

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY®



**BATTLE FOR
CONTROL**

by Marshal Younger

from Adventures in Odyssey®



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
Carol Stream, Illinois

Battle for Control

Copyright © 2008 by Focus on the Family

All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

A Focus on the Family book published by

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188

Focus on the Family and Adventures in Odyssey and their accompanying logos and designs are federally registered trademarks, and *Kidsboro* is a trademark of Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, CO 80995.

TYNDALE and Tyndale's quill logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of Focus on the Family.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons living or dead is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of the author and publisher.

Editor: Kathy Davis

Cover design by Joseph Sapulich

Cover illustration © 2008 by Rob Johnson. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Younger, Marshal.

Battle for control / Marshal Younger.

p. cm. — (Kidsboro ; 1) (Adventures in Odyssey)

Summary: Ryan Cummings, the mayor of Kidsboro, is losing control of his town, but when a new mayor takes over and things begin to get out of hand, it is Ryan the citizens depend on to make things right again.

ISBN-13: 978-1-58997-409-8

ISBN-10: 1-58997-409-3

[1. Politics, Practical—Fiction. 2. Conduct of life—Fiction. 3. Christian life—Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.Y8943Bat 2007

[Fic]—dc22

2006036540

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 / 13 12 11 10 09 08

*To Stephanie, who worked so hard to
keep a roof over our heads
while I sat at a computer and wrote
a bunch of stuff that will never sell
(and a couple of things that did).*





THE BIRTH OF A CITY

CAREER DAY WAS A BUST. There were tables lined up end-to-end across the Odyssey Middle School gym, and as soon as our teachers let us loose, we all dashed around like 300 mice scrambling for six pieces of cheese, eager to sign up for the fun jobs. If we signed our names on the list fast enough, we had a good chance of working in whatever occupations we wanted for a day. Most everyone wanted exciting things like working at the fire department or police station. At one point, I saw Alice Funderburk, a rather large girl, shove people out of the way as she steamrolled to the police station table. The crowd of people parted for her like the Red Sea. She was the first one to sign up.

I didn't worry too much about getting on the list quickly, because I figured there weren't too many people interested in what I was interested in—politics. I wanted to be the mayor. I wanted so badly to meet with, work with, and *think* with the mayor of Odyssey. I strolled casually to my table, all the while watching people clamor and fight for their own tables, and sure enough, when I got there, no one had signed

the sheet. I signed my name, *Ryan Cummings, age 12*. I could hardly wait to walk up the City Hall steps in the only suit I owned, ready to dazzle the mayor of Odyssey with my knowledge of government and politics.

It was not worth the wait.

When I got to City Hall later that morning, the mayor wasn't even around. The secretary showed me his office, and I sat at his desk. There were stacks of papers in front of me that I wasn't allowed to look through. I tried to answer the phone once and I got yelled at. I just sat there and waited for three hours, and when I finally met him, he shook my hand, had a picture taken of the two of us, and told me he was very sorry but he had a meeting to attend. I was dismissed shortly afterward. If all I had wanted was a photo, I could've posed with the cardboard cutout of himself that he still had in his office from his election campaign. I was bitterly disappointed. I wanted to work with him. I wanted to, for a few moments, *be* the mayor.

When I went to Whit's End that afternoon, I found some comfort in the fact that my friends had much the same experience I'd had. We all sat at the counter of the ice cream shop, complaining about our day. John Avery Whittaker, or "Whit" as most adults called him, was the owner and operator of the ice cream shop and discovery emporium and had the misfortune of having to listen to us whine.

Jill Segler had gone to the *Odyssey Times* to find out what it was really like to be a news reporter. She'd had dreams of uncovering some big business scandal.

"I went to Dale Jacobs's office," she began, knowing

everyone would recognize the name of the editor of the *Odyssey Times*, “and the first thing he tells me is, ‘It may be a slow news day.’ Come to find out, it was not a slow news day. It was a *no* news day. I ended up helping a guy write a story about how celery prices have risen 5 percent in the last two weeks.”

Mr. Whittaker chuckled.

Scott Sanchez, my best friend, had a similar experience. He had signed up to learn how to be a private detective. Unfortunately, his mentor was Harlow Doyle, a private eye in *Odyssey* who may have actually been a worse detective than Scott was.

“We spent two hours filling out my paperwork. All he had to do was sign the form to prove that I showed up. First he couldn’t find a pen, then he couldn’t decide whether he should sign his middle name, then he couldn’t remember his middle name, and then he confused my name with his own. It was unbelievable.”

Alice Funderburk also had a frustrating story. She was angry that they didn’t give her a gun when she checked in at the police station. She spent most of the morning riding around with a police officer and handing out parking tickets. But when Alice threw a jaywalker up against a wall, she was forced to go back to the police station and do paperwork for the rest of the day.

The only person who had a positive story was Nelson Swanson, who worked with Eugene Meltsner, an employee at Whit’s End. Eugene was the resident genius, and Nelson was his protégé. Eugene had helped Nelson conceive and

build some of his best inventions, of which he had many. Eugene and Nelson had spent the day building a solar-powered air conditioner. Everyone felt sorry for Nelson when he told this story—until we realized that he had actually enjoyed doing it.

We all whined some more. I said, “How are we ever going to know if this is what we really want to do with our lives if we never get a real opportunity to try it?”

Mr. Whittaker didn’t answer. Instead, he began to stare at nothing, which made us think that the wheels were turning inside his head.

“Mr. Whittaker?” Scott said, waving a hand in front of his face.

“You know what?” He said, breaking out of his trance. “If you really want practical experience at these jobs, there may be other ways of getting it.”

“How?”

“Why don’t you create your own jobs?”

None of us knew what he was talking about, and maybe he didn’t either, because he paused and stared into space again. “Better yet . . . why don’t you create your own *town*?”

Still, we weren’t getting it. “I’ll get you started,” he said. “You can form a community. Each of you would have a different job—whatever you want to be. It won’t be exactly the same as real life, but it might give you a taste of what you’re looking for.”

I nodded more and more as he went on explaining his idea. I loved it! We could create our own town!



And so Kidsboro was born. We started off with five of us: Jill Segler would start the *Kidsboro Chronicle*, a weekly newspaper. Alice Funderburk chose to be the chief of police. She had no police to be chief *of*, but no one was about to argue with her. Nelson wanted to be a small-business owner, selling his inventions. Scott wanted to be a private detective, though I couldn't imagine what kinds of cases he would be called on to solve in a town of, presently, five. And none of us were criminals.

Me? I wanted to be the mayor . . . and no one had any objections. The others seemed to think I was the perfect choice, and this made me feel good. I liked my title—mayor of Kidsboro.

The five of us became the city council, and with Mr. Whittaker's help, we wrote the city charter, or the Kidsboro Constitution. All the laws of the land would be laid down in this document.

After we wrote the city charter, we decided that if we were going to do this, we would do it right. "I think we should have actual buildings," I said in our first city council meeting.

"What do you mean?" Jill asked.

"Mr. Whittaker owns the woods behind Whit's End, and he told me we can use it. I think we should build clubhouses for our offices and bigger clubhouses for meeting halls."

"Build clubhouses?" Scott said. "With what?"

This question led us to another question. Was our new

town going to be just the five of us, or would we allow other people in? The clubhouse question answered this for us, because we ran into an immediate problem: none of us had any kind of building materials. Mr. Whittaker didn't want to supply our materials, because he wanted us to come up with our own solutions.

We all knew someone who had a supply of wood, and admitting him as a citizen would solve our problem. Max Darby's father owned a construction company, and Max had easy access to wood scraps. I was worried about asking Max to be a part of Kidsboro, though, because he was known for getting into trouble at school. But having him as a citizen would make it easy for us to get the wood we needed to build our town.

We asked Max, and he loved the idea of becoming a citizen because he thought it could make him rich. He would make us pay for the wood. That's when we decided to set up a money system for Kidsboro. Max would get Kidsboro money (instead of real money) for his wood: tokens (about five cents) and starbills (20 tokens, or about a dollar).

Everything sold in Kidsboro would have to be paid for in Kidsboro money. Mr. Whittaker decided that everyone who became a citizen would be given a certain amount of Kidsboro currency to start off with: enough to buy a house and have a little money left over to spend around town.

Over the next couple of weeks, with Max's help, we built a clubhouse for each of us. Eugene Meltsner was closely involved with the layout of the town, making logical decisions about where everything should go based on proximity

to neighbors, quality of soil, and drainage. We also built a meeting hall, which was an open-air pavilion 10 times as large as any of the clubhouses. It was a multi-purpose city council meeting hall and entertainment center.

The next step was to build up our population. We began a search for citizens. Everyone we talked to seemed excited about the idea of being part of a kids' town, so we didn't have much difficulty finding interested people. Everyone was welcome to come to Kidsboro, but it was simply impossible to allow everyone to become actual citizens. We couldn't build that many clubhouses.

We decided that the requirements for citizenship in Kidsboro should be high. We wanted people of reasonably high standards so that we could build up a strong community. The city council would vote on each candidate. I disagreed with a couple of the selections: Valerie Swanson, for one. She was Nelson's sister and a very manipulative girl. But she was voted in despite my arguments against her. That's because she was the prettiest and most popular girl in school. I knew that most of the guys at Odyssey Middle School had secret crushes on her.

Mr. Whittaker gave us advice whenever we really needed it, but for the most part, he held back. He wanted us to get the experience of solving our own problems, and I appreciated this. I doubted that I would ever go to him for advice on a mayoral problem, but I knew that I could if I needed to.

So we had our little town. We started off with 20 people and added more over the next couple of months. Things went smoothly at first. Most Kidsboro citizens came to the

town after school through the early spring months, and a lot of us spent our weekend days there. People obeyed the laws; businesses were set up and seemed to be prospering. And I was the mayor.

Which also made me the prime target.



THE PIT BULL AT MY DESK

MY FOOT SEEMED TO HAVE a life of its own as it tapped uncontrollably on the ground. I pressed it flatter against the ground in an attempt to stop it, but I couldn't. Fortunately for me, the desk hid my foot's nervous dance from Valerie. I've heard that in the presence of vicious animals, you should never show fear, because it's the first thing they sense. I forced myself to look at her, stone-faced. She would not see me flinch.

She spoke, an evil smile crossing her otherwise perfect face. "I don't care if you *are* the mayor, Ryan. If I don't get what I want, I'm gonna take over this town and run you out."

I felt the blood drain out of my face. I tried to return the smile, even though I knew that was silly. Valerie's smile didn't convey friendship or kindness. The fact that Valerie smiled was worse than if she had frowned or gritted her teeth. A frown would've meant she was serious about crushing me into tiny little bits. A smile meant she would also enjoy it.

She stood up without taking her eyes off of me. She leaned over my desk until her long, brown hair was almost

swinging in my face. It smelled like strawberries, and for a split-second I was distracted. But I shook off the momentary crush and stared at her eyes, which were half-closed like a lion ready to pounce.

“Ashley gets in,” she said. She turned around and left, her work here done.

Whew! I could finally exhale. I wiped the sweat from my forehead with a sleeve and paced around the office, trying to work off some nervous energy. Most of the guys in our school, including me, actually admitted to being afraid of Valerie. The guys who wouldn't admit it were lying. And crushing me under her cruel thumb would be as easy for Valerie as crushing an ant with her foot.

We had grown to 29 citizens in our short two-month history, and we were planning to accept a new person into our town to make it an even 30. That afternoon, Valerie's best friend, Ashley, would be reviewed by the city council for possible citizenship. Valerie was trying to ensure that Ashley got the votes required to get in. One thing about Valerie: It was horrible being her enemy, but it was great being her friend. Having power in your corner has many advantages. Valerie knew that the five council members had to vote on Ashley. If Ashley didn't get an 80 percent majority vote (meaning four out of five people had to say “yes”), she didn't get in at all. No doubt Valerie pretty much knew how the voting would go: Ashley had three votes in the bag, and one vote against her. I was the wild card. If I voted yes to Ashley, she got in. If I voted no, she didn't.

The problem was, I didn't like Ashley. She called me

“Dummings,” a less-than-clever variation of my last name, Cummings, plus she got into trouble a lot in school. I’d seen her cheat on tests and copy other people’s homework assignments. She was not the type of person I wanted in my town. Kidsboro was a community filled with good citizens who followed rules. After all, this was not a real city—we couldn’t actually force anyone to pay a fine or stay in jail, so everyone had to follow the rules on his or her own. A person like Ashley wouldn’t take the laws seriously. I was sure of that.

So here was my choice: I could put the town in danger by allowing in a person who might ruin it; or I could put *myself* in danger by tugging on the chain of a fierce pit bull named Valerie.

Politics.



I went to the meeting hall pavilion where the city council met. All five members of the council gathered around the table.

Scott Sanchez was talking to himself, muttering the phrase “Walk the dog” over and over, which most likely meant that he was supposed to go home and do that right after the meeting. He would probably end up forgetting anyway, as he usually did.

To Scott’s left, *Kidsboro Chronicle* reporter Jill Segler had her notebook out and a pencil resting on her ear. Next to her, Police Chief Alice Funderburk was jerking her head back and forth to crack the bones in her thick neck.

Finally, Nelson Swanson was studying a chart he had created on his computer. At the top, the heading was “Voting for

Ashley." Below the heading were two columns—a list of reasons for voting "yes" and a list of reasons for voting "no." In the "no" column were all the things that I would've had in *my* "no" column—that Ashley was not very nice, that she was a dishonest student, and so on. In the "yes" column was one phrase, typed in the biggest font Nelson could fit on the sheet of paper: "VALERIE WON'T KILL ME!" Nelson was Valerie's brother and the only one smarter than her in town. But unlike her, he used his intelligence in positive ways.

They sat there staring at me, knowing exactly what was going through my head. Ashley's future in Kidsboro, and possibly *my* future as a living, walking human being, depended on my vote. Jill and Alice would vote for Ashley because she always invited them to her birthday parties. Ashley lived on Trickle Lake and her birthday party always included boating, swimming, and water skiing. It was the best party of the year. So Jill and Alice would vote for her simply because they wanted that invitation in their mailboxes.

Nelson would end up voting for Ashley. Getting Valerie mad at *me* was one thing. But actually living with her every day in adjoining rooms like he did, where she had easy 24-hour access to his neck, would be a nightmare.

I knew Scott would vote against Ashley. Scott had never liked Ashley, and he would do anything to keep her out, even if it meant putting his life in danger.

So the vote would be three to one. If I voted yes, the vote would be four to one, and Ashley would have the required 80 percent.

We went around the room. "Yes," Alice said.

“Yes,” Jill said.

“No,” Scott said.

“Yes,” Nelson said.

No surprises. They all sat up in their chairs and gazed at me. I could almost feel Valerie’s hands around my neck, ready to squeeze. I took a long breath, still not quite sure what I was going to say. I closed my eyes tightly. Sweat began to drip down my face. Not a sound came from the other four members of the council as I opened my eyes and let the word slide off my tongue.

“No.”