



# Jesus H. Bush by Nick Holle

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When Leonardo DiCaprio's character in *Titanic* admitted he was from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin and that he used to go fishing on Lake Wissota, I wanted to fucking puke. I knew that about thirteen thousand people, not to mention thousands of others from surrounding small towns, would applaud far too enthusiastically upon hearing this. And just because some dick screenwriter pulled out a map and randomly picked my town to be in a movie.

But then you know what Chippewa Falls did? This small, Western Wisconsin town, east of U.S. Highway 53 and along State Highway 29, population 12,925? You know what they did? They made Leonardo DiCaprio an honorary citizen of Chippewa Falls and sent him the key to the city.

Jesus.

Well, you can imagine the clusterfuck of ignorance in Chippewa Falls on August 18th when George W. Bush came to town for a little battleground state hello.

Thousands of small town folks who love \$300 tax breaks and hate to kill babies ventured to the parking lot of Kell Container to see the president of our nation wrangle for votes. And small town folks love President Bush. Why you might ask? Because he is warm and likable, and he radiates that feeling that he's just like one of them.

And he is like one of them. He plays golf and hunts and fishes and loves the outdoors. He tells dumb jokes and at one point could drink them all under the table. And just like the good people of Chippewa Falls, his grandfather made a fortune as a businessman and became a U.S. Senator. His father was just your average, blue-collar ambassador to China, head of the CIA, Vice President of the United States, and President of the United States of America. And besides going to Yale and Harvard and owning the Texas Rangers and governing the state of Texas, President Bush is just your average American.

But when Bush came to Chippewa Falls, all that stuff didn't really matter. Personalities and politics were thrown out the door. The President was coming to town. Our people couldn't dwell on his savvy campaigning and determination to win Wisconsin's ten electoral votes. This was the President, man. He was coming because he truly cares about Chippewa Falls. He truly cares about its people (DiCaprio included). And the good citizens of Chippewa Falls knew that, with a decent overblown extravaganza, this town would truly stand out from all the rest.

Now it would be senseless to describe the extravaganza because thanks to television, we've seen all the campaign hullabaloo before. I mean, there are six or seven of them every day, for both candidates. There're signs and music and a stage and Secret Service and abortion protestors. They're all exactly the same. The speeches are the same. The jokes are the same. The candidates are the same. And on November 3rd, half of all the extravaganzas would have, in hindsight, been better skipped and turned into meals for the homeless or for weapons, depending on your point of view.

Really though, the campaign stops are a chance for small town folks to blow these visits all out of proportion and fail to realize how little the visit really means in the grand scheme of things.

Nothing captures this sentiment more than the local paper. No publication has been more committed to lousy reporting and biased stories—not to mention excessive grammatical errors—than Chippewa Falls' own *Chippewa Herald*. Of course, this daily mess of journalism was on hand for Bush's visit, coming in its pants to do some real, first-hand political reporting.

Here are some of the quotes from the *Herald* on the day of Bush's visit along with a little outside commentary:

"We're coming to see what he talks about," Michael Barone said. "If he talks pro-life, we're probably going to vote for him. I think he's been superb in everything he's done so far."

We might as well get to the issues right of the bat. Of course, that issue is abortion. And it is someone who cares very deeply about this country when they vote on only one issue and ignore all the other problems and challenges that plague our country and our world. Mr. Barone, I salute you for it.

"This will mean he's interested in small towns," Brown said of the current president's visit to Chippewa Falls. "The fact that he is a religious man is important to me."

She did believe that this election might be more partisan than previous elections.

"There's a lot more negative campaigning going on, especially by the opposition party. Republicans are a little more honest," Brown said.

Hopefully, Ms. Brown was excited enough to get her name in the paper that she didn't realize how awkwardly quoted she was. Surely, Bush's visit to Chippewa guaranteed his interest in small towns. He's never been to a small town before, after all. And thank God Republicans are so honest and don't do any negative campaigning because if both parties did that, that would really, really super duper suck.

"This is a good labor area with lots of unions and I'd say it's about 99 percent Democrat. The Democrats say they're for the people, but then they tax the (expletive) out of you," Larson said.

"That John Kerry, he's probably a nice guy, but he ain't my kind of politics. Now George Bush, I think his tax breaks have helped. No, I know they have," Larson said.

Come on, Mr. Larson, 99 percent Democrat? We're trying to take you seriously, but there's no place that's 99 percent Democrat. Oh God, I can't even comment on this one, but I'm comforted to know that Mr. Larson really stretched out that \$300 tax break he got.

"After he gave his speech we chatted a bit before he left. I was absolutely surprised at what he knew about Tom and I, Kell Container and the fact we just celebrated our 40th birthday in June," John Kell said. "He knew!"

The host of Bush's visit, Kell Container is a company whose products are containers to put other products into. I hate to burst your bubble, Mr. Kell, but the President has this thing called a bus ride before each city he stops in. And on this bus ride, he has what you would call advisors. And these advisors have jobs in which they research the town and host, then they relay this information to the President to make him look smart and all-knowing. I hate to say this—they do it for John Kerry too—but Mr. Bush didn't "know" shit.

"I'm going to buy some cheese," the president said.

"What kind are you going to get?" asked one of the journalists, probably surly at having to run in the rain.

"I'll let you know when I buy it," replied the president. "What kind are you going to get?"

With that, the room, actually another small hallway, erupted in laughter.

That's part of life on the road with the president.

If someone can explain to me how this makes people "erupt with laughter", please e-mail me at [nickholle@flymf.com](mailto:nickholle@flymf.com) and do so.

Then it dawns on me. When you live in a small town and police put out "Do not park" signs along the main drag of town, you can safely assume someone with a big platter of cheese is coming through the city.

As a Wisconsinite, there's nothing more satisfying than perpetuating the cheese stereotype.

State Sen. Dave Zien brought his passion for patriotism to the presidential rally with a rousing speech of his own before Bush's visit. Zien led the crowd in chanting "Hail to the Chief, Hail to the Chief" and then offered the

crowd some advice. "Say it so loud that not only the president hears it, but so God can hear it, too," Zien said.

Woof.

State Sen. Dale Schultz, who is running for the Third District Congressional seat, said there are three keys to why Chippewa Falls is a great place and why it was targeted by Bush for his visit. "The Titanic, Dave Zien and Leinenkugel's Beer." When Leinie's was mentioned a man yelled from the crowd, "Now you're talking."

Woof again.

The issue of values is important to Hildebrandt, who called Bush a man of God. "He's such a wonderful man. He'll bring back our morals that we so desperately need," she said.

Apparently, bringing back the morals we so desperately need is an eight-year process.

Many people along the rural sections along Highway 29 saw their president, or at least his bus, for the first time in their lives. They lined up in intersection after intersection just to catch a glimpse. Some were ecstatic, others joyous and still others unhappy or disgusted.

But now that campaign has touched their lives. One way or the other, they now have a connection to the November election. And that's valuable.

I'm glad the *Herald* writers got a little writerly in the end. They really brought together and turned Bush's visit into a meaningful experience for everyone, no matter what your political affiliation. But isn't that what it's about, having a month's worth of small talk already laid out for them? Nobody would be talking about the weather or the Packers until at least mid-September. And that, my friends, is valuable.