

Obama turns to trusted political insider Jim Johnson for key role

By DOUG GROW

He's hardly just another Johnson from Minnesota.

James A. "Jim" Johnson, born in Benson, now lives on the top floor of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington, D.C., with views of the Potomac and the Washington Monument. But you'll also find him in the inner circle of many of the nation's power groups.

In the last year, Johnson, who once was a member of an organization known as Friends of Hillary, has become tightly tied to the presidential campaign of Barack Obama. It's Johnson's job to vet potential vice presidential candidates for Obama, a duty he also performed for Walter Mondale, who ended up running with Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, and John Kerry, who ended up with John Edwards, four years ago.

It's also been reported that insiders from the campaigns of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Obama have met at Johnson's elegant home to discuss what lies ahead after Clinton finally flies the white flag.

Clinton has denied such meetings took place, and Obama isn't talking publicly about a search for running mates.

"I'm not commenting on vice presidential matters because I have not won the nomination," Obama told reporters recently.

Trusted adviser — and the silent type

And Johnson, 64, isn't the type to comment. An Atlantic magazine article had this to say about Johnson a year ago: "He is famously reluctant to speak to the press, which

is one reason why he has become a trusted adviser to so many politicians."

Efforts to reach Johnson for this article were unsuccessful. The Obama campaign also did not respond to questions about Johnson's role in the campaign, although it did send out press releases decrying the "behind-closed-doors" fundraising efforts of John McCain and President Bush.

It's likely that Obama came to know Johnson through the Daley political machine in Chicago. Johnson and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley are said to be close.

No matter how they were introduced, the selection of Johnson to be a part of the inner circle seems to run contrary to Obama's campaign theme of "change."

Johnson represent Washington power as it's always been. He's the consummate insider. He's very rich, very connected and very much behind the scenes.

Johnson's wealth and politics appear to be related.

Start with politics, which always have been a part of Johnson's life. He is the son of the late A.I. Johnson, a Swift County man of modest means who was a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives from 1941 to 1958. A.I. Johnson rose to the position of House speaker during the 1955 and '57 sessions.

A.I.'s passion was education. Though he had only an eighth-grade education himself, he became a member of the board of regents at the University of Minnesota and pushed hard for higher education across the state.

If that name, A.I. Johnson, rings slightly familiar to you, it may be because Jim and his wife, Maxine Isaacs, gave \$1 million to the University of Minnesota a few years back. In return, the university named the oft-used great room at the McNamara Alumni Center in A.I.'s memory.

Johnson, who has a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota (1966) and a master's in public affairs from Princeton (1968), also has given a substantial gift to Augsburg College, in his mother's memory, and has received an honorary degree from that school.

Before his days with Mondale, Johnson worked on the campaigns of Gene McCarthy and George McGovern. When not involved in campaigns, he worked for Dayton Hudson and later taught at Princeton.

Mondale provided his access to power

But his access to power came via Walter Mondale.

"As I remember it," said Mondale, who know Jim's father, "he came by to visit. He was bright and interested and so I hired him."

He was a senior aide to Sen. Mondale, an executive assistant to Vice President Mondale and the chairman of Mondale's 1984 presidential campaign.

What Johnson offered Mondale were incredible organization skills (he keeps file cards on everything). He never forgets a name, and he absorbs policy.

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MINNPOST.WORLD

Texas will conduct more focused child-abuse inquiry

By **SUSAN ALBRIGHT**

As members of a breakaway Mormon sect in Texas reunite with their children this week, authorities say they'll proceed with the child-abuse investigation that caused officials to place more than 400 children in protective custody two months ago. The effort clearly will be much more focused, however, since the Texas Supreme Court ruled last week that the state overreached in removing children not in imminent danger of harm.

The state had argued that taking all the children in the church's compound was necessary "because the culture of the sect led to illegal under-age marriage for girls and acceptance of that practice by boys, a pattern that the state said endangers both sexes," the New York Times reported after an earlier ruling by an appeals court. Members of the church have asserted, however, that they are being persecuted for their religious beliefs.

On Monday, in response to the Supreme Court, Judge Barbara Walther signed an order in San Angelo allowing for the children's release — with restrictions on the families meant to retain open access to the children and to facilitate ongoing investigation — and parents began picking up their children from foster-care facilities across the state.

State failed to show immediate danger

"The high court and the appeals court rejected the state's argument that all the children were in immediate danger from what it said was sexual abuse of teenage girls at the ranch," the Houston Chronicle reported.

"The Third Court of Appeals ruled that the state failed to show that any more than five of the teenage girls were being sexually abused, and had offered no evidence of sexual or physical abuse against the other children. Half the children sent to foster care were no older than 5."



By **JESSICA RINALDI, Reuters**

These women, Ruth (left) and Velvet, shown in late April after their children were taken from the YFZ Ranch in Texas, are expected to be reunited with their children this week.

The principal concern of Texas authorities involves marriages of adult men to underage girls in the polygamous Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (FLDS), which had established the Yearning for Zion Ranch in Eldorado, Texas. Such communities have for decades been on- and off-again subjects of investigations in Arizona, Utah and Colorado, as well as in western Canada.

Angie Voss, a Child Protective Services investigator who participated in the raid and interviewed girls at the ranch, "testified that she had found evidence that 'more than 20 girls, some of whom are now adults, have conceived or given birth under the age of 16 or 17,' " the Times reported.

Investigating specific cases is expected to be more difficult as families return to the compound in Eldorado, but, as the Washington Post reported, "the judge's ruling included a provision that child-protection officials can visit the ranch at any time. A spokeswoman for the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services said that some results of DNA testing, intended to establish who fathered children of underage mothers, might be ready this week."

Church says it will counsel against underage unions

The case has led the church itself to declare a change. According to the Associated Press, "Willie Jessop, a group elder, told reporters that, from now on, the church will not sanction the marriage of any girl who is not old enough to legally consent, and that it will counsel members against such unions."

He also told the AP that the church has been widely misunderstood "and insisted marriages within the church have always been consensual. He would not say whether marriages of underage minors had taken place in the past but said the sect as a whole should not be punished for the misdeeds of a few."

Meanwhile, the attention garnered by the Texas case has led officials in British Columbia to reconsider whether charges could be brought against members of a polygamous sect there. The province's attorney general has named a special prosecutor to lead a re-assessment.

"The breakaway Mormon sect in Bountiful, in western Canada, has about 1,500 people including about 500 U.S. citizens," the Houston Chronicle reported. "Attorney General Wally Oppal said the prosecutor will examine if there should be charges for

polygamy, sexual assault, sexual exploitation or a combination of charges."

According to the Canadian Press, Oppal indicated that "public concerns about older men marrying young girls and men with multiple wives at the B.C. polygamous community of Bountiful played a strong part in the decision to review whether charges of sexual abuse and polygamy are warranted against members of the religious group." He told the Canadian Press that the issue has been confounding the B.C. government for more than 20 years, saying, "I just want to put the thing to rest one way or the other."

Religious freedom vs. polygamy laws

The Press said that an earlier legal opinion "raised the possibility that anyone charged criminally under the prohibition of polygamy could defend themselves on grounds that their rights to religious freedom are protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"That's the big issue, whether or not the religious rights that are conferred in the Constitution would trump the polygamy section in the Criminal Code," Oppal said. "I don't think it would. That's my view. I think religious rights, like all rights, are not absolute."

Another issue confounding authorities, the Vancouver Sun said, is that of prior judicial practice. It said "opinions in the case ... have found it would be difficult to pursue charges, either because of the constitutionality of Canada's laws as they pertain to polygamy or because prosecutors have gone so many years without taking action."

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Author Carol Bly gets her Oprah moment



AMY GOETZMAN

It's a little hard to imagine Carol Bly sitting on Oprah Winfrey's couch. Not because she wouldn't have had much to talk about with the media mogul; these two smart, book-loving women would have had a rollicking conversation, says Cynthia Loveland, Bly's friend and publishing partner. The problem would have been getting Bly to sit still for all the fussing and makeup that goes along with going on TV. The modest, down-to-earth Minnesota writer just didn't have the time of day for that kind of stuff.

"She would have loved to be interviewed by Oprah," says Loveland. "She would have seen it as an opportunity to talk about the things dear to her heart, and she wouldn't have been intimidated at all. We actually sent Oprah one of the early books we collaborated on for our own small press [Bly & Loveland Press], and Carol joked about the very idea of us getting made up for TV. She had such a good sense of humor."

Bly, who died of cancer at age 80 in December, gets her Oprah moment next month, when her first novel and final book, "Shelter Half," will be a summer reading pick in O

magazine. It's not quite Oprah's Book Club, but the featured review will be the largest national exposure Bly's work has ever had; the magazine prints 2.4 million copies of each issue.

"Shelter Half," a darkly humorous literary novel set in a fictional Minnesota small town, took Bly four years to write. It is out this month on Holy Cow! Press, in Duluth. Loveland says even though Bly had never written a novel before, her voice is "all over the place" in this one, and longtime fans will be pleased to get the chance to spend more time with the author's work.

"The novel combines all of her artistry as a short-story writer, along with all the political and ethical concerns that she explores in her essays," says Jim Perlman, Bly's friend of 20 years and editor and publisher at Holy Cow! Press.

Big deal for little press

Oprah's word on the printed word holds tremendous power. So how does a small press prepare for the potential stampede of Oprah readers? Perlman is cautiously optimistic.

"Publishing is a wonderfully romantic activity, and it's easy to overestimate the appeal of a book. Just because you like it, doesn't mean everyone else

will," he says. But if Oprah likes it, chances are good that her fans — not to mention Bly's fans — will want to check it out, so Perlman has ordered a print run of 10,000 copies, the largest printing in Holy Cow!'s 31-year history. A typical printing for the literary-minded, occasionally experimental press is about 2,000 to 4,000 copies, although its titles "Brother Songs," an anthology of male poets, and "Strength to Your Sword Arm," by Brenda Ueland, have sold close to 15,000 copies over multiple printings.

"If those first 10,000 all sell, we'd have the income available to reprint the book," says Perlman. "We've had poets read on 'Prairie Home Companion,' books reviewed in the New York Times Book Review, and authors interviewed on NPR, so I consider this in league with that, but I don't really know what to expect, since this is the first time we've ever been exposed to such a large and devoted audience."

"Shelter Half" will also be promoted in independent bookstores this month as a Midwest Booksellers Association "Midwest Connections Selection."

Grant led to Oprah

Oprah entered the picture when Holy Cow! received a

publicity grant last year. "We were the beneficiary of 12 free hours of time from a professional publicist. We used her mailing list to send uncorrected galleys to reviewers in January, and Oprah was on that list," says Perlman. "In April we got a call from Oprah's people asking if the publication was still on track. Then we heard nothing until early May, when they sent an email saying they'd made a decision to review it in their July issue. Of course, I was extremely excited."

The challenge was that the magazine wanted a copy of the book immediately, and it would be two weeks before Perlman would have copies. But he wasn't going to miss this chance. "We made one up. I went through my library and found a book with the same thickness and the same dimensions the finished book would have. Then I had our designer paste the cover and the spine and the back cover to a copy of the inside pages, so from the outside it looked like a real book."

They overnighted the fake, it seemed to fit the bill, and in about two weeks, Oprah's magazine subscribers will receive their summer reading instructions: Read Carol Bly.

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Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

Obama turns to trusted political insider Jim Johnson for key role

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“Just the sort of person you need,” said Mondale.

He’s also very tough, said three close observers who have worked with him over the years, including two high-powered players in DFL politics. Because of their ties, none of them wanted to speak on the record. “There’s no percentage (in talking about Johnson),” said one.

Warren Spannaus, a former Minnesota attorney general, had a softer view of Mondale’s guy.

“He seems nice enough,” said Spannaus. “He’s friendly. You don’t have trouble picking him out in a room. He’s the guy who looks like a banker.”

Presumably, it is these skills — loyalty, toughness, organization and, now, endless connections — that made many speculate that Johnson would have been White House chief of staff had Kerry defeated President Bush four years ago. Appointment as secretary of the treasury was considered another possibility.

It was during Mondale’s presidential campaign that Johnson met and, later, married Maxine Isaacs, who was Mondale’s press secretary. She has been a longtime lecturer at the Kennedy School of Government and is known as a power player in her own right.

Mondale speaks highly of Johnson.

“He’s gifted, he’s interested in policy and he’s driven,” said Mondale.

How driven? Mondale, laughing, recalled a story from the 1984 campaign. As part of the campaign, Mondale’s family and staff created a cookbook for supporters, with all providing

favorite recipes.

“In his recipe, Jim said you put a hot dog in steaming water, put the hot dog in a bun, open a can of Coke and turn on the 6 o’clock news.”

Post-Mondale, Johnson focused on making money

Following the failed 1984 presidential bid, Johnson went about the business of making money. He joined with diplomat Richard Holbrooke in founding Public Strategies, which gave political advice to business clients. Later, he did similar work with Sherman Lehman in D.C. Holbrooke and Johnson remain together now, as vice chairmen of Perseus, an international merchant bank and private equity fund management company.

In 1990, Johnson went to work for the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and quickly became its \$5 million-a-year chairman. His compensation rose to a reported \$21 million by his final year, 1998.

But Johnson did more than make a lot of money at Fannie Mae. He increased his connections — and his access to power — by establishing Fannie Mae foundations that spread around millions of dollars. Homeless shelters, colleges, hospitals all benefited from Fannie Mae Foundation money.

Given Fannie Mae’s largess, it’s likely no coincidence that Johnson was chairman of the Kennedy Center and the Brookings Institution at the time he was heading Fannie Mae. During this period, he was known in D.C.’s inner circles as “chairman of the universe.”

In a 1997 article critical of Fannie Mae’s lavish ways, Slate called Johnson “Washington

D.C.’s Medici,” a reference to the Italian family that, beginning in the 13th century, produced popes, prospered in banking and sponsored the arts throughout Europe.)

“... But he is not a philanthropist with his own money,” the Slate article said. “The fount of Johnson’s generosity is Fannie Mae’s foundation... What makes Fannie Mae special is that it is essentially the taxpayers’ money that Johnson is giving away.”

When he left his job at Fannie Mae, which long has had a reputation as a cushy landing spot for the political class in Washington, he was serenaded by 16 members of the Benson High band, which had been flown to D.C. at Fannie Mae’s expense. He also received a number of perks, including a \$600,000 annual consulting fee.

It should be noted that Johnson got out of Fannie Mae while the getting was good. Since his leaving, the massive, quasi-public home mortgage organization has been buffeted by negative headlines. Accounting scandals, dating back to Johnson’s era, have been followed by recent news that Fannie Mae has lost more than \$3 billion in the housing slump. Johnson never has been accused of being part of Fannie Mae’s accounting irregularities.

A liberal with lots of money

Though he’s labeled a political liberal, he’s apparently a believer in massive compensation for top executives.

Not only was he extremely well paid at Fannie Mae, Johnson was on the board of directors at United Health Group when William McGuire was receiving millions in compensation and

more than a billion dollars in back-dated stock options. United Health’s board members also were receiving millions in stock options. Johnson still serves on the board.

He also is on the board of Target Corp., well-known for generous compensation packages for its top executives. He’s on the board of Goldman Sachs. And Forestar Real Estate Group. He’s been on the boards of Dayton Hudson, Gannett, Temple-Inland. All these boards continually bring a small cadre of power players together.

Does this fondness for wealth put a pimple on his liberal credentials?

“Jim is wealthy,” said Mondale. “He deserves credit, because he did it on his own. He always was good at investing. I don’t think money should disqualify somebody from being a Democrat. We’ve had people like the Kennedys who are both wealthy and progressives. Actually, I think the Democrats are pretty happy to have some people with wealth. Give Jim credit. He’s been very generous.

Johnson does spread some of his wealth around. Beside the gifts to the University of Minnesota and Augsburg, he and his spouse recently gave \$250,000 to \$500,000 to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. They have been generous, too, with charitable arts gifts in D.C., which is a long way from Benson.

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Not only was he extremely well paid at Fannie Mae, Johnson was on the board of directors at United Health Group when William McGuire was receiving millions in compensation and more than a billion dollars in back-dated stock options. United Health’s board members also were receiving millions in stock options. Johnson still serves on the board.

THE DAILY GLEAN

‘Dammit, Jim, I’m a doctor, not a backdating expert!’

By DAVID BRAUER

Somewhere in the future, Leonard “Bones” McCoy is telling James T. Kirk, “I’m just a simple country doctor.” That, apparently, is Bill McGuire’s defense against a United Health Group shareholder suit for improperly backdated stock options, the Strib’s David Phelps reports. McGuire, you might remember, was once master of the medical-systems universe, but something as inconsequential as his compensation was apparently too much for the man to understand. Those precisely ill-timed options? I was hand-off, says the otherwise controlling CEO.

I know it has its faults, but today, thank God for DNA testing. That’s why Matthew Gretz finally admitted to murdering his wife, Kira Simonian, an MCAD art student, writes the Strib’s Terry Collins. The hook here is narcissistic gall: after stabbing and hammering Simonian last June, Gretz went all weepy to vigils in the much-covered aftermath. Objectivity is OK at times, but Jason DeRusha rightly abandoned it with this blunt take: “Evil Liar Admits to Killing His Wife.”

OK, Republicans, we get it: Al Franken has juvenile sexual fantasies and tells a ribald joke or two. You know you’ve entered the rabbit hole (Alice in Wonderland, not Playboy) when Republicans stage a press conference highlighting Franken’s allegedly “homophobic” lesbian jokes. City Pages’ Jeff Severns Guntzel bodychecks the hy-

poetry by cross-referencing the intolerant GOP platform. Perhaps with recent Republican sex scandals in mind, the Mississippifarian blog noted, “Republican officeholders do what Al Franken only fantasizes about.”

More Franken: Here’s what I still haven’t seen adequately explained — why are Republicans doing their document dump now? Why not at least wait for the DFL to endorse? Or after filings close? Perhaps they think the guy is so formidable they have to start taking him down now? I know political reporters have taken some runs at this, but it doesn’t add up.

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman, a Hillary Clinton backer, will endorse Barack Obama at tonight’s Xcel Energy Center victory rally, the PiPress’s Dave Orrick reports. Coleman is a member of Clinton’s Minnesota steering committee. The story doesn’t say if he’s a superdelegate.

Strib Washington guy Conrad Wilson reports that last year’s record corn harvest expanded the nitrogen-rich Gulf of Mexico “dead zone.” The “Massachusetts”-sized zone (which looks bigger on a Strib map) will get larger because of high commodity prices. Fertilizer use rose 6-7 percent last year, and ethanol gets blamed, but that production should fall; the question is whether farmers keep planting corn, which requires more nutrients than other crops. Marshland destruction hasn’t helped.

Shocker: Prius sales in our area are down 2 percent, writes the Strib’s Emma Carew. That’s because they’re in such short supply, even though Prius production is up 23 percent in the past year. Fewer people buy hybrids in the Midwest than nationwide, so manufacturers send fewer our way. (Nissan doesn’t even sell the Altima hybrid in the Midwest.) Still, if production’s up, shouldn’t we be getting more cars even with our smaller share? Confused.

Whoa: U researchers may have a stem-cell therapy for kids whose skin falls off “at the slightest touch,” the Strib’s Josephine Marcotty reports. Kids usually die before adulthood, but the mouse-trying bone-marrow transplant “apparently cured” Nate Liao this winter; his brother Jake got the transplant Friday. Marcotty says it’s the first time a transplant has cured a non-blood or non-marrow disease, expanding the universe of diseases that could be treated.

The Strib’s Steve Brandt offers a nice report on the detritus of the condo boom: projects that have popped out of the ground but remain indefinitely unfinished. Neighbors get to look at chain-link fences, ill-parked sales trailers, taunting ad banners and collapsing sidewalks. There’s similar crud downtown. How can the city get blood out of stone? One councilmember suggests shaming by posting developer phone numbers, but that gang seems pretty thick-skinned. Fines?

Today’s talker: Car thieves drive off with sleeping 5-year-old; pops was in the liquor store. The miscreants drove five miles before they “tossed” the girl into a yard, the PiPress’s Tad Vezner and Mara H. Gottfried report. Doofus dad left the car running and unlocked. His reward: his girl “slung ... over on the grass. Just threw her on the ground,” says one eyewitness. Cops arrested one man, are looking for another, and we don’t know if they tagged the father.

Talker II: A Shakopee man will make 100 skydives in 12 hours, the PiPress’s Kevin Harter writes. The jumps will raise \$40,000 for Parkinson’s research; Kevin Burkart’s dad has the disease. Each 2,200-foot jump will take six minutes to accomplish; he’ll use two plans, six skydiving rigs and up to eight parachute packers. The event happens tomorrow, beginning at 6 a.m.

Nort Spews: So that’s what a Joe Mauer homer looks like! Twins beat the Yanks 6-5 to salvage a home split. Sore Losers everywhere: here, here and here. And God bless Pat Reusse for questioning the absolutely stupid Metrodome habit of throwing the other team’s homers back. It’s a Cubs idea, we look like desperate, imitative weenies, and why give up a souvenir? Think about it the next time you’re doing the wave.

Want to add your voice?

If you’re interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at salbright@minnpost.com.

COMMUNITY VOICES

Learning what I was trying to teach

By JAKE GREENE

Editor's note: MinnPost asked Jake Greene, a twentysomething author who grew up in the Twin Cities, to describe how he learned to sell himself to publishers, since his book, "Whoa, My Boss Is Naked," guides GenYers on how to sell themselves. Here is the result.

Three years ago, I decided to write a career book that utilized contemporary pop-culture references to enliven advice on how to land a job and get ahead without becoming a "corporate tool." As a member of the MTV Generation, I felt that infusing movies, television and music into my material would help me appeal to vaguely ambitious college grads with high hopes and low attention spans.

After nearly a year of researching and writing, I put together a nonfiction book proposal containing four sample chapters and a few pages of marketing and promotional ideas. I felt good about my proposal; I thought it was entertaining, different and ready to sell.

I was wrong.

The rejections began to trickle in about a week after I emailed the proposal to several literary agents I had found on Google. They arrived in several shapes and sizes — some were polite and individualized, some were short and generic, and a few were fairly offensive — but they all seemed to contain the same message:

"Dear Mr. Greene,

... while there is certainly much merit in your proposal, I'm not convinced it is something I could sell to a publisher in today's highly competitive market."

Getting trumped

All of the agents seemed to agree that my material was fresh, but they had doubts about whether they could sell the book to a publisher. More specifically, they had doubts about whether they could sell ME to a publisher. In the world of business books,

profiles trump prose, experts trump exciting newcomers, and (Donald) Trump trumps just about everybody.

Unfortunately, The Donald and I didn't have very much in common. I wasn't middle-aged, I wasn't rich, and I had never run a Fortune 500 company. Worse, I wasn't famous. Had I been a rock star, movie star, all-star, or even a past contestant on "Survivor" or "Big Brother," I might have been able to skate by on the strength of my material alone. Alas, I was decidedly unfamous.

If I wanted to sell my book, I was going to have to sell myself.

Over the next six months, I tightened up my material while working to define my personal positioning (the qualities and characteristics that set me apart from the other authors on the market). I focused on the following questions: What made me different and special? What were my areas of expertise? Who was my primary audience? What unique benefits would readers get from my material?

More than just answering these questions, however, I had to make sure that my answers were clear and concise. I, like millions of twentysomethings on the job market, had a bit of a rambling problem. I tended to over-answer questions and over-explain myself in conversations and on paper. After watching nearly two decades of confessional-style interviews on reality TV shows like "The Real World," I had adopted the bad habit of broadcasting my inner monologues.

Senior executives (be it in publishing, business, or academia) have very little patience for twentysomethings who talk too much.

I also worked to identify comparisons that would make it easier for people to understand my content and my style. When selling yourself, you have to get away from the pretentious jam-band mindset that loathes comparison and evaluation. Ask jam-band

members about their style or sound, and they will most likely answer with something like this:

"Ya know, it's tough to compare us to other bands because our sound is so, like, unique. It's, like, a unique fusion, you feel me?"

Eh, not so much.

It's not hard to see why most jam-bands never get signed (I dissect several problems associated with the jam-band mentality in a chapter of my book called "The Reason Most Bands Suck"). Today, when people ask me about my written "voice," I tell them that I'm like an adult Ferris Bueller — a street-smart, slightly mischievous insider who helps peers navigate the system. The comparison isn't perfect (I don't advocate skipping school or wearing vests, for starters), but it's a good start.

Making the benefits 'pop'

My earliest book proposal had a bit of a "poser problem." I thought that I had to present my material the way all the established book experts do in order to be taken seriously in the industry. Unfortunately, as I mentioned earlier, I lacked the gray hair, green paper and tabloid exposure to compete on their level. Furthermore, I didn't really want to compete on their level. I had no intention of writing the next 12-steps-to-success program. I view those business recipe books as "Corporate Tools for Corporate Tools."

(By the way, whenever I see a new business recipe book at the store, I think of the scene in "There's Something About Mary" when Ben Stiller picks up the psycho hitchhiker who tells him about a blockbuster business idea, 7-Minute Abs. "You walk into a video store, you see 8-Minute Abs sittin' there, there's 7-Minute Abs right beside it. Which one are you gonna pick, man?" That scene is classic.)

I love pop culture. I love talking about pop culture and, more important, learning from pop culture. I

grew up learning life lessons from Bill Cosby, geography from Carmen San Diego, and science from Mr. Wizard. When I hang out with my friends, we will likely throw out no less than 20 movie references per hour of conversation. My proposal really turned a corner when I realized that I didn't need to mute my love affair with pop culture just because I was writing a business book.

When I submitted my revised proposal to a new batch of agents, I explained that the pop-culture connection is what gave my book an edge over the other submissions on their desks. For a generation raised with remote controls in their hands, my material would be more memorable because of the nostalgia-driven movies, music, and TV references of the '80s, '90s and today. It became a lot easier to sell myself once I accepted that it was OK for me to focus on the subjects I enjoyed and a style that felt natural.

Two years later

To make a long story short(er), I hooked up with an agent in the summer of 2006, and we were able to sell the book to Doubleday (Random House) a few months later.

"Whoa, My Boss is Naked: A Career Book for People Who Would Never Be Caught Dead Reading a Career Book" was published in January 2008. The book has been received well and I have spent a lot of time on the road, speaking and signing. However, truth be told, I'm still not as old, rich or famous as Donald Trump.

Thank God.

Jake Greene is a marketing consultant and the author of "Whoa, My Boss is Naked: A Career Book for People Who Would Never Be Caught Dead Reading a Career Book" (Doubleday, January 2008). He grew up in the Twin Cities, and now lives in Nashville with his wife and dog.