see any quitters in that group."

January 16

Johnny had another day of walking Swamp Harbor with little success. At the end of the day - Bobbie Jean insisted, "It's time to hang it up or buy your way in."

"You know me - I'm too stubborn to quit and too cheap to buy my way on the ballot."

"From the sound of your voice - you're coming down with a cold. No walking for you tomorrow."

"Just as well. I'm attending a woman's luncheon in Banana Beach and appearing on Tom Spenders's TV program the day after tomorrow."

"I know how you can eliminate catching more colds."

"I'll bite. How?"

"Quit walking into doctors' offices."

"And lawyers' offices. Do you want to attend the woman's group meeting?"

"Have a walk through in our restaurant with a county building inspector."

"Am I causing you political problems?"

"If you were - I'd insist that you get out. Mosquito County is switching from Tax & Spend to Barefoot & Pregnant. Most of the politically connected remain Tax & Spend and could care less about B&P infighting."

January 18

Bobbie Jean was surprised, "You're home early. Our restaurant passed inspection. Did you?"

"I was denied thrice after the cock crowed."

"The ladies didn't sign your petitions?"

"The gal in charge didn't think it was the time or place. I paid for our lunch - ate with Betty Boop and left."

"Ouch! You were shunned."

"After lunch they were in a hurry to get to the bridge game. A real shame. Had to be at least ninety or so. We stopped in Stoneshelf to talk with our state representative - Bill Thorn at his office."

"That should have gone better than the lunch. He appears to be a reasonable person."

"I thought so too, but I must have caught him on a bad day. He spent five minutes shouting at me."

"He looks so pleasant and mild - so unassuming."

"Appearances can be deceiving. You saw him when his mouth was closed. The first question he asked was abortion. When I gave him my answer he came unglued. Wasn't the answer he wanted. Let me have it in no uncertain terms. Said he wouldn't support me - didn't like me - or the horse I rode in on. Sat there staring at me - like I was a dung bug."

"So he's not going to support you. What else is new?"

"It gets worse. He's going to do all in his power to work against me. Understand he used to be a nice guy. Hubris gets to everyone."

"And it's getting to you. You're still running against all

odds and the establishment. What business is he in?"

"Has a Real Estate office."

"That explains it. I always thought Relators stood on a rung lower than used car salesmen. You said three denials. What was the third one?"

"We stopped in at the B&P office to see if we could get a registered voter list for the precincts Betty Boop wants our volunteers to walk."

"Was Mountain William's wife there?"

"Yes and did we ever receive the cold shoulder."

"You should - you've been picking on her husband."

"Only his political life."

"Wives are loyal. We don't differentiate. What in the world made you decide to stop in there?"

"We decided to put their offer to the test. We asked for the voter lists."

"Did she give them to you?"

"Not right away. She had to call someone for permission."

"And did you get them then?"

"No - she would only give me updates to my own precinct."

"That's not the offer Mr. Compromise made to you at the executive committee meeting."

"When you're dealing with quick change artists - the hands are quicker than the mouth. I wanted to see what they had to offer. I copied the updates to my precinct and Billy's wife watched me like a hawk - making sure I didn't do anymore than I was authorized to do. She shouldn't have worried. The updates I copied were worthless."

"What time is your stint on the TV show tonight?"

"Seven - have to be there fifteen minutes early."

"One more time. Are you ready to give it up?"

"One more kick in the shins and I might."

Bobbie Jean kissed Johnny at the door, "My conquering hero. That was your best effort yet. I Just got off the phone with Tom Spender. Wanted to thank you. He was really

pleased with your performance. They had twenty-eight calls - their highest ever.

"Hard to tell how it went when I'm doing the talking, but I took two calls after they struck the set."

"I was impressed. Hang in there. An everyman might just win this one. Are you going to walk again tomorrow?"

"Yes, but I'm reassessing my walkabout strategy. I'm getting recognition, but not enough signed petitions. I might wind up being electable and not on the ballot."

"Remember what I said about public buildings?"

"Stand in front and let the voters come to me. I'm leaning that way."

January 19

When Johnny returned home - Bobbie Jean had good news for him, "Your appearance on TV last night was the main topic on the local talk radio station this morning."

"What was the theme."

"Eternal damnation from the Christian Right and faint praise from the pragmatic conservatives. I gather from the gist of their conversations - the antiabortionists are searching for ways to put an end to your candidacy. But - they didn't attack you head on."

"Interesting - in person they argue - shout and attack until they're red in the face."

"In a public forum they treat you with kid gloves."

"They probably can't make up their minds. Some of them think I'm Judas and the rest treat me like an Antichrist. And from what I've seen of them - that alone worries me. Those folks worship at the altar of a media Antichrist."

"Don't knock the exposure. Everyone knows you're honest and it's free press. That may be your problem - being honest and a politician. How did your walkabout go today?"

"I was well received. I stayed out of lawyers offices."

"Betty Boop called. She requested a Crooked Town precinct by name and street from the elections office. It will cost you

a penny a name. You can pick it up Friday at elections. Better take a check along. They won't accept cash. Betty has lined up several speaking engagements for you. The Republican Men's Club at noon tomorrow and Stoneshelf Kiwanis tomorrow night."

"If we can get twenty good workers - I just might get my petitions signed."

"This is Mayberry south. You'll be lucky if you find twenty people who can remember how they tie their shoes."

January 20

The Mosquito County Republican Men's luncheon speech was short, but to the antiabortionists - not sweet. The Kiwanis speech began after dinner at the Stoneshelf Country Club and questions continued twenty minutes after the meeting was over. Their president - who scheduled the speech with Betty Boop was not in attendance. The vice-president wasn't comfortable with a political speech at a service organization - so Johnny stuck to issues. The state representative from the Stoneshelf district was in attendance. He did not speak to Johnny before or afterwards. He did interject his answers to questions asked to Johnny - in a positive way and in a manner that didn't interfere.

Johnny wanted a second opinion from Bobbie Jean, "Bill Thorn was a very nice guy this evening."

"Did he shake your hand and apologize?"

"No and he didn't speak to me either, but he did help out on some of the questions I was asked. Didn't correct me - just amplified my answers with excerpts from his own experience."

"Did he talk or recognize you at all?"

"No - not one word of recognition."

"He attempted to preempt your presence with his own. Ride the coattails of your successful presentation and leave the impression that he was the one in front."

"I have a lot to learn about politics."

January 21

Johnny walked the northernmost town of Backwater County in the morning. The second largest after Quicksand Beach - Pirates Cove was still a series of strip malls and gas stations in search of customers. Bobbie Jean laughed when he described the area, "You're no different than a strip mall - except you're looking for registered voters."

"Well I discovered where the Actor's Tax & Spenders live. Not one life long member of the Barefoot & Pregnant. Every single one I met was aa recent convert."

"How many petitions did you get signed?"

"None on my walkabout - twenty-four at the Pirate's Cove B&P luncheon. I ran into a lady at lunch who claims she was Mountain William's campaign manager in Backwater County."

"What was she wearing?"

"A deeply red suit dress. Had enough metal on her fingers to hang a dozen refrigerator door magnets."

"Was she friendly?"

"Meaner than the witch Dorothy threw water on. In fact - after she tore into me - I was looking for a bucket of water to melt her down with. She's the most avid antiabortionist I've met to date. She said Mountain William is testing the waters in Backwater County and I'm an irritant who should pack up and leave town. I wouldn't ever want to be on the wrong side of a lawsuit or in a kicking contest with that lady. She's as big as Little Boy's wife and twice as mean."

"How did she have her hair?"

"Pulled back in a bun - like a German prison of war matron in the movies, but without the whip."

"You didn't look in her purse. Who was she with?"

"Two grande dames whom she intimated controlled B&P politics in Backwater County."

"It is beginning to look like my husband has alienated the B&P establishment of the two major Flat Earth counties."

"I tried my best to be friendly."

"You could turn water into wine and it wouldn't do any good."

January 23

Little Boy's campaign Manager telephoned and asked for Johnny's support in requesting the B&P voter's lists from county headquarters. Johnny smiled, "You've got it and good luck. Did you know that Mountain Billy is testing the waters in Backwater County?"

"Is he going to run?"

"Iron Maiden said he was. Have you met her?"

"Yes - she said she would support Little Boy."

"She was Billy's campaign manager."

"She's with us - now. She and Little Boy's wife have become the best of friends." Johnny hung up with a vision of two cobras circling each other - looking for weakness.

January 24

Johnny drove south to Quicksand Beach for his second walkabout in Backwater County. He stopped in at the local newspaper - the Quicksand Beach Press and introduced himself to the receptionist - which was as far as he got. He stopped in at the Backwater County elections office and introduced himself to the receptionist - which was as far as he got. No one in charge at either place wished to speak with him. Both receptionists had a look that said, "Who is this guy and where did he come from."

Bobbie Jean asked, "And how did Gulliver's travels go today?"

"Aptly put. I spent most of the day in the land of the Yahoos. Visiting Quicksand Beach is like stepping back into the 1950s. I'm not getting anywhere with a walkabout. To do it the right way - I need a brass band and Heralds to announce my coming."

"Write another media letter. Our restaurant will begin advertising next month. Use our influence to get press."

"I want to play this one out honest - up front."

January 25

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is Johnny Ropp and I'm conducting a walkabout campaign for congress in Backwater and Mosquito Counties. I've discovered a few items of interest along the way.

If you walk into a medical office you'll get sick.

Our citizens are more aware of politics than the media.

The first question a candidate is asked is about abortion.

The Flat Earth Congressional District has no town centers.

Mountain William is looked upon as our Harold Stassen.

Road kill and ice tea are the standard political luncheon menu fare.

Never address an AARP group after lunch. Naps interfere.

Backwater County brings back memories of Glen Miller.

Mosquito County brings back memories of Billy Sunday.

Johnny Ropp

Johnny asked Bobbie Jean, "What do you think?"
"You'll get their attention, but not their coverage."
"Is it too strong?"
"I think so, but you have nothing to lose and everything to gain - so go ahead."

January 26

Johnny called out to Bobbie Jean as he opened the front door, "Remember the Under Water Kiwanis Club I was going to address this noon?"
"No - I thought you were on another walkabout."
"There isn't one. Found out it was an organizational meeting. I'm now a member."
"Well - it's a service club. You'll do more good there than as a politician."
"I picked up the registered Barefoot & Pregnant precinct lists Betty Boop ordered from elections. If all government offices were run as well as our Cow Pasture elections office we would have a well managed county."

January 27

Johnny gave an issue speech to a Lions Club luncheon at a strip mall buffet. The crowd was small, but enthusiastic. Then he stopped in at several banks to see about opening a campaign account. After discovering it would cost twelve dollars a month and he would have to purchase checks - he opened a savings account at the Credit union and decided to hold all campaign contributions in escrow until he was on the ballot. Then he called the FEC to see if this was legal. They said it was. He chided Bobbie Jean, "These election laws are for the rich and famous - like you."
"I may have a little money, but I'm certainly not famous. What brought on this outpouring of grief?"
"I spend an half-a-day filling out petition forms - listing contributors and responding to state and federal laws."

"Gut check time again. Time to quit?"

"There is darkness at the end of the tunnel, but I'll hang in there a little while longer. It's a challenge. I want to see if I can really do it."

"Hubris - hubris everything is hubris."

January 28

Johnny walked the Backwater County beaches - looking for voters and found none. Almost all were behind walls in gated communities. Euphoria's weather had finally turned cold. Temperature dropped into the mid sixties by midday and low forties at night. Winter arrived late in the Flat Earth Congressional District. Johnny found one friendly barber shop and little else inside the Quicksand Beach town center. Gated communities and gated condominiums were obstacles he could not overcome. He was a tree falling in the forest when no one was around. A voice that could not penetrate stucco walls and iron gates.

January 30

On his Swamp Harbor walkabout - Johnny was asked if he supported the Concord Coalition Economic platform. He responded, "Of course - I grew up in Concord Township - in the midwest. Our economic platform was don't lend or borrow. Now the eastern Concord Coalition believes in lending, but not borrowing. So - they've got it half right."

Bobbie Jean chided him, "They want to pay down the national debt not lend."

"The Concord Coalition has its head in the sand. They ignore our trade deficit and continue down the road of unrestricted free trade."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Our definition of free trade is, 'We buy and other countries sell.' It's a one way street."

"To oblivion."

February 1

Betty Boop scheduled Johnny to teach a Civics class at Stoneshelf High. When he returned home early - Bobbie Jean asked, "I thought you were supposed to teach morning and afternoon?"

"I was cut short. My talk was politically incorrect."

"You didn't advocate hanging - did you?"

"The teacher is Tax & Spend as were most of her students. It was a tough audience. She introduced me and then sat down in the back of the room - smiling."

"Then she liked you?"

"No - I was her relief for the morning class."

"Didn't the students ask questions?"

"Yes and most of them were penetrating. Had me believing they were really listening. I felt pretty smug until I found out afterwards they received extra credit for asking questions."

"Anything unusual?"

"One answer sent chills down my spine. When I emphasized what we get out of life is what we put into it I caused a firestorm. One of there best and brightest said, 'If I want something and I can't afford it I take it' and all of the other students agreed with him. Genghis Khan would be right at home if he had to recruit our modern youth for pillaging. We face a moral crisis of enormous proportions if this idea is the norm in all fifty states."

February 3

Johnny gave an issue - nonpolitical speech to the Banana Beach Kiwanis Club at lunch. Betty Boop said it went well, but there were no converts. It's not the number in the pews, but how many come to the alter that counts. Betty Boop was worried, "Your solutions to the social and economic woes of our country might be a little to radical for the average voters taste."

"Everyone wants change until it hits them in the nose and then they seek the comfort of politics as usual."

"At least you're not a cookie cutter candidate."

"I would if I had a cookie."

February 4

Betty Boop sat in on Johnny's speech to the Swamp Harbor Kiwanis Club. After he finished and the meeting was over - he was quite pleased with himself, "Went very well - didn't it?"

"It was one of the worst speeches I've ever been forced to sit through."

"The audience seemed to like it."

"They were just being nice to you. You were too technical. You lost half of them."

"What's the fix?"

"Shorten it down - speak in sound bites. You attempted to explain all of your responses."

"Speak - don't teach?"

"Of course."

February 5

Bobbie Jean informed Johnny, "Betty Boop called."

"What did she have to say?"

"And then there were six."

"Who is the new candidate?"

"Red R. Fox has thrown his hat in the ring."

"Will he be mining United We're Twits?"

"That's what her Twit sources say."

"I've got Vinnie going after the veteran vote - Pylut going after the military vote - Fox going after the Twits and Little Boy chasing the Christians. Doesn't leave me much of a constituency."

"You could go after the educated vote."

"In Flat Earth country?"

"You have two choices. The apostolates or the pragmatics."
"I'll take the ones who can read - write and think."

February 8

Johnny gave a luncheon speech to the Sulfur Island Kiwanis Club. His lunch was potluck as was their reception to his speech. The Sulfur Island Club is as old as its few members - half of which were visiting from out of state. Of those in attendance - most were Tax & Spenders. This was not a pond Johnny would choose to fish in a second time. In the evening he competed with Red Fox for attention at a meeting of Banana Twits. At least sixty or so were in attendance and most of those who were registered Barefoot & Pregnant signed his petitions.

Bobbie Jean took one look and asked, "Did the Banana Twits eat you alive?"

"They asked penetrating questions. Quite a variety of folks out there who think they are disenfranchised."

"You recieved a set of questions from a midwest outfit called the Vulture Quorum. I read them and it appears to me they're attempting to entrap you on the abortion issue."

"They will and she has."

"Who is she?"

"Prissy Shoefly. Most of her followers howl at the moon. I'll answer her survey in the morning."

February 9

Bobbie Jean scanned Johnny's response to the Vulture Quorum -

Abortion - I'm against abortion as an individual and opposed to forcing my opinions or those of others on my constituents. God has entrusted this matter to woman and not to priests or the state. If God can accept his

decisions - so can I. As for the state. We the people have decided that women are not chattel. They are equals and as such have freedom of choice. The problem with giving humans free will is - sometimes we make the wrong decisions. If God can accept our errors - so can I.

Education - I would recommend the elimination of national - state and county education departments. Education should be under local control. I do not recommend the elimination of national and state guidelines as long as they further education and not administration.

Family - Government - at all levels should stay out of family matters.

Defense - We should have adequate force to defend our country and to deter other countries from attacking us. The problem with standing Armies - Navies and Air Forces is they are configured and trained to fight the last war - not the next one. We must continually redefine the threat and then man - train and equip to defend and defeat it.

Art - For art to remain free - government must stay away. Return art to free enterprise and we'll eliminate charlatans - nepotism and hacks.

Children - We've got to do something to prevent children going from broken homes and foster homes to prisons. Boarding schools like Boys Town may be one answer.

Johnny Ropp

Barefoot & Pregnant Flat Earth Congressional Candidate

Bobbie Jean smiled, "I like your responses, but you'll never get her support."

"I could have a death bed conversion and her Vulture Quorum never would. Answering their questions helps refine my ideas and I hope shock her followers."

"You think that group reads?"

"Read - yes. Understand - no."

February 10

Bobbie Jean wondered, "We haven't made reservations to fly up to Virginia for your Barefoot & Pregnant candidate course. Aren't we going?"

"I can either take a course in how to be a candidate - or stay here and become one. I need to get petitions signed."

"So we're not going?"

"No. I can't afford to take time away and meet the petition deadline."

"You're volunteer meeting last night. It didn't go well?"

"Out of twenty volunteers who said they'd be there - only four showed up - counting me. Getting volunteers is easy. Getting them to show up - isn't. Are you going to the executive committee meeting tonight with me?"

"After your lecture about volunteers - I'd be afraid not too."

The executive committee meeting was a quieter than the last three Johnny attended. The only announcement of interest to Johnny was the candidate's forum was being delayed until April fourteenth. Bobbie Jean whispered, "Won't that interfere with your efforts to gain recognition in the party?"

"All the minds are closed in this committee of kings without kingmakers. Whatever I say won't change one of their minds to my cause."

"Time to reconsider?"

"And miss out on being a thorn in the B&P lion's paw?"

February 11

Bobbie Jean stopped Johnny before he ran out the door, "Where are you going so early this morning."
"South to the Backwater County elections office. I want to see if I can order a precinct list for a door to door petition campaign in Pirate's Cove and Quicksand Beach."
"Won't do you any good. No one's at home on weekends and those who are - are locked behind gated communities."
"Sit in front of libraries and license offices?"
"Fish where there are fish. Are you the only one going the petition route?"
"G. W. Pylut - Little Boy and Red R. Fox are - too."

Johnny ordered the precinct lists for Pirate's Cove and picked up a print out showing the number of registered voters in each party by precinct. When he returned home Bobbie Jean glanced over the lists with him, "You're out of luck down there. Remember your first finding. Most registered B&P voters live on the barrier island and they're behind locked doors."

"If we can get enough volunteers - who knows?"
"Delusion - delusion! If you want to be a politician - you must conquer delusion."

February 12

The volunteer effort in Pirate's Cove was a bust. Three volunteers showed up and only sixty petitions were signed. Johnny estimated that he had passed out over two thousand petitions since the beginning of his petition drive and only six were returned by mail. He decided against leaving petitions with less than disinterested Flat Earth voters. Bobbie Jean was upbeat, "At least you didn't lose the cost of a self addressed return envelope."

"I didn't provide one."
"Good thinking on your part."

February 13

Johnny brought back fifty signed petitions late on this warm Sunday afternoon. Bobbie Jean asked, "How many did you do for the weekend?"

"One hundred and ten. And I have eight weekends to go until I have to turn them in. At this rate I'll have eight-hundred and eighty. If I get an additional one hundred and fifty during the week - I'll have about twenty-five hundred at the end of my petition drive. And I need six thousand."

"How many are you getting an hour?"

"On a good day - eight."

"If you work a five hour day - seven days a week - the most you can get signed is a little over twenty-two hundred if the weather holds and you don't get sick. Two people can double your take. Just to make sure you'll need three or four full time volunteers to get six thousand signed petitions. How many do you have?"

"None."

"Time to throw in the towel."

"Getting damn close."

February 14

Bobbie Jean asked, "Why are you laughing?"

"We have two more B&P candidates in the race - Iron Maiden from Quicksand Beach and Dick A. Dickey from Mouseville. One more and we'll field a baseball team. I almost forgot - and an independent from San Cumulus."

"And you have an incumbent - A B Nose and his last challenger - Mountain William waiting in the wings."

"Odds against me are now eight to one. Should we invest in my campaign?"

"Our charity is the Salvation Army. You are not a write-off on our income tax form and it's against the law for a corporation to support a candidate."

"Only his political action committee and I don't have one."

"Then why are you staying in?"

"As an exercise. To find out if mankind is worth saving."

"Mankind - yes. Politicians - no."

February 15

Johnny - after walking into one too many doctors' offices came down with intestinal flu.

February 16

Johnny was still sick at home and getting further behind - Betty Boop telephoned, "I have more meetings for you to attend. Be prepared to speak and answer questions."

"No more AARP luncheons. It interferes with their nap time."

"Mostly forums. At the Backwater County B&P men's candidate forum and their woman's candidate forum. The Under Water B&P woman's candidate forum - the District Twits candidate forum - Swampwater Bay Twits forum and a Rotary Club nonpolitical speech. Remember - stay on message."

February 17

Bobbie Jean asked, "Do you feel well enough to attend the Mosquito County B&P men's club luncheon today?"

"As long as I eat here and not there. Not big on cafeteria style food."

"Who's the speaker?"

"Little Boy. Wouldn't miss it for the world."

Little Boy - dressed in a sincere blue suit and red tie came out swinging at Johnny. He took Johnny to task on NAFTA - Little Boy was a supporter - Johnny wasn't. Then Johnny's approach to drug problems. Little Boy wanted to incarcerate - not cure. And the economy. Johnny told Bobbie Jean, "He gave a good speech. Looked good in his suit, but a bit pale. I was thinking about getting out, but he changed my mind." "Now I'm really upset with him. What did he say?"

"He attacked me. I must be doing the right thing. If I'm that much of a threat - I have a chance."

"Eight to one. You're a long shot. What did you bring home in the box?"

"I had 1500 new petitions copied at the printer. And I'll need more."

"Are you going to the candidates meeting tonight?"

"Have too. They're going to give me and the rest of our baseball team full of candidates advice."

"At least you picked a good time to get sick. Its been raining for two days. You couldn't walk a precinct in this weather if you wanted too."

"I'll give it one more weekend and then I'll try your idea out. If it works as good as you think it will - I'll be kicking myself for not trying it sooner."

Tonight's gathering of B&P congressional candidates seemed more like a group of caged beasts to Johnny. A gathering of kings without kingmakers - everyone was on edge. Using petitions as a way to get volunteers and contributors took most of their time - with emphasis on contributions. Johnny listened to political advice he could not or would not take with one ear closed. He spent most of his time sizing up the other candidates. For the life of him - he couldn't understand why any of them were running. And assumed they felt the same way about him. Beam Me Up Scotty gave advice about newspaper advertising. Euphoria Toady's price was \$3600 when he ran an unsuccessful campaign for state office several years back. A radio spot was doable - only twenty dollars. Signs were a problem. Local laws were structured to prevent using them. However they were usually enforced only against non incumbents or out of favor candidates. The emphasis was on picking them up after the election was over. Failure to do so could be expensive in fines and forfeited fees. Johnny listened intently, but didn't offer any suggestions. If failure is a teacher - he learned a valuable

political lesson from the other candidates. Mountain William attended, but did little - other than nod when others spoke. The only consensus was - A. Brown Nose was vulnerable.

February 18

Finally back on his feet for good - Johnny attended the Pirate's Cove monthly B&P meeting. The Iron Maiden was in attendance. She denied that she was a candidate. However - Johnny could tell by her outfit that she was a cowboy. She reemphasized her antiabortion stand - looking down at Johnny through half glasses. She told him in no uncertain terms to get out of the race. He was allowed to speak for a minute and he did so - without getting booed. Knowing that Betty Boop had forty volunteers lined up for precinct walks this weekend - Johnny left the luncheon in high spirits.

Bobbie Jean wondered, "Why are you so quiet?"
"I ran into the wicked witch of the south at lunch."
"The Iron Maiden? What did she have to say?"
"Get out and leave politics to professionals."
"For once - I agree with her."
"I would if just one of these people who have traveled this path before would talk with a straight tongue. When I ask for advice - all I get is, 'Do the right thing.' Might as well be back in Omaha."
"Your in the State of Euphoria. You're not in Kansas any more - Dorothy."

February 19

Out of forty who volunteered - only ten showed up to walk the precincts in a retirement area - Swampwater Bay. Two volunteers attempted to set up a table outside a Seafood Festival and were chased away. Half the volunteers - faced with the frugality of Johnny's campaign quit before the day was half over. If Gettysburg was the high water mark of

America's Civil War - this was the high water mark of Johnny's Campaign. An early morning rain and high wind didn't help his situation. Faced with no central place to campaign and without adequate volunteer support - Johnny was learning a modern political lesson. There was no place to campaign for free.

Bobbie Jean whistled, "You look like something the cat drug in. Did your volunteer effort go well?"
"The idea was great - the planning was flawless - our execution was terrible. Only one out of four volunteers showed up. Walking a precinct is too hard for our modern generation. Beginning to look like there is no place to campaign free. I can see why candidates sell out. The same voters who want campaign reform won't support free access for campaigning. A classic lose-lose situation."
"Are you ready to try my solution."
"I need a table - chair and a sign."

February 20

Raining again in Mosquito County. Johnny had a small ounce of inner satisfaction - the Festival that wouldn't let his volunteers set up a table was rained out for the second day in a row. Too wet to walk precincts - he spent most of the day composing a new media letter.

February 20

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is Johnny Ropp. I am one of a horde of Barefoot & Pregnant

candidates for the Flat Earth Congressional seat - currently occupied by A. Brown Nose. To separate myself from the cookie cutter blue suiters - I have several issues you may find unique to political campaigns.

I recommend a new test program to combat drug use and to reduce criminal activity. We should test the British approach to drugs. Treat addiction as a medical condition. Provide outpatient care and prescribe controlled doses of common substances. We eliminate the profit motive and as a side benefit - curtail use of our prisons as a warehouse for drug addicts. Another benefit may be the reduction in numbers of our growing population of addicts - as most old users must create a new market to sustain their habits.

Phase out foster homes and aid to dependent children. Phase in group homes modeled after Father Flanigan's Boy's Town in Omaha Nebraska. Our current system of raising the orphaned - abused and poor is a disgrace and an abysmal failure.

Create a new Civilian Conservation Corps to rebuild our national parks and forests. Adults in need of public assistance and willing to work will be removed from the rolls of the homeless. Create group homes/farms for adults who are in need of public assistance and require mature supervision. Create group homes for the mental and genetic deficient who are in need of mature supervision. Phase out Medicaid - phase in a beefed up Public Health Service and establish a Medical Corps patterned after the Peace Corps. These entities will be responsible for ministering to the poor - the addicted and the disabled.

Johnny Ropp - Barefoot & Pregnant

February 21

Johnny set up a petition table outside the door of the Crooked Town library. Business was quite brisk until a young Christian girl - not quite sweet sixteen - stood in front of his table and apostatized her Christianity by apostolating man worship in the form of the unborn. Unable to get her to move on - Johnny waited for an opening and said, "God bless you - young lady. If God can forgive you the error of your ways - so can I. May you travel in peace." Johnny had to admire their tactic if not the execution of the Covenant Presbyterians - sending out children to do the deeds of their elders. And this woman-child was quite striking. She was slender - blonde - pretty. Reminiscent of a poster child from another youth movement of the 1930's. Her speech reminded Johnny of a tape recording of a Valkyrie trained to argue the benefits of worshipping unborn man, but ill prepared to counter a tactic of Christian forgiveness.

Bobbie Jean shook her head, "You look just as tired as if you had walked precincts."

"All I need is a bell and a uniform and I can double as a member of the Salvation Army. Got fifty-five petitions signed. Your idea works. Waiting for the voters to come to me is better than walking, but just as tiring."

"Any problems?"

"I found the mother hive of the right wing Christian antis'. The Covenant Presbyterians are sending children out to attack nonbelievers. Had a hard time shaking off a fifteen year old Presbyterian girl from her predamnation spiel. Finally got her to move on by turning the other cheek."

"Are they stooping to using children?"

"Stealing a page from Adolph and Lenin. The end justifies the means'."

"Where are you going too next?"

"Back to the Crooked Town library."

"Don't stay too long at the fair."

February 22

Johnny interviewed the local University Young Barefoot & Pregnant Club president. It appeared to Johnny that he was the only active member of his club - or at least he was the only one who showed up. A full time student with two jobs - he didn't have time to work on Johnny's campaign. Betty Boop had volunteers sitting in front of Post Offices today and Johnny was in front of the Crooked Town library. A coastal shower cut short his petition effort. More of the same tomorrow and a speech at a Quicksand Beach B&P woman's luncheon the next day.

February 24

Bobbie Jean asked, "How did your speech go?"
"Ladies seemed to respond. It was a friendly group."
"Were you the only one?"
"Little Boy followed me. Stepped all over his tongue. Red R. Fox was there. It was a home audience. He seems to be improving - or he was relaxed among friends."
"When is your next one?"
"The Under Water Woman's B&P Club is having a forum tomorrow night. Should be six of us there."
"Is the Iron Maiden one of them?"
"She hasn't officially declared."
"If she did would she attend?"
"I don't think so. There is a rumor about a problem between her and our Mosquito County B&P Woman's Clubs. I don't know what it is, but from what I've heard they don't get along."

February 26

Bobbie Jean gave Johnny a brief critique, "You won the battle, but lost the war."
"I thought my speech went over pretty well."
"You have issues. Problem is you're not political enough. That's what the lady who sat next to me said."

"I thought not being a politician was a good trait."
"She said you'd have a hard time getting along in DC."
"Didn't you tell her we lived there and still own property."
"No - she meant well and I couldn't change her mind."
"How about my opposition? How did they do?"
"Vinnie Veteran uses education as his theme. G. W. Pylut's
is a new morning in the Flat Earth Congressional District.
Little Boy says he is a different type of candidate. Beam Me
Up stresses he's from here and the rest of you aren't. Red
Fox sounds a lot like you. Over half his issues are the same
as yours. All in all you tied the rest on charisma - won on
issues, but didn't win a single vote."

A Caucus-Race

*"I will tell you how the Dodo managed it. -
First it marked out a race course in a sort
of circle - and then all the party was placed
along the course - here and there. There was
no "One - two three and away" but they began
running when they liked and left off when they
liked so it was not easy to know when the race
was over. However when they had been running
half an hour or so - the Dodo suddenly called out
"The race is over" and they all crowded around
asking, "But who has won?"*

February 27

Reluctantly - Johnny decided to attend the Crooked Town United We're Twits meeting with Betty Boop. To his surprise - the evening speaker was Red R. Fox. Red was in rare form. Red R. dumped his platform on one more nonlistening audience. By the time the meeting was over everyone had spoken and not one Twit - had listened to another Twit. All were mesmerized by the music of their own voices. Betty Boop was livid, "I've been trying for a month to get you scheduled to speak to these Twits. And each time I called they turned me down." "Red R. Fox is a Twit and I'm not." "Why don't you join?" "I don't want to be looked upon as a Twit come lately."

Fox stopped Johnny when they were outside the library, "G. W. Pylut told me he has Backwater County citrus growers in his hip pocket. Have you heard anything?" "You're one of my few contacts in Quicksand Beach. It's the first thing I've heard about your county other than get out." "Well - as far as I know our citrus growers aren't supporting anyone. Have you heard any news about Iron Maiden?" "Only that she's going to run, but hasn't announced." "I'm surprised by her lack of support in Quicksand Beach, but she'll run - I'm certain of that." "How are you doing on petitions?" "Great - how about you?" "I'm looking for miracles." "Slow going?" "Each volunteer can only get about twenty a day."

"You need more volunteers."

"I need volunteers who will work."

March 1

Betty Boop scheduled Johnny's speech at a Devil's Port Kiwanis Club luncheon. He arrived early and spent an hour looking for the restaurant before finding out it was a pizza parlor more interested in carryout than eat in. The meeting was held in a booth. Four members showed up - three signed his petitions and the fourth was not registered B&P. Johnny spoke to this immense throng of three for thirty minutes. Afterwards - he waited an hour as his car was blocked in by a delivery truck - its driver off to lunch.

Bobbie Jean wondered, "You're very quiet. Didn't your speech go well?"

"A very small audience of four. Five hours of time better spent soliciting petitions."

"With all this wind and rain - you couldn't work outside. Oh - One of your volunteers called."

"Must have been Betty Boop or Frenchie. They're the only ones who show up."

"It was Frenchie. He wanted to apologize. Wind was too high so he had to give up. He only collected ten petitions."

"That's seven more than I did."

"Time to reconsider?"

"Not until spring."

March 2

Johnny drove to Titus to pick up petitions from his one and only volunteer in the northern quarter of Mosquito County. Not one petition was signed after a truckload of promises and four weeks of stalling. Johnny stopped by the local Twit office. It was closed. He looked inside. The office was empty of furniture. He surmised the petitions he

left there were lost in the move. He telephoned Betty Boop, "We lost our northern volunteer. He was willing to work, but not lead. And the Twit office is closed. How many petitions did you leave with them?"

"At least a hundred. Were any of them signed?"

"The office was bare - everything was gone."

"Looks like the twit movement is in a decline."

"If it wasn't for our Post Office effort I'd be tempted to hang it up."

"I have bad news for you. A Christian Coalition Post Office worker ordered me off the Cow Pasture Post Office property."

"That's a violation of our First Amendment rights - the right to petition."

"After he finished swearing at me and my ancestors - he called me a baby killer. And then he quoted some obscure Post Office regulation. Threatened to call the police if I didn't leave. And I know him. He's a member of the B&P executive committee."

"We stand outside and don't interfere. We don't go inside and hassle folks. I'll go up the Post Office administrative ladder and see if we're legal."

"I'm not going back to that Post Office."

"We still have libraries. How about the county offices? Can we stand outside and petition there?"

"You query Washington and I'll call Cow Pasture."

March 4

Yesterday - Johnny called the Mouseville district Post Office and worked his way up the administrative chain through three more State of Euphoria cities. Today he called Elvis Town in the State of Gore and was told to call the regional office in Turnerville Georgia. From there he telephoned the Postal Service's mother hive - Washington DC. After working his way up their Byzantine ladder - he finally found a moss covered lawyer. One with an answer. The lawyer read a 1992 Supreme Court ruling to Johnny that prohibited political

activity by the Postal Service in or around Post Offices. The Postal Service was established by congress as a nonpolitical entity. After Johnny explained the ruling to Bobbie Jean - she said, "Looks like they've got you painted into a corner."

"We have a constitutional right to petition being overridden by an act of congress. Something isn't right."

"Don't just sit there - take action."

"Another letter?"

"Keeps you off the phone."

Postmaster

Swamp Harbor

Enjoyed talking with you on the 3rd of March. Reference our request to petition outside of Swamp Harbor Post Offices. We wish to petition to place a candidate on the ballot for federal office. We are exercising our constitutional right to freely petition under the laws of the United States and the State of Euphoria. We are in accordance with Post Office Order 221.65 - Issue 5-1-31-83 - 654 Soliciting - Electioneering. We are not campaigning for election to any public office. We are not using campaign literature or political advertising. We will not impede foot traffic - conduct our affairs in a disorderly way or attempt to enter your facilities.

Johnny Ropp

Citizen

March 5

Bobbie Jean looked up from the morning newspaper, "I've found your problem. It wasn't Betty Boop and her militant

Christian. It's an anti-tax group attempting to get a law on the ballot to cap taxes. One of there paid petitioners moved his table inside the Swamp Harbor Post Office to get out of the rain and all hell broke loose."

"It was fun writing my letter, but with paid petitioners competing for signatures there is no hope."

"How about shopping malls?"

There is a Supreme Court ruling - Pruneville versus the State of Fruits and Nuts that allows us to petition on sidewalks in front of the malls. However - our Mosquito County laws force us to seek approval first and our malls won't give it."

"Hire a lawyer."

"Cost a small fortune and our petition drive would be long over before we'd get a judgment."

"Even though you're in the right they're in the wrong?"

"And nothing could be done because it was the Mosquito County commissioner's son."

March 6

Bobbie Jean laughed, "There's an article in Euphoria Toady about a congressman Dollar who is sponsoring a bill to limit the number of petitions required for federal office to one-thousand."

"He has the number about right. Where are the Civil Liberty lawyers when we need them?"

"Out fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat and the right to yell fire in a crowded theater."

"You're saying that they don't give a damn about being civil or free."

"Or about the vast throng in the middle of the road. Betty Boop called while you were out this morning. Next Tuesday is local election day in Backwater County. She's organizing a petition signing effort outside the polls."

"Things are looking up. Time for my monthly media letter."

"Aren't you running out of things to say?"

"I'll announce the end of my walkabout campaign."

"As if anyone cares."

"They don't and I don't, but we don't let on that we don't."

"What else?"

"Haven't given it much thought."

"Don't pick on the other candidates."

"Have to make a comment about the Iron Maiden."

"I wouldn't."

"She's spreading rumors that I'm getting out of the race."

"Go get em' Red Rider."

March 7

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is still Johnny Ropp. And in spite of the rumors you might have heard - I am still in the race for congress. The rumor the Iron Maiden heard in Backwater County about me quitting came from the same source that said she was withdrawing because she was pregnant.

Now about my campaign. I've given up walking because I've discovered that our Flat Earth voters won't answer doorbells - there are no town centers - one can get sick walking into lawyers offices and sued walking into doctor's offices - or is it the other way around?

I'm following W. C. Field's line of thinking. When John Barrymore caught him reading from the Bible on the front porch of the Actor's home - just before he passed on - Barrymore needled W. C. "Bill what are you doing

with that Bible. You've been an agnostic your entire life." W. C. replied, "I'm looking for loopholes." In my case - I'm looking for miracles.

Now about the incumbent - A. Brown Nose. Mickey Mouse could beat him - even if Minnie exposed Mickey as a mouseophile. Course' he'd have to contend with the antiabortionists.

Johnny Ropp

Barefoot & Pregnant candidate for congress

March 9

Bobbie Jean sat at the counter - drinking her morning coffee - waiting for the other shoe to drop, "You didn't say how it went at the polling places yesterday." "Petitioning went well except for Little Boy and his wife chasing voters through the parking lots. Thank God they left after an hour in the sun. And we had an aggressive group of citizen activists chasing our voters with clipboards. They had four state law petitions to sign. Took several minutes for a voter to write addresses and scribble a name. After that - the voters wouldn't take time to sign a one of our candidates petitions."

"How many did you get signed?"

"350 - against immense odds at five polling places."

"What's up for today?"

"I'm sitting in front of the Ugly library and Betty Boop is working the Ugly county government annex."

"Don't forget your Rotary Club speech at noon."

"And I have another speech tomorrow - lunch at the Quicksand Yacht Club. Do you want to go?"

"Yes - I want to see this Iron Maiden lady."

"She is an imposing figure."

"So was May West."

March 10

Bobbie Jean linked her arm in Johnny's and turned away so Iron Maiden wouldn't see her attempt to cover up a set of uncontrollable giggles. Inside - she whispered to Johnny, "Matching Aloha shirts."

"You're commenting about the matching blazers - ties - shoes and slacks worn by her husband and son?"

"You can tell who rules the roost in her house."

All four candidates were given three minutes to speak. Red Fox - Little Boy - Iron Maiden and Johnny were unable to do more than introduce themselves. However - tis trip wasn't a complete waste of time - Johnny was able to get thirty-four petitions signed. He asked Bobbie Jean on their drive home, "Are you going to attend the executive committee meeting with me tonight?"

"After this fiasco I shouldn't, but I will."

"Was it that bad?"

"You can't introduce yourself in three minutes. I looked around the room. Not one of the ladies will help you. Short of hiring a Dixieland band to announce your coming - you might as well give up on Backwater County."

Johnny picked up another thirty-four signed petitions at the executive committee meeting. Bobbie Jean was surprised, "Beam Me Up and Vinnie Veteran were allotted five minutes to speak. It took you six months before you were allotted five minutes and then they cut you short."

"I wasn't with the 'In Crowd'." Beam Me Up's talk came right out of the Barefoot & Pregnant candidate manual. Bobbie Jean Wondered, "Why does he talk about himself in third person?" "Don't know? He works at Engineers Are Us. Could be a company trait."

Vinnie spoke of flag - mother - country - honor and service in Vietnam. All of which Johnny agreed with, but

wouldn't speak about. Some things were better left in the past. And he couldn't criticize those who desired to relive it - if they didn't dwell on it. Bobbie Jean didn't understand, "Why don't you mention your military service?" "I'm running for congress - not general." "What do you think of Dick A. Dickey?" "He's from Mouseville and will have to move into the 66th District if he's elected." "He'll be following in A. B. Nose's footsteps. Do you think he stands a chance?" "Only if he spends a ton of money." "He's very young." "And a lawyer." "Conflict of interest time."

March 11

Johnny sat out in front of the Mosquito County Ugly government annex from eight o'clock until one. While waiting on registered voters to sign his petitions he had time to think about last night's county executive committee meeting, "Charlie Compromise talked of sixty-five deaths attributed to Jefro Wilson Clampet since he took office. The Christian Coalitionists passed out a pamphlet full of praise for the Branch Dividians and C. T. Source is following up with a radio program on their virtues." When Betty Boop arrived to take over his chair Johnny asked, "What did you think of last night's meeting?" "That crazy antiabortionist wouldn't apologize." "Did you talk to Charlie about it?" "I gave him a letter publicly admonishing their mad one. He wouldn't sign it. Said he didn't want to cause dissension with the religious right even though they are wrong." "Our executive committee and its chairman are fifty-two cards short of a full deck." "I'm seriously thinking of registering as an independent." "And miss watching the inmates dance?"

March 12

Flyoff Floyd stopped at Johnny's petition table outside the Mosquito County's Ugly Annex offices - his face red with anger, "Damn that supervisor of elections! Won't give me his purge list."

"Who are you working for?"

"Little Boy. I need it for mailers and precinct walks."

"You can get precinct lists."

"I want their computer files."

"Now your getting personal. Don't think you can ask for government files. Excerpts - yes, but the whole data base would be out of the question."

"They work for me so they owe me."

"See any more helicopters?"

"Not funny. You know damn well the UN has blue helmet storm troopers flying around in black helicopters at night."

"Didn't know wet birds flew at night."

"What?"

"Nothing. Will you sign my petition?"

"Of course not. I'm for Little Boy."

"You're not voting for me - just helping me get on the ballot."

"I don't want you on the ballot."

"Have a good day."

March 13

Johnny arrived early - to set up a table outside the Crooked Town Senior Center. A craft show was in progress. He had volunteers at all four entrances until the President of the Center appeared. He was more than irate, "Get out! And take your people with you!"

"I'm on city property exercising my constitutional right to petition. You're interfering with the federal and state election process. If you don't get out of my face - I'll call the law."

"I'm in charge here and I say get out!"

"You sir are an Okole Puka."

"What's that?"

"You don't want to know. We'll move further away from your doors, but we will not leave. And if you interfere I'll call the Federal Marshal and have you arrested."

"You can't do that."

"Try me."

"Who gave you permission?"

"Your secretary."

"We'll see about that" and he stomped away - head down - in a hurry to smite someone - anyone. Betty Boop walked up, "Did you straighten him out?"

"That man is one frustrated bureaucrat. We're in a no win situation. We should back away from the entrances and set up on the sidewalks."

"Only until noon. Then we'll try the food fair at Mosquito County's Cow Pasture Park."

Bobbie Jean asked, "How did you do?"

"Sixty at the craft show and one-hundred at the food fair. Not bad, but not enough. How's construction going?"

"We start on the interior next week."

"Do you need my help?"

"After we open. Oh - I want you to take the state course for restaurant managers."

"You need help watching the cash register?"

"Yes and the food handlers the bar and another certificate on the wall."

"Certificate on the wall?"

"Have to have one for each manager and a certified manager has to be present at all times."

"What is the course all about?"

"Proper food handling - dish washing and table cleaning procedures - proper temperatures and kitchen cleanliness."

"Makes sense to me."

March 14

Johnny spent most of the morning gathering petitions outside Ugly Annex. He had only thirty-four when Betty Boop relieved him at noon. Bobbie Jean wanted to know, "How are you doing?" "Not bad - about seventy a day."

"Not enough. Why don't you buy your way on the ballot?"

"Odds are too high against me wining. And this is an easy way to campaign. The voters come to me."

"You won't have enough petitions - you're not going to win and you won't get out. What happens when you don't get on the ballot - or if you do - lose the primary?"

"I checked into that. I'm going to run as a write-in."

"And you think the Twits are crazy."

"Can't experience the whole thing unless I follow through."

"To the bitter end?"

"All I can hope for is a bittersweet end."

March 15

Today was more of the same - except he collected fewer petitions - only forty-six signed today. That evening he attended a STOP meeting at the Crooked Town Senior Center. STOP an acronym for stop turning out prisoners on early release had attracted a great number of supporters. Some of them were even sane. The Underwater Beach police chief gave a speech telling them that they couldn't get the law changed by petition. The Great State of Euphoria's laws had to be changed by legislators at the state capitol in Never Never. The Police Chief watched hopelessly as this enthusiastic throng of irate citizens ignored his sage advice - being hell bent on a petition drive.

March 16

Johnny spoke at the cloth coat Barefoot & Pregnant lady's group in Quicksand Beach. He followed Red R. Fox. Not an easy chore. By now Red had usurped all of Johnny's

platform. Although Johnny could tell that no one here would support him - he did get seventeen petitions signed.

March 17

Saint Patrick's Day. Johnny wore a green sweater and had forty signatures by noon. Betty Boop took over at noon and got thirty more. He missed the B&P men's club meeting today and would miss the Pirate Cove B&P luncheon tomorrow. Gathering petitions to beat the April deadline took priority over speeches and face time.

March 18

Bobbie Jean tapped Johnny's arm, "Guess who made the front page of Reactionary Weekly?"

"Has to be G. W. Pylut."

"Huge snarling picture on the front page. Must have had his portrait taken at the same department store you did."

"You'd snarl too if you had to stand in line behind two dozen irritated toddlers."

"How did you do at the Ugly Annex?"

"Not well - only twenty two signed petitions by eleven. I changed my mind and went to the B&P men's club luncheon. Red R. Fox showed up with eight supporters from United We're Twits. The same ones who wouldn't let me speak because I was political."

"New political party - same old tactics."

"The Twits are going to hell in a hand basket. They're losing potential members by the thousands. Only media hype and Boss Ear's money can save this group."

"Why would the media support a bunch of Twits?"

"Split the B&P vote and Clampet and his Tax & Spend Party wins again."

"I thought the Twits were a grass roots group?"

"The closest our Twits have come to grass is the stuff they bake in their Brownies."

March 19

Johnny and six volunteers walked a small area of the Swampwater Bay retirement community. Four hours of hard work yielded one hundred and twenty signed petitions - twelve blistered feet and seven exhausted workers. Johnny talked with Betty Boop afterwards, "Twenty per person per hour. If we had our group sit in front of the libraries we might have gotten four hundred and eighty."

"This is better campaigning."

"Won't do us any good if we don't get on the ballot."

March 20

Johnny attended the Twit's political issue symposium at a motel that looked almost as abandoned as the highway it was on. Their political showcase attracted one state legislator who looked like a fish out of water. Two minor gubernatorial candidates who took center stage. A Whig candidate in a tri-cornered revolutionary war era hat and a Twit favorite - an overbearing Independent. Eight B&P congressional candidates - including Johnny showed up. All in all this Twit gathering of would be politicians was a real goat rope.

Little Boy set the tone when he accused the voters of apathy and non support for his own failure to attract voters. Afterwards - he conducted a whispering campaign against G. W. Pylut who retaliated by accusing Little Boy of dirty tricks. G. W. had his own problems. The format was strictly question and answer. He had difficulty answering questions without a script. He was almost laughed off the stage for his free trade economic statements by isolationist Twits. Red R. Fox skated home Scot free - preaching to his choir. Beam Me Up played nice guy and Vinnie Veteran waved the flag. Iron Maiden failed to show. Mountain Billy hung around at the back of the room - grinning like Sylvester with Tweety Bird inside his mouth.

Bobbie Jean asked, "From the downcast look on your face - I can tell it didn't go well for you at that gathering of Twits. Was it as bad as you look?"

"I feel just like a gazelle does just before a pride of lions breaks its neck for dinner."

"Who are the lions? The other candidates?"

"No - the audience of Twits. Each one of them has their own agenda. Add them up and they'll devour most candidates."

"It's time to reassess."

"I know I can't win, but I want to stick this one out."

"Who was in the audience?"

"Twit activists - their spouses - other candidates and their workers. I think I talked to only one or two real voters. The ones we're all trying to reach."

"I should have gone."

"One of us with a headache is enough."

"Anything important happen I should know about?"

"Vinnie Veteran brought along an out of town Medal of Honor winner for support. Little Boy and G. W. Pylut are at each other's throats. Innuendo is winning out over fact."

"Your opponents are pulling out all of the stops."

"We are almost to the deadline and Mountain Billy hasn't declared his candidacy."

"Was he there?"

"Hanging around the edges with C.T. Source."

March 21

The first day of spring - symbolic of earth seeking another year of rebirth. Bobbie Jean poured coffee along with good news, "You made the front page of Euphoria Toady. Do you want me to read the article?"

"Only my part."

"United We're Twits held a candidate symposium yesterday. This event helped would-be office holders. Many - such as Swamp Harbor's Little Boy and Under Water's Johnny Ropp need petition signatures and financial support to get on the

ballot. They were two of eight congressional candidates at the meeting."

"Not bad, but it sounds like we're poor relatives."

"Where are you going today?"

"Back to the Ugly Annex."

Johnny teamed up with two of Red R. Fox's supporters at the government annex and garnered sixty signed petitions. He wondered if Fox would give him the same courtesy in Quicksand Beach and answered his own question, "And pigs will fly."

March 22

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny a glass of white wine, "You look irritated."

"We were doing pretty well until Little Boy's wife showed up at the Ugly Annex with a handful of petitions on a clipboard and began chasing citizens down the sidewalk. She is a bit overbearing at times. She and her husband have a bad habit of standing in front of our tables and blocking us from the voters. And when they aren't doing that - they block the entrance doors so voters can't get by."

"How long did she stay?"

"From ten to noon."

"They may get on the ballot, but they're alienating voters."

"How did you do."

"We did well. Before she came and after she left - ninety-two petitions signed. While she was there - none."

"How many petitions do you have?"

"Twenty-five hundred."

"How many more do you need?"

"Twenty-four hundred. Thirty-five hundred to make sure."

"How much time do you have left?"

"Three weeks."

"Slim just left town."

"Looking for none."

March 23

Johnny met Red R. Fox at an evening Twits meeting in Swampwater Bay. Fox's new pitch was, "I'm carrying Boss Ears' banner. If you support his platform you must support me." Only three Twits showed up and all were Fox supporters. Johnny answered their questions for over thirty minutes. Fox showed up late and left early - secure in the knowledge that he had these Twits in his pocket. Before he left - Johnny had a request, "We're doing well teaming up with your workers at Ugly Annex. Why don't we join forces for the rest of the petition drive and triple our take?"

"Let me think it over."

"Don't take too much time. We only have three weeks left."

Johnny never heard about from Fox. Except that he instructed his workers not to participate in any more joint efforts.

Johnny spent the rest of the work week at Ugly Annex - collecting petitions and working on another media letter. He decided to write about constitutional issues.

March 27

Betty Boop and Johnny drove to a retirement day affair being held in a hanger at Prop Wash Air Force Base. Last year six thousand attended. This year less than a thousand showed up. They left early. They couldn't advertise or conduct politics on a federal installation. It didn't seem proper to be here - so they left for the Craft Fair at the Swamp Harbor auditorium. When they arrived - the Swamp Harbor police were escorting Little Boy and his wife away from the front entrance. The lady in charge of the Craft Fair had called because she had received numerous complaints about Little Boy - his wife and campaign manager impeding foot traffic. The crafty crowd couldn't enter without having a clip board shoved in their faces. Little Boy and his wife displayed the finesse of a wild elephants in a crystal shop.

March 28

More of the same. Little Boy and his wife were still running amok through the Craft Show parking lot. With all of this effort Johnny received only one hundred and forty-four signatures for the weekend. Time was running out on his effort to garner petitions. After one to many run-ins with militant Christian antiabortionists - Johnny decided to strike back in his media letter.

March 29

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is Johnny Ropp and I am running for congress. I have heard from some of our Christian friends that they want to replace our constitution with God's Law. I have searched my Bible for this Law and have not found it. Unless something happened while I was out campaigning - our constitution still remains a clarion call for freedom of religion and equal justice under the law. These United States are still the home of the free in spite of the best efforts of our misguided antiabortion Christian brethren.

Article VI of our constitution states - "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." The antiabortion Christian litmus test is unconstitutional.

Johnny Ropp

Barefoot & Pregnant candidate for congress

March 30

Bobbie Jean poured a second glass of wine for Johnny - knowing it was now safe to ask, "How many petitions do you have now?"

"Should have thirty-five hundred by the end of the week."

"You need twenty-five hundred more to be on the safe side and you only have a little over two weeks left."

"Doesn't look good - does it?"

"We should have our restaurant open by the end of next month. Working for me will take your mind off politics."

March 31

Red R. Fox's campaign manager stopped by the Mosquito County Ugly Annex just as Johnny was closing up shop for the morning. She wanted to chat about a meeting, "Betty Boop said I could get a-hold of you here. I want to have a three candidate meeting tomorrow night at my house. And you're one of the chosen three. Are you interested?"

"Who are the other candidates?"

"Vinnie Veteran and Red R. Fox."

"What's the agenda?"

"Form a coalition to get our petitions signed."

"I'm for it. You're people have worked well with mine here at the Annex. Really helped - we both doubled our take. Let me know the time and how to get there."

"I'll call."

Johnny telephoned Betty Boop, "Surprise - surprise. Red R. Fox's campaign manager says Fox has gone to ground and Vinnie isn't available. So much for candidate cooperation."

"Are we still collecting petitions for them?"

"It's the right thing to do."

"If we cover the gun show this weekend and all the libraries we might just make it."

"Are you attending the executive committee meeting?"

"Our last hurrah. Wouldn't miss it for the world."

"If we don't make it - I'm going to resign."

"That's a little harsh."

"I'll have to - if I decide to run as an independent."

"Right - we swore to support our candidate."

"And it depends on which one wins the primary if it isn't you?"

"You broke the code."

"We're going to work the Gun Show at the Swamp Harbor auditorium this weekend."

"Are you sure there will be registered voters in attendance? I thought most of them were survivalists who didn't want any government body to trace them."

"Most gun owners are Barefoot & Pregnant."

April 1

Johnny had forty petitions in hand at the Ugly Annex by the time Red R. Fox's campaign manager stopped by at noon. She apologized, "Red sees conspiracy in your cooperation. He thinks you have a hidden agenda."

"He's half right. I have an agenda. It's to get on the ballot first and politic later. And if we work together we can double our take. It's as simple as that."

"Red doesn't want you on the ballot."

Bobbie Jean wasn't surprised, "Red's group sees black helicopters flying at night. You're sensible so your a threat. What does he do in real life?"

"He has a medical practice."

"Is he an MD?"

"No - Red's a massage therapy acupuncturist."

"Are you sure it isn't an escort service?"

"He's attracted some good people in Mosquito County and he's from Quicksand Beach - so he must have something going for him."

"He does - your platform."

April 2

The gun show turned into a real donnybrook. Five B&P candidates vied for position outside of the entrance doors. G. W. Pylut had the funds and foresight to purchase a booth inside. Beam Me Up - Vinnie Veteran - Red R. Fox and Johnny competed for space outside of the entrance. The manager in charge - profiting from the Craft Show's experience offered this group a table in the back of the hall. However - they had to buy admission - which they did. Little Boy and his entourage of three arrived late and began hassling gun show patrons as they entered. He refused to come inside and was escorted off the property. Johnny was able to solicit two-hundred signed petitions.

April 3

Much slower at the gun show today. Johnny garnered only one-hundred petitions. Six Twits showed up to help Red R. Fox and all refused to work with other candidates.

April 4

Bobbie Jean was interested, "You're looking down. Didn't the gun nuts sign your petitions this weekend?"
"Wasn't all bad. We did three-hundred. I've come to the conclusion that I'm outnumbered. Red R. Fox has shown his true colors and the others have borrowed my message."
"Except the abortion and drug issues."
"Little Boy and Beam Me Up are anti. G. W. Pylut and me are positive. The rest are on the fence."

April 5

Bobbie Jean laid down the paper, "Now you can quit this foolishness."
"What happened?"
"Our congressman - A. Brown Nose had decided not to run."
"Did he give a reason?"

"Wants to spend more time at home with his family."

"Or - quit a winner. Jefro must have promised him a job. A. B. spent his political capital defending Clampet's health care program and tax increase."

Johnny received a phone call from Euphoria Toady's new political reporter. He answered half a-dozen questions about Nose's announcement. The big event of the day was Iron Maiden's announcement of her intentions to run for congress - in the Flat Earth Congressional District. It was carried on the early evening news by all three Mouseville TV stations. Wearing a power red dress - she had her back to a large stand of Sea Grapes and the Atlantic Ocean. No crowd was on hand for her august announcement. Johnny surmised, "There is no ground swell out there for this Maiden."

April 6

Johnny opened Euphoria Toady to the Local section. His telephone interview was on the front page.

"I know of no one out there with a campaign chest in the Tax & Spend Party. Anyone with any brains would not jump in now." Barefoot & Pregnant candidate Ropp compares Mountain William to Happy Stetson - the former B&P governor of Nordic State who ran unsuccessfully for president in 1948 - 1952 - 1964 - 1972 - 1976 and 1980. "Even the people who are strong on abortion have seen enough of him," Ropp said. "He might be able to win the Primary, but the Tax & Spenders would trounce him if they put up somebody on the conservative side."

Bobbie Jean asked, "Did he quote you correctly?"

"Close enough for Euphoria Toady. He left out the problem of a Tax & Spend candidate getting five thousand petitions in less than two weeks and the unfairness of A. Brown Nose

pulling out at such a late date and leaving his party with no viable candidate. Both fairly important items."

"You've accomplished what you set out to do. It's time to come home to your family business."

"You're doing fine without me and Mountain William still might run - so I'll stick around."

"If he runs - we'll have enough candidates to field a football team."

"Catchy name - 'The Barefoot & Pregnant eleven.'"

April 7

Johnny drove south to Pirate's Cove only hospital where he was to be interviewed by the hospital administrator and his assistant. He was surprised - both grilled him on the abortion issue. He had anticipated volunteers. What he didn't anticipate was another grilling by militant Christian antiabortionists. The trip wasn't a total failure. He picked up thirty signed petitions at the hospital complex from disgruntled workers.

April 8

Johnny composed his speech for the Barefoot & Pregnant candidates forum at this weeks executive committee. He handed it to Bobbie Jean and asked, "What do you think?" "Wait until after I read it."

More than ten score ago - our founding fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation - conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Later - our constitution was amended to eliminate slavery and amended again to elevate and guarantee that women have equal status with men.

Any citizen of this great country worth his salt believes in individual

freedom. And each citizen's freedom must be respected - honored and recognized. We must retain and defend this sacred trust of freedom and equality. We must preserve - protect and defend our constitution.

Article six of our constitution rings loud and clear. It defends individual liberty and freedom of religion in no uncertain terms. It states - "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the United States."

And yet members of the B&P party and its candidates for public office are given religious tests by the Christian antiabortionists among us. And I too was given this Christian litmus test by several members of this committee - by our state committeewoman and by Colonel C. T. Source - who is honor bound by oath to preserve - protect and defend our constitution. More than a few of you within this hall have given this religious single issue litmus test to candidates on this podium. If we continue to condone this type of activity - we as members of the Barefoot & Pregnant Party are in direct violation of the laws of - and constitution of these United States.

Members of this committee have stood idly by while our candidates and officers have been accused of reading - of thinking - of voting - of showing compassion to others. And we have sat silent as some of our members preach against protecting our children's teeth. We have remained passive as our Chairman accused the president of mass murder. We have done nothing as some of our members accuse honest elected officials - members of our own party of election fraud. We have encouraged an election system that denies access to the ballot by anyone except the wealthy and connected.

'We should be incensed if a religious group attempted to take over our party yet we have welcomed with open arms the participation of several religious organizations. Organizations with a single issue litmus test and an open religious political agenda. We are trampling on our constitution - we have turned a blind eye toward the constitutional right of religious freedom.

As God fearing Barefoot & Pregnants - we can no longer stand by as our constitution is crucified on the cross of political Christianity. It is time for the brave among us to follow Christ's example. To render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. It is time for our Barefoot & Pregnant Party to stand up - to preserve - protect and defend the constitution of the United States of America. It is time for us to follow Christ's example and throw these religious charaltans out of the temple!

Bobbie Jean put Johnny's speech down, "Didn't know I was married to Patrick Henry. It needs to be said. However - this will be your resignation speech."

"And you want me to quit."

"Well - are you?"

"What? And leave show business."

April 10

Johnny was still two thousand petitions short of his goal of six-thousand with only eight days remaining. His volunteers were busy working in front of libraries and he chose to work in front of the Ugly Annex.

April 11

Averaging a little over one hundred and forty petitions a day - Johnny was resigned. Unless a miracle happened - he could not get the six-thousand petitions he knew he needed.

His people were still gathering petitions for Vinnie Veteran
- G. W. Pylut - Beam Me Up and Fox.

April 12

Johnny sat in front of Crooked Town's library. It was a good day to solicit petitions. His volunteers gathered over two-hundred. However the militant antiabortion Christians were taking their toll. Their new tactic - stand in front of Johnny and his volunteers and disrupt his petition process. Bobbie Jean couldn't understand why they were impeding his efforts, "You're not even listed as an important candidate by Euphoria Toady."

"It has me baffled too. Guess they took offense at my speech to the executive committee."

"You don't give it until the 14th."

"Sent advance copies out to the media in case I'm cut off. They must have intercepted a copy."

April 13

Another twelve hour day made harder by the extra time needed to fend off an increased blocking effort by militant Christians. Bobbie Jean wanted to know, "How are you doing?" "Not as bad as I thought. We have forty-three hundred and I need at least fifty-five hundred. If we can get that many - a twelve percent error rate should yield forty-eight hundred valid petitions."

"Will you make it?"

"No - but we'll go down trying until the bitter end."

"Throw in the towel time?"

"I can't. I have several dedicated volunteers working very hard to get me on the ballot. If I quit now they've done all that work for nothing. If we don't make it - that's fate. I can see why candidates won't quit when the political world is stacked against them."

"Doesn't change reality?"

"No, but it is a slice of real life."

"Still giving the same speech tomorrow?"

"I plan to go down in flames."

"If you do - make sure you pronounce all your words right."

April 14

The candidates forum turned out to be an exercise in futility for Johnny. Seven candidates elbowed each other for position on stage. Iron Maiden was a no show. A microphone malfunction cost Johnny one minute out of his allotted five. He was cut off two minutes early - just before he arrived to the inflammatory part of his speech - where he threw down the gauntlet - tossing the charlatan militant money changers out of the B&P temple.

April 15

Bobbie Jean laid down the morning copy of Euphoria Toady, "They didn't write about your speech. But the head of the Christian Coalition is quoted as saying, 'Johnny Ropp doesn't follow our platform.'

"I think he meant the B&P platform. They have chiseled their antiabortion plank into it on stone."

"Must mean a lot to them. They keep referring to it."

"There is an old saying about allowing a camel to stick its nose under the tent."

"I thought you would be hit with a frontal attack."

"Didn't have to. Not after they cut my five minute speech down to two minutes."

"Your stance on drugs will cost you."

"Because I'm for treatment not amputation?"

"You forgot the politicians creed - if you can't say it in a ten second sound bite - don't."

April 16 - 17

A gathering of petitions.

April 18

Johnny delivered five-hundred petitions to the Backwater election office while Betty Boop carried 5000 petitions to the Mosquito County elections office - just beating the noon deadline.

Over dinner Bobbie Jean asked Johnny, "What did you learn?"

"When given an opportunity to buy my way onto the ballot - do it. This is too hard. Too much like work when it should have been fun. The second thing I learned is - next time - run unopposed."

"How do you like your crow?"

"Well done."

"Do you think you made it?"

"I started too late."

"How many petitions did you get for your opposition?"

"Almost a thousand."

"And how many did they give you?"

"Less than one-hundred."

"Instead of getting there first with the most you got there last with the least."

"Your favorite Civil War general - Nathan Forrest?"

"Not civil - Dear. It was the war of northern aggression."

There was nothing very remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so very much out of the way to hear the rabbit say to itself "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!"

8

April 19

Johnny slept in this morning and napped half the afternoon - more out of relief than from being worn out on the petition drive. Beam Me Up Scotty called at dinner time. He and Little Boy were the only two candidates invited to a militant Christian political forum in Crooked Town. Johnny asked, "How did you do?"

"They were measuring us to see which one of us would get the militant Christian support."

"Did you win it?"

"When they asked for born again Christians to stand - I couldn't. I'm Catholic. So it looks like a walk over for Little Boy."

"Why didn't they invite all the candidates?"

"Little Boy and I are the only two announced antiabortionist candidates."

"Iron Maiden is too. She took my head off at a meeting in Pirate Cove for not supporting the Christian Coalition plank in the B&P platform."

"She hasn't made a public statement. She might be waiting to see which way the wind is blowing. You and G. W. Pylut are the only two announced candidates who don't support our God given right to have government determine what a woman can or cannot do with her own body."

"The way I look at it - we're the only two candidates who have Christ's compassion. And we're the only two who read the old testament and understand God's will. He gave woman freedom of choice when he banished Eve from the Garden. He

understands his intentions. Some of his followers don't."
"Peace. How did you do on your petition drive?"
"I started to late. Don't think I made it."
"I didn't get enough to bother turning them in. I'll have to buy my way in."
"Even though you'll have eleven challengers in the race?"
"I'm the only native Euphorian. That alone will make it easier for me to win."
"Might, but ten to one is still a sucker bet."

April 20

Bobbie Jean poured Johnny's coffee, "You made this morning's Euphoria Toady."
"Am I Toady's expose of the day?"
"You and the rest of your loony B&P candidates. The article tallies the number of petitions you turned in. They have you for five thousand - Red R. Fox for six thousand seven hundred and G. W. Pylut for six thousand. I thought you had fifty-five hundred."
"I do. They only counted the ones in Mosquito County. What about the rest?"
"Vinnie Veteran - Beam Me Up Scotty - Dick A. Dickey - Hill William - Iron Maiden and Perky Patty may pay \$10700 each to enter the race. Who gets the money?"
"The political parties get the lions share. It's a major source of party funds. Which is one of the reasons the price is so ridiculously high."

April 21

Johnny drove to Swamp County to sign an undue burden statement. Not to do so would cost ten cents a petition and to top it off - the elections officials would not accept cash or a personal check. It had to come from a campaign account which he didn't have and would be an undue burden to open. When he returned home - Vinnie Veteran's wife called for a

chat, "G. W. Pylut showed up at the moving wall with campaign buttons and signs. Vinnie told him to leave. We don't allow politics at war memorials. Did you turn in your petitions?" Johnny knew she was digging to see if he was upset at Vinnie for not providing more than a token few, "Yes, but we don't hold out much hope. Is Vinnie going to buy his way in?" "We're thinking about it, but we haven't made up our minds. If you don't make it by the petition route are you going to pay the fee?" "No - I will not. Too many candidates spoil the political broth. Where is Vinnie?" "At the veteran's reunion. Did you here that Perky Patty is going to switch parties and run as a Tax & Spender?" "Just rumors - nothing official."

April 22

Johnny put the newspaper down, "It's official. Miss Pitty Pat is going to run as a Tax & Spend candidate for congress."

"Pitty Pat?"

"Perky Patty Pitty Pat. She switched parties."

"Do they give any reason why?"

"They quote her as saying, 'The local Barefoot & Pregnant Party is not tolerant of people who believe women have a choice.' Pitty Pat is right, but that's not the reason she switched parties. The odds are eleven to one if she runs in our primary. As the only Tax & Spend candidate she won't have to worry about a Primary."

"If she's seen you and the other candidates and has decided to run - Pitty Pat must sense that you're all losers."

"I was the first one to throw my hat in the ring and we now have eleven others in opposition? I must be the vulnerable one or there is an overabundance of hubris in our Flat Earth congressional district."

"As usual your right on both counts. Have a final inspection with our contractor today. Want to come along?"

"Might as well. I don't have anything on my schedule until a speech at a Titus trailer park tonight."

"Will they feed you?"

"No. Little Boy and I are invited to speak an hour after a pot luck dinner."

"You've done that before. No one will be awake."

Bobbie Jean was right on the mark. Not only was the entire audience nodding off and on - the Mosquito County Clerk of Courts droned on and on before Little Boy spoke. By the time they were finished - Johnny was standing up before a sea of heads rolling like waves on the storm tossed Atlantic. When he arrived home - Bobbie Jean was waiting, "Any converts?"

"Almost all were expatriate Tax & Spenders from the northeast. They woke up when I began to list the federal departments - offices and agencies I was recommending for elimination."

"How did Little Boy do?"

"He's floating downstream without an oar since Nosey quit the race. Perky Patty doesn't have a record he can attack."

"He's been a busy little investigator. G. W. Pylut's wife telephoned while you were out. It seems that Little Boy has sent away for her husband's military records and university records."

"Dick Tuck is alive and well in Mosquito County. Can they get them?"

"Not unless Pylut approves. Can I see your list?"

"Only if I approve."

"Or after I break one of your kneecaps. Is it that bad?"

"I spent a few days waiting on people to sign my petitions studying the structure of our executive branch. I came up with a list of unneeded and duplicative departments."

"Can I see the list?"

"Yes, but remember - no job necessary will be left undone."

Eliminate Five Departments

Department of Agriculture

Department of Education

Department of Labor

Department of Health

Department of Housing

Eliminate Five Offices

Office of Administration

Office of Policy Development

Office of Science and Technology

Office of Trade Representative

Office of Drug Control Policy

Eliminate Two Councils

Council of Economic Advisors

Council on Environment

Eliminate Thirty-Six Agencies

Action

Equal Opportunity Employment Commission

Farm Credit Administration

Federal Election Commission

Federal Maritime Commission
Federal Trade Commission
National Foundation on Arts
National Labor Relations Board
National Science Foundation
Selective Service System
Small Business Administration
Tennessee Valley Authority
Agency For International Development
Commission on Civil Rights
Information agency
International Trade Commission
Administrative Conference
Appalachian Regional Commission
Commission of Fine Arts
Federal Labor Relations Authority
Inter-American Foundation
Merit Systems Protection Board
National Commission on Libraries
Occupational Safety and Health Commission
Panama Canal Commission
Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation
Postal Rate Commission
Commission on Employment of the Handicapped
Council on Physical Fitness
Railroad Retirement Board
Parole Commission

General Services Administration
Consumer Product Safety Commission
Export Import Bank
Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
National Mediation Board

Bobbie Jean asked, "Have you thought this out? You're wiping out half the offices in DC."

"And almost all of them hire consultants to do their work."

"I'm missing your point."

"Eliminate the middle man and the consultants. Let congress - our courts and the remaining offices take up the slack."

"How about the Parole Commission?"

"Justice Department. Convene a panel of volunteers when their needed."

"Export Import Bank?"

"No longer needed. Banks are now international."

"One more - the trade agencies."

"Since we've had them our trade deficit has grown and our exports are in the tank. Commerce duplicates their efforts."

"I'm worried."

"How so?"

"You're beginning to make sense."

April 26

Bobbie Jean asked, "What are you doing now?"

Johnny had a rye smile, "I'm looking for miracles. Not much else I can do until I see if I make it on the ballot."

"I plan on opening our restaurant on the first of May. I'll need your help."

"You don't need my help. You've got a great location - the facility matches it and you know how to run a business."

"I don't want to work fourteen hour days. I need someone I can trust who knows my rules."

"What are your rules?"

"Good food - good service - moderate prices and honest help. I need someone I trust as manager and near the cash register until I can vet all of our employees."

"How long will that take?"

"At least ninety days."

"How about surveillance cameras?"

"Built in where no one can find them. We'll run new tapes for sixty straight days and then reuse them."

"Checking for exterior and interior threats?"

"Yes - both. Our Chef in Virginia can check up on food preparation and he knows how to spot food going out the back door. If we have a robbery we can match that tape with tapes of previous customers going back sixty days."

"And if an employee has his or her hand in the till?"

"The camera will catch them."

April 27

Bobbie Jean smiled, "The Reactionary Weekly has the head of the Young Barefoot & Pregnants rating the candidates on their front page."

"How did I come out?"

"Damned with faint praise. He gave Little Boy high marks. How old is the Young B&P chairman?"

"Don't know, but he looks old in the tooth. Read what he said about me."

"This gentleman calls himself a compassionate conservative. One thing I have noticed about Johnny Ropp is that he is not a big fan of the Christian Coalition - perhaps because they are antiabortion and he favors a woman's right to decide. Also - at a Barefoot & Pregnant forum he said on a question about drugs, "We must take the profit motive out of drugs." Does that mean legalize them? He has taken pot shots at former B&P

congressional candidate - Mountain William. Is he a threat if he jumps into the race? I will tell you that Mr. Ropp takes a good stand on the military - he opposes environmental takings of private property and he opposes retroactive taxes and I agree with him.' "

"I'd say it was a fair article."

"You'll be trashed because of your stance on drugs."

"Hard to get something that complicated out in sound bites."

"I'd back off talking about it."

"Only if I'm asked."

April 28

Backwater County finished counting Johnny's petitions. He had a thirteen percent error rate. Out of five hundred petitions - Four hundred thirty-five were deemed acceptable and sixty-five were not. Bobbie Jean asked, "Just what is the exact count you need?"

"Four thousand seven hundred seventy-eight. If the thirteen percent error rate holds I'll get exactly four thousand seven hundred eighty five. I'll make it by seven petitions."

"When will the Mosquito County count be completed?"

"Not until next week. They're having trouble with Little Boy's petitions. He decided to go the random route. I should have - too."

"How do they do that?"

"Pull cards at random and use the percentage as a whole."

"How about Red R. Fox?"

"He had an eighteen percent error rate. Same as G. W. Pylut, but they both made it."

"They finished theirs and not yours?"

"I was first in and it looks like I'll be last out."

"More like first out. Someone is cooking the books on you."

"The long arm of the Christian militants?"

"They're not Christian, but they are militant."

April 30

Able Baker Charlie telephoned Johnny from the elections office with news that dispelled more than a few rumors, "As far as I know we're still counting G. W. Pylut's and Little Boy's petitions. Red R. Fox is the only candidate who has qualified so far."

"How about the others?"

"Beam Me Up - Vinnie Veteran - Iron Maiden and Dick Dickey didn't turn petitions in."

"Don't you find it strange that most of our citizen activists are supporting politicians. Strange bedfellows - indeed."

"You have a lot to learn about politics - Johnny. What have you planned to do between now and the primary?"

"Our restaurant opens tomorrow. That will keep me busy. I don't have another speech scheduled until the middle of August - almost four months downstream. Euphoria sure has strange timing for its primary. It's right on top of the general election."

"Our legislature set this up when Euphoria was a one party state. Now that the Tax & Spenders are out of power it's coming back to haunt them."

"How soon will you begin to count my petitions?"

"Should start late tomorrow."

May 1

Bobbie Jean opened their restaurant at four in the afternoon without advertising or fanfare, "No grand opening for the 'special' people. All that would do is make everyone else mad."

"And the special people won't support you anyway. They eat at home or at their 'special' clubs. Where do you want me?"

"At the cash register. If we can get our food quality up - we'll snare one or two wheels."

"You already have a line at the front desk. Those are our 'special' customers."

At four-thirty Johnny punched intercom and asked Bobbie Jean, "How is the crowd?"

"We're half full with more are coming in. It'll be a little rough. I didn't expect so many customers this soon."

"Dining out is a contact sport in Mosquito County. Kitchen is running smooth and the bar is - too. Your people from Virginia have it under control. Our local help may be able to go solo in a couple of weeks."

"We'll see. Remember - this area is Mayberry squared."

Johnny locked the door to the outside at ten - the last customer was out the door at ten thirty. Johnny and Bobbie Jean sat downstairs at the bar - sipping coffee as their cleaning crew finished up. He asked, "What do we change?" "Nothing for now. We had a thirty minute wait for tables so I might expand our appetizer menu."

"I was upstairs. Did we have many standing?"

"Just a few at the bar downstairs. We can serve overflow in the bar upstairs. We'll begin our reservation system in two weeks. I notified each patron that we will change to a waiting list only in two weeks. I hope they all understood. We were in a learning mode."

"Same reservation system as Virginia?"

"Yes - half reservations and half first available. We'll encourage dining in the lower and upstairs bar areas if we get too crowded."

"How did the menu go over?"

"No one complained and we had quite a few compliments. I'll check with the Chef tomorrow afternoon and see which items were the most popular."

May 2

Betty Boop was still laughing, "I've had phone calls from Twits all morning. They're furious with you."

Johnny switched the phone to his right ear, "What happened that I should know?"

"The Mouseville Guard wrote about Perky Patty switching parties. They named you as a Twit activist in the same article. Our Mosquito County Twits are livid. They think you're behind this misinformation campaign."

"The only ones who would complain are Fox supporters."

"Today is Saturday - I'll call the Guard reporter on Monday and get a retraction."

May 3

Able Baker Charlie telephoned right after breakfast, "We're still counting yours, but everyone else who went the petition route made the ballot. You should have gone the random count route like Little Boy."

"Has anyone committed to buying their way on?"

"Beam Me Up and Iron Maiden have committed."

"That makes five for sure."

"If you don't make it are you going to pony up ten thousand to get on?"

"Not in my playbook."

May 4

The supervisor of elections telephoned late in the day, "Sorry Johnny - you didn't make it."

"I feel like Charlie the tuna. How much did we miss it by?"

"Less than a-hundred."

"Can I demand a recount?"

"Only if you want to pay for it and it will cost you over a thousand dollars."

"I'll pass."

Bonbbie Jean asked, "What are we celebrating?"

"I didn't make it on the ballot."

"Good - you'll be done with this foolishness."

"I'm going to run as a write-in in the B&P primary."

"You are a stubborn one. Is it hubris?"

"No - I've come this far. I want to play this hand out."

"Can I give you a piece of unsolicited advice?"

"Fire away."

"When you're dealt a losing hand - fold."

"What and leave show business?"

"Are you going the write-in route?"

"If I can garner twenty percent of the votes - I might make the primary runoff. That is if there are seven candidates in on the ballot not counting me. If I can do that - I'll be on the ballot for the runoff."

"If the militant Christians did there best to keep you off the ballot - they'll figure a way to nullify your write-in campaign."

"That's why I'm going to hang in there. It will be fun to see how they do it."

May 5

Mountain William declares his intentions to run for the state legislature. Bobbie Jean nudged Johnny, "You did your job. Both A. B. Nose and Hill William have decided not to run for congress. How much have you spent so far?"

"A whopping eight hundred dollars."

"You couldn't win dog catcher on your campaign budget."

"I can be a gadfly in the election process. Betty Boop polled our volunteers. They want to have a go."

"I've seen your volunteers. Counting you - it's the over the hill gang."

"I've come up with a motto."

"I'm waiting with baited breath."

"Vote none of the above - write in Johnny Ropp for congress."

"Are you going to back up your words with money?"

"Not at eight to one."

"Your slogan could be the Sermon on the Mount and without publicity you can't win. And you have one more problem."

"I'm waiting."

"This is the Flat Earth Congressional District."

"My God - you're right. A compound sentence is too hard here - let alone writing-in on a ballot."

May 6

After reading Euphoric election laws and asking for a second opinion - Johnny discovered that he had qualified for the general ballot as a write-in candidate. The state legislature had written an election law so that a write-in candidate on the primary ballot was not allowed.

"If that's all you know about it - you may stand down," continued the King. "I can't go no lower" said the Hatter, "I'm on the floor as it is."

9

May 7

Bobbie Jean asked, "Why did they send out a pink form for write-in candidates?"

"So they could identify the malcontents."

"You've one piece of luck. Out of your mass of candidates running for congress you're the only one who has qualified for the general election."

"It was to easy. There has to be a catch. Is there an article about the results of the petition drive in Euphoria Toady? I was interviewed by one of their reporters over the phone yesterday."

"Yes - it's in the third section."

Three Barefoot & Pregnant candidates qualify to run for congress. A fourth candidate - Johnny Ropp - of Under Water turned in more than the required four thousand seven-hundred seventy-eight signatures - but not enough were verified as Barefoot & Pregnant. Red R. Fox - Little Boy and G. W. Pylut qualified. Although Ropp said he is out of the primary - he is not out of the race. "I am going to run as a write-in candidate in the general election" Ropp said. "I will run Barefoot & Pregnant but I will not be the B&P nominee. I will be the alternative to whoever the B&P and Tax and Spenders put up." Ropp has submitted the paperwork which must be in by May 20th to run as a write in.

Bobbie Jean frowned, "You didn't tell me that you sent your paperwork in."

"If you notice - the pink forms are still on my desk. I have to do another oath at the elections office before I can turn them in."

"Are you a serious candidate?"

"Only if my Party nominates a militant Christian."

"They'll figure a way to nullify you."

"The only way they can do that is to run their own write-in candidate."

"How would that effect you."

"A write-in candidate will only be successful if like Tigger - he is the only one. With two the uniqueness is gone. Both would be considered a nuisance."

"Either way - you qualify."

May 8

Bobbie Jean took out the needle - stuck it in and began to turn it - slowly, "You were in the race for the learning experience. The petition drive is over - so by now you must be really smart. Tell me - what did you learn about Flat Earth politics?"

"If I had to do it over again - I'd have ladies working the supermarket parking lots to get my petitions signed."

"Why ladies?"

"They're less threatening and get better results. Libraries are only good for three weeks. After that you get too many repeat customers. And I'd continue a table outside the local county drivers license and car license offices."

"How about Party support?"

"Won't get any in this district. Our Party activists bring new meaning to egocentric. Everyone of them is an expert. Most don't know they're mostly ex. If they can't be king - or choose the king - our party faithful could care less about supporting anyone else. Hard line party people are not interested in ideas. They're only interested in control."

"That means you - too. Your not supporting anyone."

"Touché! Can't find anyone with my ideas."

"Pylut - Veteran and Fox are close."

"If one of them wins - I'll drop out."

"Your favorite subject - abortion. How does it play in local politics? What is the real issue?"

"Seems strange to build a religion around worship of man in the form of the unborn. And stranger yet to make it the single issue to support a candidate. I've seen how religion controls citizens of other countries up close. We are one of a handful of countries where freedom of religion is the law of the land. In the rest of the world it is barely tolerated by most and in a few countries not at all. The real issue is life and death. A true Christian welcomes death as a friend. Without death there is no resurrection. For Christians to espouse life as the litmus test of their religion is to deny the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. We have a choice - to limit life at the beginning or to hasten its end. And the reason we have this free will is because God cast Adam and Eve out of the garden. As a result we are doomed to choose. If we must choose isn't it more humane to limit our families to the number we can support? If we don't do planning now - eventually millions will die a young - painful death of starvation and disease. The proof of the pudding is in Africa - Arabia - India and Indonesia."

"You're preaching to the choir. Tell me - if you were a woman would you have an abortion?"

"If I were a woman I wouldn't have an unwanted pregnancy. If I did become pregnant - I don't know. We only have two. We've made the choice to plan our family. Have you noticed that most evangelicals who espouse antiabortion sentiments have one child or no children at all."

"No - I didn't."

"Worse yet - we've become a country where the poor have many children and the rich have few."

"A situation ripe for revolution. How about your walkabout campaign."

"Boy - was that a mistake. What I thought was a new idea was

old hat around here. Our Governor - Rabid Koon wore that ploy out. I really tried to walk. He rode most of the way and walked a bit for sound bites. I learned what he knew. In a land of strip malls - there are no town centers."

"I remember. His nickname was Runnin' Rabid. Is he a piece of work. Plays poor mouth and is one of the richest men in the State of Euphoria. The number one Old Boy in the old boy network. If he was in a horse race he'd cut across the infield to win."

"And when he dies - they'll build a monument to him."

"Fits the profile of your average Tax & Spender."

"You forgot one item. I tried to run a populus campaign on five dollar contributions."

"Didn't work did it?"

"The populus worships the candidate with the most bucks. And the only way to get a message out is to pay for it."

"I researched a proper campaign for you. If you were frugal and kept your advertising costs to a series of TV & radio ads and two mailouts you could get by on five-hundred thousand."

"And if I was a popular incumbent with a government printing press and franking privileges?"

"Less than a hundred thousand."

May 10

Johnny drove to the election office in Cow Pasture to get his oath witnessed and signed. Able Baker Charlie shook his hand afterwards, "Sorry Johnny - I've been asked to tell you that you have to resign from the executive committee."

"I'm not resigning from the party."

"You swore an oath to support the party's candidate."

"I'll send a letter to Charlie Compromise today."

"One other thing. Anyone else who actively supports you will have to resign for the same reason."

"Ain't easy being an outsider - is it."

"Our election laws and party rules are a stacked deck."

May 11

Able Baker called from the election office, "You have company. Someone named Sam Iam Sunday sent his papers in to be a write-in candidate. Very unusual. As far as we know - under the current election laws - you were the first write-in for federal office in the State of Euphoria. That covers more than a few years and a lot of districts."

"Is Sam Iam a liberal - conservative or a Twit?"

"I have no idea. No one has ever heard of him."

"Has anyone purchased their way on?"

"So far Iron Maiden is the only one. Veteran and Beam Me Up Scotty are making noises, but haven't come in. So we have four for sure on the B&P side - Perky Patty is the only T&S and you and Sam Iam are independent write-ins."

"The less than magnificent seven."

Bobbie Jean shook her head, "You said you'd only have a chance if you were the only one. Now there are two."

"Sunday has to be a plant of the militant Christians."

"You had to spout off your mouth to that reporter."

"I wanted to let the evangelical nuts know they couldn't run me off."

"They can and I would too."

"Let's wait and see how the Primary goes. I won't be doing very much politicking until after it's over anyway."

"You're beginning to sound like a Greek god of vanity has scrambled your brains."

May 13

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny this morning's third section of Euphoria Toady, "Read the lead story."

Doctor Doctor enters a crowded Barefoot & Pregnant race for the Flat Earth congressional district seat. Doctor Doctor - a Swamp Harbor pill

pusher and conservative activist is running on a pro-serf platform. He states, "When I went to school we learned that European serfs were exploited by landowners." Doctor Doctor is head of the Mosquito County Commune Coalition - an active antiabortion forum. If the Christian Coalition is the Mensheviks of the antiabortion movement - the Commune Coalition is Bolshevik. Doctor Doctor's campaign slogan is- All Power To The Serfs!

"The real militant Christian has finally arrived. I know they won't support Beam Me Up - he's Catholic. I wonder why the antiabortion folks dropped Little Boy. He claims to be born again - or why they won't support Iron Maiden? She told me she was their number one supporter."

"Are you asking me?"

"No - just rhetorical."

"How many candidates does that make?"

"Five Barefoot & Pregnants - one Tax & Spend - two write-ins and two more in the wings. A plethora of politicians."

May 14

Bobbie Jean laughed as she closed the third section of Euphoria Toady, "The other shoe has dropped. Read section three."

Barefoot & Pregnant pollution is rampant in the Flat Earth District congressional race. Little Boy accuses G. W. Pylut of youthful immoral acts. And Perky Patty - running unopposed as the Tax & Spend candidate is called a turncoat by the B&P County Chairman. Dick A. Dickey drops out of the race as Doctor Doctor takes over the antiabortionist banner as the most militant. Johnny Ropp - running as an independent Barefoot & Pregnant - is accused of not following his Party's antiabortion platform.

Entering a foray of mudslinging and innuendo are the following folks. The Barefoot & Pregnant candidates are Iron Maiden - Beam Me Up Scotty - Little Boy - G.W. Pylut - Doctor Doctor and Vinnie Veteran. The Tax & Spend candidate is Perky Patty. Johnny Ropp and Sam Iam Sunday are trailing far behind as write-ins.

Bobbie Jean said, "You should have waited till the last minute before tipping your hand."

"I've never been known for being patient. So Vinnie paid his way in. Hope he knows something I don't. That's another lesson I've learned. Don't bet your money on an unknown horse."

"You didn't answer my question about tipping your hand."

"The political Christians are the most astute practitioners of cutthroat political art since the time of Machiavelle's Prince."

May 15

Johnny wrapped up his work on campaign slogans and handed a short list to Bobbie Jean, "Tell me what you think. Remember I'm trying to draw attention to an unknown candidate who isn't on the ballot."

"What's your ultimate goal?"

"I know I can't win as a write-in. However, if I can compete in a runoff - I'll be on the ballot and that will give me a chance to win."

*Get off the political merry-go-round
Write-in Johnny Ropp for congress!*

*Vote none of the above
Write-in Johnny Ropp for congress!*

*He's not Barefoot & Pregnant
He's not Tax & Spend
He's what our district needs
He's a horses rear end!
Write-in Johnny Ropp for congress!*

PSST

*Join the whispering campaign
Write-in Johnny Ropp for congress!*

Bobbie Jean pointed toward the horses rear end, "While I agree with it - the last one is more dignified and might catch on - in Virginia. However - it might be a bit complex for your sixty-sixth district voters. I'd go with none of the above or the whispering campaign. We have an hour before the restaurant opens. Do a strength and weakness chart on the other candidates. It might help you change your mind and stop this foolishness."

May 17

Bobbie Jean began to read Johnny's assessment of his opposition.

Iron Maiden

Strong points - Looks good in a suit. Has what may be a strong Backwater County power base. Appears to have the ability to raise campaign funds. Should make run-off with her Backwater County support.

Weak points - Suit may be empty of conviction. Switched from antiabortion to free will. Late entry into campaign may represent opportunistic tendencies. Mosquito County Barefoot

& Pregnant women are at odds from disagreements and clashes during her tenure as a B&P Euphoric representative at state and federal levels.

Beam Me Up Scotty

Strong Points - Comes across as a nice guy. A good steno. Takes down everything the other candidates say. Antiabortion, but not militant. Has a small core of very active supporters.

Weak points - Came in late to a many person race. Has not been able to raise sufficient campaign funds. Local militants won't support a Catholic candidate. Works full time - so he can only campaign part time.

Little Boy

Strong Points - Looks good in a suit. Says what will win. Works hard at campaigning. Well organized and appears to be intelligent.

Weak points - Suit may be empty of conviction. Early stages of campaign marked with obfuscation on major issues. No longer the choice of the militant evangelists, but still claims he is antiabortion. Negative campaign tactics may turn voters off. Works full time. Can only campaign part time. Wife is power behind the candidate.

G. W. Pylut

Strong Points - Looks good in a suit and looks like an old time congressman. Has local business support and old time party support. Has adequate funding. Has rented a campaign office so his effort looks serious.

Weak Points - Works full time. Intelligent, but not well versed on issues. Proponent of free will in a militant antiabortion district. Acts like a politician - i.e. lacks conviction and tends to exaggerate. Does not have enough funds to overcome first impressions.

Vinnie Veteran

Strong Points - Looks good in a suit. Strong patriotic campaign theme. Has support of Vietnam Veterans. Has a positive image. Avoids antiabortion issue.

Weak Points - Works full time. Has little time to campaign. Wears a full beard which hasn't worked politically since the nineteenth century. Has limited financial backing. Patriotic theme is a self limiting issue. Eventually must have issues from the gut to run on.

Doctor Doctor

Strong Points - An unknown quantity. Has a horde of active supporters from militant evangelical extremist groups. Has to have money from the above to run. Should be able to tap the medical profession for funds. With a strong twenty percent base going in - will certainly win a run-off slot in the Primary.

Weak Points - An unknown quantity. Has an appearance that by comparison - makes Abe Lincoln a handsome man. Works full time. Has little time to campaign. Only convictions are militant antiabortionism. Meaner than a junk yard dog.

Red R. Fox

Strong Points - Gets a lot of laughs. Has a stand up comedian approach to campaigning. Has a hammer lock on Twit volunteers. Platform is I'm a Twit - plus.

Weak Points - Lacks a sense of humor. Gives appearance of not being serious enough for campaigning. Lack of funds. A New York minute. Paranoid - conspiracy nut. Platform is I'm a Twit - plus.

Sam Iam Sunday

Strong Points - Write-in militant antiabortion.

Weak Points - Write-in militant antiabortion.

Perky Patty

Strong Points - Perky cheerleader for the Tax & Spend crowd. Moderate conservative. Pro woman's right to free will in controlling bodily functions. A known quantity in the community.

Weak Points - Switched from being Barefoot & Pregnant to Tax & Spend for political office. Smacks of opportunism. Lost last time out. Pro woman in an anti woman Flat Earth congressional district. Has to carry Jeffro Clampet's baggage in an anti Clampet district.

Johnny Ropp

Strong Points - Compassionate conservative. Populus candidate. Strong platform ideas. Pro woman.

Weak Points - Compassionate conservative in an angry evangelical district. Platform is too advanced for the Flat Earth. Populus campaign. Refuses to accept sufficient funds to run a winning campaign. Not a serious candidate.

Bobbie Jean set Johnny's assessments on the kitchen table, "You'll never be a politician."

"Have to agree with your assessment. A politician today is a person who isn't afraid to shake down the electorate for funds and ignore them when he's in office."

"Did you notice what you put down for Sunday?"

"Militant Christian?"

"Don't you see what they've done. He's qualified as a write-in candidate in case a pro woman candidate wins the Primary."

"I am paranoid. I thought he was running to dilute my chances of getting into a run-off."

"That too. It was a smart move on their part. Now that you've made your assessment - Isn't it time to give up this foolishness."

"Let's see who wins the Primary."

May 19

Johnny unfolded his copy of Reactionary Weekly, "Bobbie Jean - I made the news again."

"What do the property rights people have to say this week?"

"My friends - a few weeks ago I did my review on the congressional race in the Flat Earth congressional district. My goal was to briefly report from what I saw and the facts I had obtained. One gentleman in this race is Johnny Ropp - an Under Water restaurant owner. My goal was not to bad mouth anybody - just report the facts. Ropp took exception to the thumbs down approach by me and the militant Christians. I am not a member of the militant evangelicals - nor am I a member of any political religious organization. I mentioned the antiabortion issue because I was receiving phone calls at home and on my radio program. It is an issue that my listeners wanted to know about. In reference to what Johnny Ropp said about eliminating the drug problem by eliminating the profit motive. Well - he is dead wrong on that issue. In reference to Little Boy - I have not endorsed Boy. He told me he has always been opposed to NAFTA since he has understood the treaty. I do not know what tactics Little Boy used during the petition drive. However he made it on the ballot and Ropp didn't. The object is to win.

Bobbie Jean laughed, "You made him mad. Was it the old - young B&P?"

"It was. Did you get the part about not belonging to any political Christian group?"

"Yes - why?"

"None of the political Christian groups are political. They lose their tax exempt status if they admitted they were."

"So he's a member?"

"Probably to more than one group."

"How can one over thirty be president of a young political group?"

"Once in office - one doesn't want to give up perks."

May 20

Bobbie Jean couldn't believe the ad rates, "The country music stations charge twice as much as the one that plays Glen Miller music."

"Tells you something about our Mosquito County's body politic when Hillbilly stations charge more for advertising than ones programmed for citizens who read and write."

"Who called on the telephone after dinner?"

"Beam Me Up. He estimates there'll only be fifty thousand votes in the Primary."

"Why so few?"

"The powers that be schedule the Primary when our winter residents are out of state."

"How many votes does he think he'll need to make a run-off?"

"Ten thousand. I would have doubled his numbers. He has run for office before - so he must know."

May 21

Euphoria Toady has an article about a candidate running for State Senate being arrested for petitioning at his local Post Office.

May 26

Johnny attended a Barefoot & Pregnant candidate forum in Quicksand Beach with Betty Boop. He was promised two minutes to say hello and then was denied at the door. He and Betty Boop left as Vinnie Veteran said, "If you've heard me before - raise your hands." Like East Germans - they voted with their feet. Betty Boop frowned, "You're being frozen out. Do you think it's time to fold your tent?"

"My wife says the same thing. I want to hang in there until the Primary is over."

"Not much you can do until then if you won't commit."

"Who is that putting up signs?"

"Iron Maiden's husband. He's a retired Northern Air Lines copilot."

"Image over substance."

June 3

Bobbie Jean wondered, "You've cleared all the political stuff off your desk. Is it too much to ask? Are you finally throwing in the towel?"

"No - I'm going to low key it until after the primary. I have no funds or support and we're not going into debt over one of my whims."

"You tend to be like Mr. Toad of Toad Hall in 'Wind and the Willows'. You see a new toy or game and you must have it."

"An honest politician is one who when he's bought - stays bought."

"You didn't come up with that. Who did?"

"Times have not changed a whit. Simon Cameron coined that phrase one-hundred and fifty or so years ago."

"There is a political article about Little Boy and Doctor Doctor in the third section of Euphoria Toady. Little Boy is upset because Doctor Doctor's political religious group grilled him - gave him the antiabortion litmus test and then decided withdraw their support. They quote Beam Me Up Scotty as saying, 'This is much ado about nothing. I would not have entered this race if I the militant Christians had decided to support Little Boy.'"

"What he didn't say was that he wouldn't have entered himself if he knew that Doctor Doctor was going to - too."

"How about your campaign?"

"On hold until something important happens - like a train wreck with all of the other candidates on board."

"Good - I need you at our restaurant."

July 16

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny this mornings paper as he sat down at the kitchen table, "I thought you weren't going to do anything until the Primary was over. The Toady political reporter has a column about you."

"After everyone opened an office except me I couldn't resist getting a dig in." He opened the paper to the third section.

Independent candidate for U.S. congress - Johnny Ropp of Under Water released some big news from his campaign this week. "I want to make an announcement that I'm not opening a campaign headquarters," said Ropp a local restaurant owner. And I'm not holding a fund raiser." That doesn't mean his following isn't growing by leaps and bounds. "I've got and understanding wife - a friendly dog and ten loyal supporters. Other than that - I haven't asked for money or for additional support. A politician would ask and I won't," Ropp said. You might say this man isn't serious about running. Ropp simply says he's older than dirt and doesn't have time to waste. After working for four straight months on his petition drive, Johnny says he needs a break from campaigning. Since declaring his candidacy as an independent - Ropp has had a falling out with the Barefoot & Pregnant Party - criticizing its religious right wing. In the meantime he's working in his new oceanfront restaurant.

"He copied my press release almost verbatim."

"Now everyone will think my husband is insane."

"As long as they don't come after me with a net."

"If they don't I will."

"I've received calls from Beam Me Up - G. W. Pylut and Vinnie Veteran asking for my support."

"Will you?"

"If one of them wins the Primary - I will."

July 30

Bobbie Jean laughed, "I know you made a promise to stay away from politics for awhile, but this is too good to pass up. She handed Johnny the third section of Euphoria Toady.

Darwin Meets Mosquito County Politics. The militant Christians have sent out a questionnaire to most of the Flat Earth congressional district candidates. The lead question is, "Do you maintain that Darwin's theory of evolution is a scientific fact?" Thirty-four more questions continue about the origin of man. As women were not mentioned - it is assumed that they were not created, but evolved. The Barefoot & Pregnant Mosquito County State Committeeman received one of these questionnaires. He says, "These folks are Neanderthals. This is the same group that prefers rotten teeth over Fluoridated water."

Johnny handed the paper back to Bobbie Jean, "Creationism - after antiabortion must be the second litmus test."

"What was it your Air Force friend said?"

"Ignorance and superstition will always win out over science and fact. I hope our committeeman is right about our Flat Earth creatures being Neanderthals. The Neanderthals were a genetic dead end."

August 9

The results of the candidate interviews by the Mosquito County Realtors Association were in the third section of today's Euphoria Toady. Bobbie Jean asked, "Who did they endorse?"

"Perky Patty and G. W. Pylut - they list Iron Maiden - Beam Me Up and Little Boy as qualified. Didn't even mention Vinnie Veteran - Doctor Doctor or me."

"You were on the way to the golf course?"

"I was returning."

"In your shorts - golf shirt and tennis shoes?"

"Sweat had mostly dried."

"Your lucky they didn't hose you down or turn you away."

"Toady has a Mosquito County abortion survey."

"Read it to me."

"Sixty-one percent want the laws to remain as they are. Twenty-nine percent say it's okay for rape - incest or as a lifesaving procedure. Eight percent say never and two percent don't know."

"I'd say your Barefoot & Pregnant Party has picked the wrong horse."

"It proves that a minority of activists can take over almost any organization."

August 14

Bobbie Jean said, "You made the newspaper again."

"There is so much internal fighting right now - I don't think the Barefoot & Pregnant Party can survive the way things are," said Johnny Ropp of Under Water. Ropp was a member of Mosquito County's B&P executive committee until he left because he declared himself a write-in candidate for the Flat Earth congressional district. He continued, "That's why we've put a Tax & Spender up there - even though we're a conservative county and a conservative district. This is going to be a donnybrook," Ropp said. "Anything can happen."

"When did you talk with the reporter?"

"He dined at our restaurant Friday night."

"Any press is better than no press. I'm participating in a

candidate forum on the 16th."

"You're not in the Primary."

"I mentioned that, but the Twits don't seem to care. They want me to participate anyway. I'll get to meet Sam Iam Sunday. Will you go?"

"Someone has to mind the store. You can tell me all about it when you come home."

August 16

"You should have gone. It was very interesting."

"A gathering of Twits - interesting?"

"Everyone was there except Perky Patty. There were so many of us on the podium we looked like a high school football team lining up for the kickoff."

"How did it go?"

"Only three weeks to go until the Primary and the stress is beginning to tell on our Flat Earth candidates."

"How tough were the questions from the Twits?"

"Real doozies. First one out of the box was, 'How is the Trilateral Commission effecting our national economic policies?' Second one was, 'What is Bilderberger?'"

"Did anyone know enough to answer?"

"I waited and when no one volunteered - I did. The rest of their questions were just as esoteric. No one can accuse the Twits of lacking smarts. Just common sense."

"How did the candidates do?"

"Red Fox has filched all of my platform. He was a little too flip with his answers. Little Boy stressed morality and character. G. W. Pylut hawked his resume and endorsements. Doctor Doctor stressed the militant evangelical's new code word for antiabortion - family values. Beam Me Up Scotty's theme was duty - honor - country. Iron Maiden was proud of her membership in the National Rifle Association. Vinnie Veteran's theme was a meat market approach - look us over and then decide."

"What did Sam Iam have to say?"

"Sam Iam has to be a plant. He related every question he was asked to antiabortion - a tape recorder for antiabortionist evangelicals. The rest of his platform is right out of Jack Betalua's book on radical conservatism. Seemed nice enough though. Doctor Doctor - the leader of the militant pack danced all around his litmus test issue. The new tactic is to obfuscate in public and hammer home their religious litmus test in private."

"What about Iron Maiden."

"Her political convictions are written on sand. What she says is one-hundred and eighty degrees out from what she is. And it's hard to get a handle on fact or fiction. She's now for a woman's right to choose and she says she has the most experience for the office. I tried to make small talk with her, but she walked away. Unfriendly - the iron lady is downright surly."

"Remember your idea about passing out pencils to voters so they could write you in?"

"Yes - did you find out how much it will cost?"

"Over five-thousand for one-hundred thousand pencils."

"There is no free political lunch."

August 22

Bobbie Jean looked up from this morning's Euphoria Toady, "Doctor Doctor is the candidate of the day and they've air brushed his photo."

"Read what it says and make me weep."

"'As the former head of Mosquito County's most radical evangelical antiabortion organization - Doctor Doctor has been endorsed by all of Euphoria's militant antiabortion groups. His central theme is family values and the rest of his platform is taken from the National Barefoot & Pregnant campaign guide.'"

"Anything about antiabortion?"

"Only the endorsements."

"If their cause is just - why do they hide their issue?"

"They only have twenty percent support."

"Like the National Socialist movement in the Thirties."

"That's a little rough, but they do have one thing in common.

Both groups were opposed to abortion."

"And they both believe that ends' justify the means."

August 24

Bobbie Jean carried the morning mail into Johnny's office, "The political season is in full swing. Mailers are out. Look at Doctor Doctor's."

"He's standing next to a farmer on a tractor. That's as close as he's ever gotten to one."

"His new theme is - *A Plan To Revise The American Dream.*"

"Now don't get me wrong, but I thought the American Dream was liberty and justice for all - not for men only. Who else has mailers out?"

"G. W. Pylut - Little Boy - Vinnie Veteran - Iron Maiden - and Beam Me Up Scotty."

"None from Red R. Fox?"

"Not a one. He may have a selected mailing list. It's obvious the rest don't - or we wouldn't be receiving their propaganda."

"Political information - not propaganda."

"Not when Little Boy is accusing G. W. Pylut of being less than honest with the facts and Red R. Fox of being a fan of the not heterosexual community."

"Its getting that bad?"

"Where have you been? Didn't you get my message yesterday?"

"You mean about all of the candidates accusing Little Boy of destroying his own signs and blaming them?"

"Yes. The dirt clods are flying."

"Be prepared to duck."

August 31

The Christian Coalition's flier appeared at the front door of Johnny's condo. Doctor Doctor is their chosen one.

September 3

Johnny was invited to attend a gathering of candidates at a pancake breakfast on Sulfur Island. When he pulled into the parking lot - Johnny was impressed by the number of autos. Then he noticed - a Little League football game was being played in the next lot. As usual - there were more candidates than voters. His table was between Beam Me Up Scotty's and Sam Iam's. He noticed that Sam Iam did not have any political information. Not even a handwritten flier. Just a smile and antiabortion pamphlets.

When he returned home early, Bobbie Jean was on her way to the restaurant, "Good - we're short handed today. Why are you home so early?"

"Waste of time. You were right about Sam Iam. He's in the race to nullify me. Showed up at the breakfast without one written word. Just dead baby photos."

"Did Perky Patty show?"

"With an entourage. Maybe that's what I need - a moveable claue. We were in an open pavilion surrounded by water on three sides. Hot! Humidity had to be one hundred percent."

"It's almost over. Primary is in four days. What's next?"

A gathering of candidates at the Swampwater Bay Community Center tomorrow afternoon."

September 4

Bobbie Jean was impressed, "This is the biggest audience you've had so far. When are you on?"

"About three-quarters through. About the only thing good about this gathering is the free coffee and donuts."

"They are good. Home made. Aren't there any live voters?"

"Only if you count the sixty candidates - their handlers and supporters. Not one undecided in the whole lot."

"And where are the voters?"

"Watching TV - fishing or on the golf course."

"Which is where you should be instead of chasing after windmills."

"If you don't chase after windmills - you'll never get a whiff of the fresh breeze."

"Or a lot of hot moving air."

September 7

The day before the Primary. Ads on the radio are from Little Boy - Vinnie Veteran - Iron Maiden and Beam Me Up. A Reporter from the Quicksand Press Journal called Johnny, "Are you interested in knowing how we think the election will come out in Quicksand Beach?"

"Very - is Iron Maiden out in front?"

"By a large margin. Little Boy is second and Red R. Fox a distant third."

"I'm surprised that G. W. Pylut isn't doing better."

"Hasn't spent much time down here."

"What happened to Red R. Fox?"

"He's a political outsider with an insider's attitude. How do you see it up there?"

"Florida Toady thinks it will be G. W. Pylut."

"How about Doctor Doctor?"

"He's my pick to win. Came in late - bought his way in and has the support of the religious right - so that's a twenty percent base to begin with."

September 8

Primary election day. Johnny poured Bobbie Jean a cup of coffee, "Local talk radio says it'll be a low turnout."

Bobbie Jean asked, "What does that mean?"

"Doctor Doctor wins."

"As soon as your ready - lets vote."

"Who has the first spot on the ballot?"

"Iron Maiden."

After they returned home - Bobbie Jean asked, "Who was it that left a message?"

"A Mouseville TV station. Wanted to know the directions to our house. I gave them directions to our restaurant."

"What in the world for?"

"They must think I'm on the ballot."

"Didn't you tell them you weren't?"

"What? and leave show business."

"This time you're right. Our restaurant can use the free publicity. We received an invitation in today's mail to Iron Maiden's fund raiser."

"When is it?"

"Tomorrow."

"Votes aren't even counted. Now that's chutzpah!"

September 9

Bobbie Jean smiled, "Get a grip on your coffee cup. The final results are in."

"I'm hanging on. Read them to me."

The results of the Barefoot & Pregnant Primary - as tabulated by the Mosquito County Supervisor of Elections are - Doctor Doctor - 11821 (23%) Iron Maiden - 10763 (21%) G. W. Pylut 8405 (16%) Beam Me Up Scotty 6821 (13%) Vinnie Veteran 5841 (11%) Little Boy 5230 (10%) and Red R. Fox 3267 (6%). Only 37 percent of the Barefoot and Pregnant Party turned out to vote. Of this group - 46 percent voted a religious right ticket. Iron Maiden will face Doctor Doctor in a runoff election. Twenty percent was the cutoff for the runoff.

Bobbie Jean looked up from the paper, "Were you surprised?"

"Yes - I thought Little Boy would come in third and G. W. Pylut - second. Iron Maiden is the surprise. She must have carried Quicksand Beach by a wide margin."

"Who will win the runoff?"

"It will be a low turnout. So it's Doctor Doctor by a wide margin. Bad news is it delays my campaign until after the runoff election."

"Lets go on with the game," the Queen said to Alice and Alice was too frightened to say a word, but slowly followed her back to the croquet ground.

10

September 10

Beam Me Up Scotty called to see if Johnny was still in the race. His answer, "Only if Doctor Doctor wins the primary."

"You haven't got a chance."

"Pride goeth before a fall."

"I would have made the runoff if it wasn't for the low turnout and rain."

"You certainly would have had a better chance if you were the only antiabortion candidate. But there were three. What happened to Little Boy? I thought he had the Coalition votes in his hip pocket."

"They found out he wasn't a certified evangelical."

"Didn't attend church?"

"Something like that."

"Are you going to support Doctor Doctor?"

"Too soon to contemplate. I'll support the Party's choice."

September 12

Bobbie Jean asked, "Have you heard any response about the election from your fellow travelers?"

"No - except for Beam Me Up - they've all gone to ground."

"Losing isn't easy. They've gone to ground to lick their wounds. What is your next move?"

"Media letter and wait and see time."

"Why don't you support Iron Maiden?"

"If she wins the runoff I will. Her political conversion may not stick."

"You think she'll flop on the litmus test again?"

"She has no political conviction - except to win."

"Sounds like the definition of a politician to me."

"Did you see where Saffron V. Poverty is coming to town for a fund raiser for Perky Patty?"

"Yes - they're going to hold it at Euphoria Toady founder's shack on Banana Beach."

"Time for another media letter - just to keep my hand in."

"Let me read it before you send it out."

September 14

Betty Boop telephoned late in the day, "You won't believe who called me."

"The Supervisor of Elections to tell you we're on the ballot?"

"No - Iron Maiden. She wants you to drop out of the race and support her."

"Maybe - after the runoff if she wins. Not now. Her sharp tongue and nasty comments are still ringing in my ears."

"We need to have an organizational meeting."

"Can't believe anyone would want to jump onboard a sinking ship."

"We have twelve volunteers."

"The Apostles before the crucifixion."

"What?"

"Nothing. How about the party room at our restaurant on the 17th. I'll set it up for seven o'clock."

"Can you print out an agenda?"

"No - my word processor just blew up. Can't store a thing on disc and it erased two."

"Are you going to do a media letter?"

"I'll do one to let them know we're still out here."

"Oh - I talked with Able Baker Charlie yesterday. He thinks Iron Maiden has an excellent chance."

"After my encounters with the militant ones on the petition trail - I don't think she has."

"Then we better organize."

September 16

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is Johnny Ropp and I'm running as an independent write-in for congress. My campaign committee - Three Dog Night - has informed me that Perky Patty has announced a fund-raiser - attended by our current Vice President - Saffron V. Poverty. Not to be outdone - Three Dog Night plans a fund-raiser attended by none other than W. C. Fields aka William Claude Dunkenfield. Whom has on his tombstone "All things considered - I'd rather be in Philadelphia." You might ask, "How can a dead man attend your fund-raiser." A good question. My answer is, "He is not as stiff as our Vice President."

W. C. - not as stiff as Poverty - Fields has garnered a plethora of additional endorsements for our campaign. To wit - Chester Snavely - a well known disposer of bodies. Mahatma Kane Jeves - what every candidate needs to ward off dirty tricks - an Indian snake charmer. Posthwhistle and Sumnn - barristers who posses clocks without a minute hands. And his director of security - J. Pinkerton Snoopington has offered his services to protect us from any and all militant crusading Christians.

W.C. Fields and his entourage will not fly into Prop Wash Air Force Base as Poverty will on a borrowed second hand Air Force jet transport. He and his entourage have chartered the latest in 1920 technology - a Ford Tri-

motor and will land in Cow Pasture. Date and time not established. Asked why he is supporting Johnny Ropp for Congress - W. C. summed it up in his own inimitable style, 'He's not a Libertarian - he's not a Dixiecrat - he's not Barefoot & Pregnant - he's not an aristocrat. He's what your Flat Earth District needs - a political acrobat.

Bobbie Jean handed the letter back to Johnny, "You're not serious - are you?"

"How much chance do you give me of winning?"

"Zero."

"Then it won't hurt and if I can get publicity - who knows."

"If you did - you'd give up this foolishness. What is next on your agenda?"

"The Twits are conducting a candidate forum at the Community College on the 22nd. I'm not invited. I'll attend anyway and pass out literature."

September 17

The campaign organization meeting was more enthusiastic than Johnny expected. Seven volunteers showed up. Johnny outlined his proposal to keep money from having too much influence on a campaign.

Newspaper - radio - and TV time should be free. Campaigns should be limited to six weeks. Three for primaries - three for the general. Signs should be allowed only if a live person is holding onto it. Anyone mailing out literature before the six week time frame would be automatically disqualified - including incumbents. Use of a government printing press by incumbents is also illegal unless used within the time frame and fully reimbursed at commercial rates by an incumbent.

Knowing they would lose - all agreed to have a good time.

September 22

Betty Boop called to let Johnny know, "The Twits have canceled their forum. They've lost interest since Fox lost out in the Primary."

"Lots of infighting?"

"Every Twit wants to be king. There's going to be a straw poll at the Community College on the first of November. I've signed you up to speak."

"Who's behind this event?"

"The Chamber of Commerce. It's their main money maker."

"And everybody makes money off the candidates."

"Except the candidates."

"Can you explain to me just how a straw poll operates?"

"Everyone who attends has to buy a ballot. The candidate with the most votes wins."

"So - he or she who can bus in the most voters wins?"

"Not a very scientific survey - is it?"

"Another political lesson to the uninitiated."

September 24

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny this morning's Euphoria Toady, "Read what they say about Doctor Doctor and Iron Maiden."

Doctor Doctor agrees to one or two political debates with Iron Maiden. Iron Maiden desires five or none. She says they have debated twenty times and the voters know their issues and where they stand. But - if they are to debate - one or two is not enough.

Johnny put the paper down, "She's right about the issues. Except for abortion - all they have said comes directly from the Barefoot & Pregnant Congressional Committee campaign guide. The Toady reporter wants us all to meet in Cow Pasture and have a live debate."

"Who too? The cows?"

September 26

Johnny responded to a letter of inquiry from an AIDS activist group.

Dear Activist

If elected - I will push for two things. Treatment of AIDS as a public health crisis - not a Civil Libertarian debate. And Public Health funding for control and cure.

We have stood idly by while millions of our population have been infected. If we cannot cure the disease we can at least attempt to control it. If AIDS were plague or TB - we would identify the carriers - advise and if necessary - isolate. It does not matter who transmits the disease. What matters is that AIDS is transmitted and we have not identified or cautioned the carriers. It does not matter what your sexual orientation may be. What matters is we all deserve protection from a communicable disease. We as a nation cannot continue to stick our hands in the sands of political correctness. We must do what can be done until a cure is found. The alternative is an exponential explosion of a controllable disease.

Pushing condoms as a protective measure against AIDS is the equivalent of prescribing lead weights as life preservers.

September 27

Neither Doctor Doctor or Iron Maiden have advertised as much as Johnny would have - if he was going too - which he wasn't. Doctor Doctor's followers were using loaded - anonymous telephone calls implying that Iron Maiden is a baby

killer. Iron Maiden was mailing out what appeared to be an eight by twelve publicity photo of her head. Johnny wasn't sure if she was running for office or prom queen. Bobbie Jean laughed, "If you're wondering where Iron Maiden and Doctor Doctor have been - they've gone to our nation's capitol to see the Queen."

"That's Pussycat Pussycat."

"Euphoria Toady has a photo op of our lost candidates on the Capitol Steps."

"Isn't that the name of a satirical group that does song and dance spoofs of congress?"

"It is and this group deserves it. Eye of Newt has our lost souls signing a contract. Our candidates lose a bit of their individuality in a lockstep display of the obvious."

September 28

Doctor Doctor's flier arrived in the mail. Photos of six supporters were inside. Johnny showed it to Bobbie Jean, "Our dentist is supporting this fanatic."

"It's time to find a new one."

"And Little Boy."

"Strange bedfellow time."

"Bet he's looking for a payoff. No chance. Doctor Doctor's inner circle is filled."

"Bait and switch isn't confined to used cars."

"Have you prepared another media letter?"

"Yes - read it and tell me what you think."

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is Johnny Ropp and I'm running for congress. Our Federal Budget is a nightmare of ambiguity. I've decided to cut through the

bureaucratic obfuscation - explain what a budget is and what we should do about it. The actual budget contains income (receipts) and expenses (outlays).

Receipts by source are - individual income taxes - corporate income taxes - Social Security taxes - medical taxes - excise taxes - estate taxes - gift taxes - customs duties and that great All-American catchall - other.

Outlays by source are - national defense - international - science - energy - resources - agriculture - commerce - housing - transportation - community - education - health - Medicare - Medicaid - Social Security - veterans - justice and interest.

We have attempted to balance the national budget through the budget process and have failed. The only way to control it is through appropriations. So - cut all appropriations except defense - ten percent. Remove Social Security and Medicare from the budget and appropriations process. Raise tariffs on imports from unfair trading countries. Eliminate most favored nation status. Provide tax incentives to manufacture within our own borders. Eliminate taxes on interest income below thirty-thousand dollars. Eliminate forty-eight offices departments and agencies. If we do the above - educe the top income tax rate to thirty percent.

"Pretty strong. You'll gore a lot of oxen."

"And eliminate a few self perpetuating agencies."

"Too bad you're not on the ballot."

"Why not?"

"I'd vote for you."

September 30

Bobbie Jean laughed, "You were the only one quoted at Titus Mall."

"Read it to me - I'm working on my speech."

"Which one?"

"Local PBS station is recording an eight minute speech to be broadcast at a later date. What did the Toady reporter say?"

"It's time to stop the Washington merry-go-round. Can't those guys in our nation's capitol get anything right? They're spending our tax dollars like drunken sailors on shore leave" said Johnny Ropp - a write-in candidate for the Flat Earth congressional seat. "Write-in Johnny Ropp for congress," is Ropp's new theme.

"Not bad. Do you think it will help?"

"Only if there are pencils and a writing surface in the voting booth. How did you do in the straw poll at the mall?"

"A landslide - two percent out of two-hundred and forty votes."

"Who voted?"

"Whoever the candidates could bus in. I did very well considering there were only two of us."

"Five votes? Who were the other three?"

"Don't know."

"How did your speech go?"

"I finished on time and hit every mark. And when it was over - I noticed no one had listened. The sound of silence - or one hand clapping."

"Who all showed?"

"Doctor Doctor and Perky Patty. Iron Maiden was a no show."

"Who won?"

"Perky Patty had two busloads of the homeless. She just barely beat out Doctor Doctor by five votes."

"Let me see your speech."

Who is Johnny Ropp and where does he come from?

I was born and raised in Buckeye land.

An average farmer and college student.

I served.

Launched a missile above the Cape.

Had Migs at my six.

Chaired a space committee in DC.

Doesn't call collect.

Never been found guilty.

- What are the real issues?

The economy and a disintegrating society.

- Has our congress addressed these issues?

With money - but throwing money at problems has not worked.

- What has congress done?

Attempted to spend the poor rich.

spend the ignorant smart.

spend the criminal straight.

spend the bureaucracy fat.

- Can't congress do anything right?

If spending is right - yes.

*Congress has built constituencies for the poor - homeless - lazy - criminal -
all seeking funds - grants and influence.*

Congress has run up a five trillion dollar debt for our children.

*Congress gave away so much pork - Washington has become a pig sty.
Congress generates paperwork for us and pensions for themselves.
Congress spends our taxes like drunken sailors.
Then congress robbed their own bank,
Robbed their own post office.
And they're robbing their own constituents.*

What is your political philosophy?

*I'm a throwback to Teddy Roosevelt.
I don't hold trust for big government - big business - big labor - big
welfare - big education - big PACs or big special interests.
I don't have all the answers - no one does. I have ideas. I'll let you know
where I stand and then I'll listen to you.*

Can you make a difference?

*Eventually. A new congressman has as much influence as a pro choice
delegate at a right to life convention. Honesty - integrity and my word as
my bond works at home and in congress.*

Will you support our space program at Cape Confusion?

*Yes - but not blindly. Cape Confusion's masters are in dire need of new
vision and adult leadership.*

Can a write-in candidate win?

Yes - but it won't be easy. I need your support and vote.

Should I write-in Johnny Ropp?

Only if you want a voice in congress.

Will you be affiliated with a political party?

I will be independent - but Barefoot & Pregnant.

Do you support free trade?

Yes - but it must be fair - a two way street. Treat others like they treat us.

Do you support national health care?

Yes - bring back the public health service to take care of the poor - our school children - those who are dependent on drugs and others who have fallen through the cracks. Eliminate the current veteran medical system and provide our veterans with cards - similar to Medicare. Leave the current Medicare system alone with the exception that it be more patient friendly and responsive. Doctors - hospitals - clinics and apothecaries that lie - cheat and steal should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Do you support term limits?

Yes - if it's good enough for the president it's good enough for congress. I recommend twelve years for both houses. It will require an amendment to our constitution.

What do you think is wrong with our economy?

We've given away our wealth and neglected our infrastructure.

We buy more than we sell.

We owe more than we have.

Our railroads and highways are deteriorating.

*Our cities are crumbling from within.
Our youth is being seduced with drugs.
Crime is rampant.
We sell raw materials and purchase manufactured goods.
We do it on borrowed money.
Without a merchant fleet.
We have become a third world country.*

*How did we become a third world nation?
After World War II we helped to restore world trade.
We encouraged unfair trading practices.
We created counterpart funding - i.e. we accepted foreign currency and
kept it in-country at our embassies.*

*Our international economic policy has not changed in fifty years.
We are now on the losing end of a growing trade imbalance.
We've allowed foreign trusts to dominate our trade.
We have lost our manufacturing base.
Our machine tool industry has vanished.
Our electronics industry is disappearing.
Our textile industry is in Asia and Central America.
Our automobiles are manufactured in Asia - Mexico and Canada.
Our largest employer is national - state and local governments.
We are a service economy running on borrowed money and borrowed time.*

*If this economic trend continues - what will happen to our country?
We buy more than we sell - so we must borrow.
If we borrow without collateral the value of our dollar decreases.*

*Costs rise and purchasing power diminishes.
If wages remain constant - buying power decreases.
Industry goes overseas to cut costs and jobs are lost.
In the long run we will import less.
If we do there will be a worldwide recession.
Followed by the rise of economic nationalism.
We'll need a strong military to defend our country.*

*How do we get out of this mess?
Practice the golden rule in our international economic policy.
Make it profitable to manufacture here.
Make it unprofitable to manufacture there.
Sell more than we buy until our trade deficit is eliminated.
Then maintain a balance of trade.
We can either be an economic power or a footnote of history.*

Bobbie Jean handed it back, "Pretty heady stuff. Will anyone listen to your speech?"

"Broadcast on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon on Public Television during football season? It will be the sound of a tree falling in a forest empty of people."

"Which windmill is my Don Quixote chasing after now?"

"None - until the run-off election is over. I've decided. If Iron Maiden wins - I'll drop out."

"If she loses?"

"Take out windmill insurance."

October 4

The run-off is over and Apathy wins again with eighty percent of those eligible not voting. Of the twenty percent who voted - a few more voted for Doctor Doctor. He polled

18739 to Iron Maiden's 16836. Bobbie Jean's comment was, "It is closer than you thought it would be. Looks like my Don Quixote will be chasing after windmills again."

"Read my new media letter."

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

I'm Johnny Ropp and I'm still running for congress. Our Flat Earth Congressional District has once again picked a jawbone of an ass to lead us into the wilderness. Ignorance and superstition have again won out over science and fact. I have no other choice but to continue to run. I'm the conservative alternative to a Barefoot & Pregnant one issue antiabortion candidate. Our Flat Earth voters have three clear choices - a malcontent (me) - a religious fanatic (Doctor Doctor) - or a political toady (Perky Patty) as their representative for congress.

My campaign committee - Three Dog Night - is staffed by active volunteers aptly named - The Over The Hill Gang. They challenge Doctor Doctor and Perky Patty's mid life crisis claques to have their candidates walk on water. Our contest will be at a place and time of our choosing - not later or sooner than two weeks before the election.

The Northern Virginia Chamber Music Orchestra is world famous for their rendition of The Sound of the First Cuckoo in Spring. The Flat Earth Congressional District is famous for its rendition of the sound of the first cuckoos in fall.

"What is this walk on water challenge?"

"If I told you it would eliminate the surprise."

October 5

Bobbie Jean laid this morning's Euphoria Toady down and took a sip of coffee, "Politics are the main topic of our local newspaper this morning."

"I spoke to a reporter on the phone yesterday."

"He quoted you at the end of his piece on Doctor Doctor and Perky Patty."

Lest we forget - there is another candidate in the race. Write in Johnny Ropp - Under Water says, "I look at the Barefoot & Pregnant Party as immolating itself again. Doctor Doctor is not inherently bad - he's strictly a one issue candidate. He must have something going for him. He convinced the government to pay for his dental and doctor education. I would feel much better about him if he had paid back his country by serving at least twenty years in the Army. It's beginning to look like a pattern - failing to complete what he sets out to do. If we elect him to congress - will Doctor Doctor decide to take up another career?"

"You didn't make a comment about Perky Patty?"

"I did. They didn't print it."

Johnny met up with Doctor Doctor at the Sulfur Island veteran center later that evening. As he stuck out his hand in friendship - Doctor Doctor pulled him aside, "I don't like you or the horse you rode in on. Get out of the race now. You're a nuisance." Johnny just stared at him - fascinated with Doctor Doctor's devil red eyes as they flashed with fire under the bright fluorescent lights. As Doctor Doctor strode away - Johnny whispered to Betty Boop, "I think I've just met the antichrist."

"Mean one - isn't he?"

"I'd hate to meet him in a dark alley with a scalpel in his hand. He might just be an incarnation of the Ripper. He radiates pure evil."

The turnout was light - not more than fifteen interested veterans. Johnny fielded most of the questions. The main difference between him and Doctor Doctor - at this gathering was the local veteran's hospital which Doctor Doctor favored. Johnny was in favor of a medical card system for veterans - eliminating the Veterans Administration and their hospitals.

October 6

Bobbie Jean walked into the kitchen, "What are you doing home? I thought you were at the Greater Swamp Harbor Chamber of Commerce Breakfast with the other candidates."

"I was kicked out."

"You didn't spear one of their windmills - did you?"

"Not one. They were downright nasty. The establishment is striking back. I was offered a table. So - I set up my stuff and was then asked to leave."

"Who did you in?"

"Doctor Doctor."

"He must be the only one who thinks you have a chance."

"Not really. His concern is - I'll take away enough votes from him and Perky Patty will win."

"Will you?"

"Not with his army of militant Christians on the march."

"They are less than twenty percent."

"But they all show up early and stay late."

"Lenin would be proud of them. Was the Chamber serving breakfast or setting up a torture chamber?"

"I peeked in - both."

"Betty Boop called. The Barefoot & Pregnant establishment is unifying behind Doctor Doctor. They asked her to tell you to drop out."

"That explains my reception this morning. I got my two cents in. I put my cards on every windshield. What did she say about the Twits?"

"They've lost interest in the congressional race."

"Boss Ears is running again."

October 7

Bobbie Jean smiled as Johnny read Christopher Morley's comment on another candidate who was a sure loser in the forties, "There was so much handwriting on the wall that even the wall fell down."

"Those who fail to heed history are forced to relive it."

"I wrote another media letter."

"No room at the Inn?"

"Yes."

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

No Room At The Inn

My name is Johnny Ropp and I'm running for congress. I know how a Jew must have felt in Munich when turned away from his favorite beer hall. A Bund meeting of Brown Shirts was in process inside. Remembering the theme of the musical Cabaret - liberty is not lost in one fell swoop. Liberty is lost in subtle slowly escalating steps.

This morning - the Greater Swamp Harbor Chamber of Commerce held their candidate forum at the Inn on the Beach. My campaign committee - Three Dog Night - chairman called a week in advance and asked that I be

included. I was not invited. We were told it was too late. Realizing that a weeks advance notice may not be time enough to place another chair at the table - I decided to attend anyway and pass out my cards at the door. When I attempted to do so I was turned away again and ordered to a table placed unobtrusively away from any contact with potential voters. Then this table too - was taken away when a voter or two accidentally found it and stopped by to chat.

I felt like Dumbo's Mother when the matriarch elephants formed a circle and locked her out with their backsides. Our voters may be apathetic toward the election process because it is perceived to be a closed shop. As far as the Greater Swamp Harbor Chamber of Commerce is concerned only those who are Barefoot & Pregnant or Tax & Spenders may apply for room. This may be nothing more than a little loss of liberty, but little losses do add up. We may all wind up like Dumbo's Mother or the Weimar Republic.

"You really do like to get even."

"And have a little fun along the way."

October 8

Betty Boop telephoned, "You made the Mouseville Guard newspaper."

"Read it to me."

Johnny Ropp - a write-in candidate for congress knows how to turn a word or two, "The local Barefoot & Pregnant Party has again picked a jawbone of an ass to lead our populi into the wilderness. And now our Flat Earth voters are being asked to choose between a religious nut - a political toady or a malcontent (me).

"It's mostly correct."

"You're going to drive Doctor Doctor up the wall."

"How many cards do we have left?"

"I just purchased five thousand more."

October 9

Bobbie Jean handed Johnny the local section of Euphoria Toady, "You and Dumbo made the paper today. I'm hard pressed to tell which one of you is which."

No One Envyies a Write-in Candidate

Johnny Ropp has not been invited to the party. He's running as a write-in candidate for the Flat Earth 66th District US congressional seat. This is a fact very few know. Johnny Ropp - until recently an active member of Mosquito County's Barefoot & Pregnant executive committee - attempted to run the old-fashioned way as a member of his party. He fell short of the almost five-thousand signatures required to qualify to be on the ballot. His next option was to run the really old-fashioned way - buying his spot on the ballot like the other two Party candidates - paying a qualifying fee of more than ten-thousand dollars. Instead - this former military Intelligence officer resigned himself to the status of write-in candidate - a position considered by most politicians to be less enviable than a dung beetle. Consider what he is up against. Despite qualifying as a write-in candidate in the Great State of Euphoria - he is invited to almost none of the debates - candidate forums and other flesh pressing opportunities. Just this week when Tax & Spend candidate Perky Patty and Barefoot & Pregnant candidate Doctor Doctor were asked to debate - Ropp wasn't invited. He called the Greater Swamp Harbor Chamber of Commerce and asked if he too

could participate in the debate. "I called the Chamber a week before this event and asked to be included," Ropp said. "I was told that it was too late. Perky Patty and Doctor Doctor would be the only ones allowed to speak. Realizing that a week may not be time enough to place another chair at the table - I decided to attend and unobtrusively pass out my campaign business cards." This was not allowed either. Chamber head - Upa U. Okole said it was a matter of scheduling and write-ins would be allowed in the future. "I felt like Dumbo's Mother when the matriarch's formed a circle and locked her out with their backsides," Ropp said. "If we remember the theme from the musical Cabaret - Liberty is not lost in one fell swoop, but in small escalating steps."

"He was accurate. This is not good news."

"Why not. It's the best press you've had so far."

"It will be my last and there is still four weeks to go."

"So - what is your next plan?"

"Place my business campaign cards under windshield wipers on cars at the supermarkets."

"Motor voter in action. Have you changed your message?"

Johnny handed Bobbie Jean a card. On the outside was written

PSST

She opened it up

*Vote None Of The Above
Write-in Johnny Ropp for
Congress*

"Cute, but will it work if there isn't a pencil or writing surface in the voting booth?"

"Your solution?"

"Have volunteers hand out pencils with your name on them outside the polls."

"I need several hundred volunteers."

"And you only have ten."

October 10

Doctor Doctor's political poll is the lead story in Euphoria Toady. He is at forty-two percent - Perky Patty at thirty-one percent and twenty-nine percent undecided. Johnny handed the paper back to Bobbie Jean, "Doctor Doctor's poll is over the top. It adds up to one-hundred and two percent."

"Must have an error rate of one hundred and ten percent."

"The League of Women Voters have decided not to include me in their forum."

"What is the problem?"

"Their cutoff is five percent of the voters."

"How did they decide you wouldn't get five percent?"

"By keeping me out of the debates I won't get five percent."

"You're caught in a political Catch 22."

October 13

Media

Any Street

Flat Earth Congressional District

My name is Johnny Ropp and I'm running for congress in the Flat Earth Congressional District as an independent write-in candidate. One of two run away favorites in this general election - Don't Care and None Of The Above - I am not resting on our laurels. Albeit I must admit that Don't Care does have a slight edge over me.

Our eclectic grouping of supporters spans the political spectrum from those who are apathetic to Alfred E. Neuman's, "What? Me worry?" And that hornswooglin' vote stealer - Don't Care is standing by silently on a William Tecumseh Sherman platform. He will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected. So - our Flat Earth apathetic voters have no other choice - if they Don't Care for Tax & Spenders and they're not Barefoot & Pregnant then they must vote for me - None Of The Above.

Bobbie Jean set the letter down, "I like it. It's the best effort yet."

"Probably won't get in. I'm being brushed aside as a minor political nuisance."

October 14

Bobbie Jean asked, "Where are you headed today?"

"Around and about. Sticking my cards under windshield wipers."

"Are you getting noticed?"

"By the Sheriff. We have to move fast. Doctor Doctor's militant followers turn us in when they spot us."

"Is it against the law?"

"Not that I know of, but the hassle is intended to slow us down."

Bobbie Jean looked up from her desk in their restaurant, "Betty Boop called. The League of Women Voters has more than one excuse to keep you off their show. She says forget it. I responded to questions from two out of county newspapers. They wanted your age and background. Your last media letter was a hit with the editors."

"But they're not going to publish it?"

"Right - too contentious. The establishment lacks a sense of humor. Are you getting caught up in this mess?"

"Hard not too. There is a little nagging hubris in my frontal lobe that says we just might do it."

"Take a walk on the beach with me and it'll go away."

October 16

Bobbie Jean laughed, "Surprise - surprise. Euphoria Toady's editorial board endorses Perky Patty. Did they interview you?" "No - they sent me a questionnaire for their election edition."

"Let me look at your answers."

Question - What is the most important issue facing voters in the Flat Earth Congressional District? How can you help?

Answer - The most important issue is - How do we cope with a dollar that is losing its value? In 1950 a hot dog - fries and Coke cost twenty-five cents. Today they cost ten times as much. Minimum wage in 1950 was a dollar. It is five times as high today. Cost of living has gone up ten times while real wages have increased only five - a gap that represents a real devaluation of our currency. How can I help? As a member of congress I can support legislation that raises the value of our dollar. Step one is to bring our trade in balance. Step two is to manufacture here and sell there. Step three is to change our international economic policies - i.e. eliminate most favored nation status and follow the golden rule - do unto others.

Question - How can congress assist workers laid off in space and defense?

Answer - Encourage manufacturing here. We can create welfare or we can create a climate that allows business to flourish. If we make it profitable

to manufacture here - jobs will follow. Jobs come from industry and entrepreneurs - not government. Government alone has made it more profitable to manufacture out of country. It is government's job to protect our basic industries from unfair competition.

Question - Can you sit on a congressional committee involving space and build coalitions with other members?

Answer - Yes. I sat on a multiagency space related committee as the Air Force representative. I've chaired a multiagency space committee. The secret to success is a thorough knowledge of space related activities and the ability to make things happen when you - as a new congressman have very little clout.

Bobbie Jean reviewed Johnny's questionnaire, "You're getting better at sound bites."

"Or just wearing out. Have to order another ten thousand cards. We passed out two-thousand yesterday and we only have nineteen-hundred left."

October 18 - 19 - 20

Johnny and his over-the-hill gang papered the Flat Earth Congressional District cars with cards on car windows. The Sulfur Island Mall called and threatened to sue him for cleanup. Johnny responded, "Please hurry up and sue me. I need the publicity and you don't. By the way if you do - I will counter sue citing a Supreme Court decision 'Pruneville vs. the State of California - 1990.'

October 20 - 21 - 22

Johnny and his over-the-hill gang papered another three

thousand cars with campaign cards. Johnny appeared at three candidate forums and received a standing ovation when he said, "It's time for the little guys to win just once."

October 23

Bobbie Jean asked, "What do you think your chances of winning are now?"

"If I was on the ballot - forty-sixty. As a write-in I don't have a ghost of a chance."

"What have you learned?"

"If you don't spend for advertising - just being the most qualified doesn't hack it. Your message gets lost in the noise of paid political advertising. As a result - I have not gotten my message out."

"So - what are you going to do?"

"Stand on the street corner waving my sign."

"Not healthy sucking in all of that exhaust."

"My workers are out there - I have to support."

October 24

Johnny waved his sign in Crooked Town from seven in the morning until nine. Euphoria Toady's political reporter interviewed him at the restaurant at ten. Bobbie Jean commented, "He didn't take many notes."

"He was just going through the motions to show fairness."

"What's up for this afternoon?"

"Have to tape an interview for the local UHF station later this afternoon."

"Get your charisma up. When you gave your last speech - you come across like a professor."

October 25

Johnny sucked exhaust at Swamp Harbor's intersection in the morning and stood on the causeway to Under Water in the afternoon. In the evening he spoke to a small gathering of

Swamp Harbor Twits. When he returned to the restaurant to help Bobbie Jean close - she asked, "How did it go waving your sign."

"Must have been five-thousand cars pass me by.

"Did they wave and smile."

"No, but no one showed their IQ either."

"IQ?"

"One finger."

*Alice thought the whole thing was absurd,
but they all looked so grave that she did not
dare to laugh - and as she could not think of
anything to say - she simply bowed -*

11

October 26

Bobbie Jean asked, "Where are your windmills today?"
"Today is the day I walk on water."
"Wear a swimsuit."
"Can't do that - it'll show a lack of confidence."
"Where do you plan to do this trick?"
"If I had a chance to win the election - across a puddle in our restaurant driveway. I don't - so drastic measures are needed. I'm going to wait for high tide and walk off our dune crossover."
"You'll sink in up to your butt."
"True - but anyone can walk on water - it's the duration."
"What are you going to prove by this stunt."
"That I'm willing to take a risk. My campaign committee challenged the other candidates to walk on water."
"Three Dog Night? No one will take you serious."
"Might be a slow media day."

October 27

Bobbie Jean shook her head, "It was a slow media day. There are three photos of you. One stepping off the dune crossover - one with your feet on top of a wave and the last one shows your head sticking out of the ocean."
"Read me the caption and the article."

Johnny Ropp Attempts To Walk On Water

Johnny Ropp - a write-in candidate for congress challenged the other

candidates to walk on water. He was the only one who showed up. Although he sank in up to his head - Ropp says, "Anyone can walk on water - it's the duration. Though it does pay to swim once in a while - to show humility. I was humbled today. I showed up and gave it the old college try. No other candidate in this race can make that statement."

"Promise me that your campaign stunts are over."

"Can't wave a sign at car exhaust?"

"Time for a lower profile."

"Publicity won't hurt our restaurant."

"Our cooking is the best publicity."

October 28

Rained all day. Johnny and the over-the-hill gang drove west to Swamp County for a carding foray and gave up. The rain followed them from the coast.

October 29

Saturday morning pancake breakfast in San Cumulus turned into another one of those forums where candidates and their handlers outnumbered voters fifty to one. The Finished forum was held at the Finished Country Club. Johnny got in a few good one liners during a newspaper interview of congressional candidates. "If talk could solve our problems we would be living in Utopia" and "Perky Patty is joined at the hip by Jefro Wilson Clampet. Doctor Doctor's idol is Ollie South. As for my guy - Teddy Roosevelt - he's in the ground. He can't say anything to screw up my campaign." Doctor Doctor got mad and stomped out.

Euphoria Toady's political reporter left before the Finished candidate forum began. His mind - unencumbered by fact - was filled with fiction. The forum was like all others - no time to speak and too many candidates.

October 31

Johnny was confronted by one of Doctor Doctor's militant Christians in the parking lot of Sulfur Islands WAL*MART. He made it out of the parking lot seconds ahead of a Sheriff deputy. He finished carding the Stoneshelf WAL*MART parking lot minutes before another one of the Sheriff's patrol cars drove in - looking for him.

Bobbie Jean asked, "How does it feel to be a fugitive?"
"Scary out there. My telephone number is on each card. I'm sure if it was against the law - the law would call."

"Then why is the Sheriff dogging your heels?"

"Simple harassment. I'm bucking the establishment."

"Colonel C. T. Source is now a host of a conservative radio talk show."

"How is he doing."

"Fine until he lets his bias show. A lady called in praising your performance on the PBS TV forum. Said she was going to vote for you."

"What did he say?"

"Tried to talk her out of it, but wouldn't say why."

"That's their new tactic. Imply that something is wrong and not say what it is."

"Ooh - they do hit below the belt don't they?"

November 1

Bobbie Jean looked up from this morning's Euphoria Toady, "You can kiss away whatever hopes you had of being elected. Their political candidate calls you the joke candidate."

"I finally joined Will Rogers. Not bad company to be in."

"I'm serious - the Toadies buried you today."

"Let me take a look at it."

"Wait - I'm almost finished."

Johnny poured coffee.

Write-in Candidates Are Serious About Election

Johnny Ropp - who recently attempted to walk on water - calls himself a man without a country. In reality - he is a man without a Party. He is a write-in candidate for the Flat Earth congressional seat. Though he has been involved with the Barefoot & Pregnant Party at other times in his life - the B&P does not claim him now. An associate to an associate animal trainer at Euphoria State University - A. Stoooper Nagle claims - "If anyone can get on the ballot by saying I want to run - the ballot would list a thousand names. We need to differentiate between real candidates and joke candidates." In some cases that's difficult. Ropp of Under Water says that he is a serious candidate with a sense of humor, "Any candidate that attempts to walk on water must have a sense of humor." He says he means to win this race, but if that is not possible he might as well have a little fun along the way. Consider this quip Ropp made after butting uninvited into an interview I conducted with Perky Patty and Doctor Doctor the major party candidates. The Barefoot & Pregnants have Ollie South hanging around their necks and the Tax & Spenders have Jefro Wilson Clampet around theirs," the former military Intelligence officer said. "I'm a Teddy Roosevelt independent. At least my guy is dead and buried - so he can't embarrass me." Ropp - who tried to qualify for the Barefoot & Pregnant Primary, but fell short of enough signatures is tailoring his message to retirees. His Three Dog Night campaign staff is affectionately known as the over-the-hill gang. He supports tougher penalties for drug dealers, but believes we should decriminalize drug use. He favors treatment over incarceration. He is a staunch conservative opponent of the religious right. Ropp has arrived politically. After being denied a spot in several debates

and forums with Perky Patty and Doctor Doctor - he and his over-the-hill gang have had the Sheriff's office called on them for putting notices on windshields of cars in parking lots.

"Except for the joke candidate line - it was a good article."

"All anyone will remember is the joke candidate."

"And relate it to me. You're right about the article. I've been cut by a knife that was so sharp I failed to notice it."

November 2

Johnny stood outside of the main gate to Cape Confusion waving his sign. He left as the Space Police were moving in to arrest him.

November 3

Johnny waved a sign at the causeway leading to Banana Beach in the morning and the one leading to Prop Wash Air Force Base in the afternoon.

November 4

Johnny waved signs at the causeway leading to Under Water in the morning and the one leading to Ugly in the afternoon. Bobbie Jean asked, "Why aren't you passing out cards?"

"Doctor Doctor has his militant Christians out looking for us - ready to call the Sheriff if we show up."

"You're running out of cards - aren't you?"

"Can't hide anything from you."

"Order some more."

"And throw good money after bad?"

November 5

Johnny attended a Twit meeting in Frenchie - the county seat for Swamp County. Attendance was sparse. Perky Patty

spoke - too. She had trouble with NAFTA and GATT and things like that, but the Twits were primed for her. Poor Perky Patty came across like Doctor Doctor - very political and obtuse. Any question outside of her party programming wasn't answered.

November 6

Euphoria Toady's election guide is printed in this morning's (Sunday) newspaper. Johnny's responses to their questions were included.

November 7

Monday - the day before the general election. Johnny sucked exhaust morning and evening on the Ugly causeway. Betty Boop called to say they only have ten volunteers to cover the polls. Johnny bends down and attempts to place his head between his legs so he can kiss his okole good-by. But like his campaign - fails in this endeavor.

November 8

Tuesday morning - election day. Bobbie Jean is up early - asking, "Where are your gallows?"
"Outside the Swampwater Bay recreation center."
"When do you want to vote?"
"I'll be back early in the afternoon. The retired folks vote early and often."

Johnny's heart stopped as he entered the voting booth. There were no pencils and if there were - no surface to write on. Johnny stepped outside and asked the poll workers for a pencil. The poll worker responded, "I'm not allowed to offer you a pencil."

"You are required by the laws of the Great State of Euphoria to provide proper utensils to voters so they may exercise their citizenship - their right to vote."

"We don't provide pencils."

"There are two authorized write-in candidates. How can I write one of them in without a pencil?"

"That's your problem."

"Let me talk to your supervisor." The supervisor asked Johnny, "What is the problem?"

"I need a pencil."

"The Supervisor of Elections has ordered us not to provide a pencil to voters."

"Is there any rule against a pen?"

"His order didn't include pens. You can borrow mine."

Johnny had to improvise - to write his name in - using the side of the booth as a writing surface. Bobbie Jean had her own pen, "You look steamed."

"The establishment got their pound of flesh. We'll be lucky to get five-hundred votes."

"I thought the Supervisor of Elections was friendly toward you."

"So did I. His office violated state law. He was required to provide all necessary utensils to vote."

"You can get a court injunction."

"Even if I win that - I'll still lose the election. I've had my fill of this business. The voters elected a single issue jackass. He can saddle up with the rest of the political asses and join them in their Washington corral."

Alice was very nearly getting up and saying, "Thank you - Sir - for your interesting story," but she could not help thinking there must be more to come - so she sat still and said nothing.

Ode To Failure

Do populi demand to
Turn politicos around
Or to a single issue
Fanatic be bound -

Do populi desire to
Tug on Superman's cape
Spit into the wind
Tear the mask off the Ol' Lone Ranger
And toss the miscreants in a bin -

But news releases fly into trash
Media moguls clamor for cash
No one votes for an under puppy
Nor a Libertarian or a Yuppy -

Single issues win the day
Fairness is lost in the fray
Anger - half truths - laughing gas
Populi elects another diving jackass -

Another political year
Full of feathers and fuss
Populi forgot to vote
So - the enemy is us -