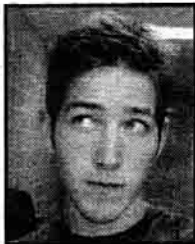


Be My Friend, Mr. President

by Chris Ladd
FUN EDITOR

Ok, I may as well go ahead and admit it: I have a friendship crush on our newest president,



President Phillip Glotzbach. He's just so engaging, so personable. He's exactly the kind of friend I need to complete my social circle — which, in itself, raises all sorts of issues.

There's the age thing; our seventh president

is a good five or six years older than I am (I'm young for my class year) and people of that vintage, people who've outgrown hot pots and narrow beds and binge drinking, root themselves in a different field of societal rules. What would Phil and I do together? What have we got in common?

To be honest, I've always had this problem, the problem of planning. Ever since I was a kid.

Calling me "anti-social" or a "loner" as a child would be off-base and unfair, but not without a hint of truth. Most of all, I think I was just too careful, have always been too careful, and this is at the heart of a friendship crush, of any crush, really. Because if we lived our lives with the same disregard to consequence our generation holds so dear, the same recklessness, these crushes would cease to be. We would act on these crushes — introduce ourselves to them, make plans. My plan-making insufficiency, or my awareness of it, stems to one person. That person is Chad Zalkin. Chad Zalkin lived across the street from me growing up, in a big, white house with

cast iron radiators and thick paint. The woodwork's hard, crisp edges had been coated again and again, covered and recovered for decades with lead and latex, and now cast an inflated, cartoonish border about the house.

I'm not sure who decided that Chad and I would be friends; it may have been our parents. Chad's sister, Meeka, was friends with my sister. Our parents were friends with each other. Our houses were diagonally across the street from one another, across Route



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133. I think that given the circumstances, given our respective ages, which were the same, if a little slanted in Chad's favor, and the closeness of our houses, siblings and parents, a play-date now and then was inescapable.

That, and Chad had a Nintendo game system. This, really, is why we're talking about Chad right now. Because I've never been good at Nintendo; my thumbs don't work fast or precisely, and Chad, as I remember, was excellent at it. Playing, he went into a sort of trance.

Chad chewed on his shirts, chewed the necks so his collars were frayed and wet-forever marked with an inaccurate semicircle of mucus. He always did this, but when we played Nintendo he went at it with a particular zeal. We often sat on his parents' bed for hours playing Mario from beginning to pirate ship. I say that "we" played, but when my turn came, Luigi's turn, Chad turned to me,

unhinged his jaw, and let the soggy neck of his sweatshirt fall off his teeth.

"Hey," he'd offer, "you want me to play your guy for you?"

We were a team, Chad and I — clearly working toward the same objective, fighting the same evil bosses that held our dearest princess captive. A partnership. Who was I to hinder our efforts? After I'd handed over the square controller and watched Chad untangle the wires and stuff the hem of his sweatshirt back into his mouth, my

partner's offers became more and more generous.

"I'll juft get you fru thith nexth lefel. Ithreally hard if you donnew whath yoodooing."

"I know a thrick in thif one to get like fiteen guyth, watch thith."

"I'm juth gonna' flay your guy again, we're almoftt there."

Laying there on his mom's side of the bed and watching him play level after level, his character first red, then green, then red again, I decided that Chad was a poor host. Decided that I would never be like Chad. Since, I've thought it important to always have a plan, an agenda when compay comes to call.

Which is why I'm having so much trouble with President Glotzbach.

Because it is I that has the friendship crush on our seventh president and not the other way round, I feel it my duty to plan the activities we will do together in advance, so as not to be

awkward. What do I do with Phil? What do old friends do? By this, I don't mean friends who have known each other a long time, but rather friends who are old because, and I mean no offence by this, he is and we haven't.

I say "Phil," of course, because that is what the parentheses beneath President Glotzbach's name on the college website indicate he would prefer to be called. I think that in any relationship it's important not to stand on ceremony.

I know from books I've read, books as old as Phil, that adults host dinner parties, or did during the time when Phil was born. This presents me with several problems; I live in a room ten feet square, with no space for a table, let alone a prep room for the caterer or a foyer to welcome guests to my home. I have no flatware and I'm not allowed candles. Combined, the particulars of my situation make for a lame dinner party.

In these books, people do things that seem out of place to me now, like play tennis wearing sweaters and smoke cigarettes in the parlor. I haven't got a parlor, and I left my racket at home. It's beginning to look like my friendship crush and future friendship with our seventh president are doomed.

But maybe there's something else. Maybe a friendship crush in itself is an unhealthy thing, the sick corollary to its more normal romantic cousin. Maybe a friendship is something that needs to evolve naturally, unplanned and spontaneous.

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So, Phil, I'll see you around. ☹