



# *this i dream... for Our Vote*

by Bruce Coville

**"I dream that my passion for this nation will help light a flame in children's hearts to participate fully in our national life, especially by registering to vote when they are 18, and then exercising that astonishing privilege. I dream that they will use that cherished right as a torch to light their way... and ours." - Bruce Coville**

## **I've Been Waiting Forty Years**

It's hard for anyone who wasn't there to understand what 1968 was like. Even harder, perhaps, to understand what it was like to come of age in the late 60's. It was a time of enormous hope, unbelievable possibility, and crushing loss. I was seventeen the night Martin Luther King was assassinated, and I can still remember the pain of hearing that news. And I was a white kid in the north, so my pain was as nothing compared to that of the folk who were really invested in him. I remember where I was the morning I heard that Bobby Kennedy was assassinated. I remember the insanity of the 1968 Democratic convention when Eugene McCarthy, the first politician to whom I gave my heart, was shoved aside so the political machine could continue with Hubert Humphrey, a once great man who had been compromised by his loyalty to Lyndon Johnson, a once great man made insane by the trap of the Vietnam War.

I remember the hope, and I remember the loss. I remember the way dreams died at Kent State.

And my heart has been broken for forty years, mourning for the country that I love, and the dreams that I grew up with.

Let me make it clear. I'm a left wing liberal who is wildly patriotic, in love with this country because of what I learned in church, the boy scouts, and my public school social studies classes. I know how to fold and care for a flag, which is more than I can say for some who claim to honor the flag but leave it hanging outside, faded and tattered, in all sorts of weather. All I have ever wanted is for us to be what I was taught we are: the home of hope and freedom.

Heck, it was believing what I was taught about who we are that made me an activist to begin with. I just wanted us to mean what we said.

As a result, I've spent forty years with a broken heart. And now—like the guy who has been dumped a dozen times, but is ready to give love one last chance—I'm filled with hope again. And it scares me. Because I don't know if I can take having my heart broken one more time.

But this time it feels different. It really does.

This time it starts to feel like, after forty years that we may be ready to come home to our own best selves.

I have wept buckets of tears over the campaign of 2008, but they are the best tears, the tears of joy, the tears of hope, the tears of dreams, the tears of "Yes we can."

In Barack Obama, in the gathering that he has inspired of young and old; the gathering of black, white, Latino, Asian, and every other ethnic group imaginable; the gathering of straight and gay; the gathering of old line Democrats and Republicans ready for something new, I feel the kind of hope that was crushed forty years ago.

I deeply love this country, and I have been waiting forty years for it to come to its senses.

I'm willing to fall in love one more time. To let myself go. To dream.

I dream that children will discover their own passion and love for America through a political process that is fair and clear and honest. I dream that my passion for this nation will help light a flame in children's hearts to participate fully in our national life, especially by registering to vote when they are 18, and then exercising that astonishing privilege. I dream that they will use that cherished right as a torch to light their way...

and ours.



### **Bruce Coville**

Bruce Coville ([www.brucecoville.com](http://www.brucecoville.com)) has written more than 90 books for young readers, including the international bestseller *My Teacher is an Alien*. He lives in Syracuse, NY, where he also runs FULL CAST AUDIO.

### **Bob Staake**

Bob Staake is a children's book author and illustrator. His work also appears in *The New Yorker*, *TIME*, *MAD*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal* and other publications. His most recent book for Random House is *The Donut Chef*. He lives and works on Cape Cod.



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**“And yes, I know it can be frightening to express an opinion. Personally I’d rather eat a burnt rubber tire than tell the waitress she got my order wrong, but if we continue to be quiet, passive voters and wait for others to voice our concerns, we might end up feeling ashamed for a lot longer than the day after the election.” - David LaRochele**

## **How I Became a Raving Political Activist**

I’ve never been very interested in politics. I’d much rather listen to the jazz station than the candidate debates. Political talk gives me a headache and makes me feel uneasy, like when my mechanic talks about transaxle lubricant filters.

Don’t get me wrong. I’ve always voted. Every election I’d ask my friends which candidates they’d recommend, then vote accordingly. But the hands-on, nitty-gritty work of the political process I’ve always left to the people who were more qualified than I was, and really, that meant just about everyone else. Besides, I was too busy being artistic, creative, and right-brained to get involved.

Then came the election of 2000. When the last hanging chad had fallen and the results were announced, I was stunned. How had so many candidates who held such different values than mine been elected? Why hadn’t the folks who were more politically-savvy stopped this from happening? Why hadn’t other people championed those candidates who shared my beliefs?

I was furious. Obviously somebody had been asleep at the wheel, and whoever that person was, I hoped he or she was feeling ashamed. Very ashamed.

When the next presidential election rolled around, I made a decision. If the people who should be taking care of this election weren’t going to do so, I’d have to do something myself. Something dramatic. Something far-reaching. Something that would get this country back on track.

I’d write a letter to my local paper.

A carefully worded editorial had the potential of swaying dozens of voters. Maybe hundreds. Who knows, if my letter was powerful enough, it might be picked up by other papers, too....

I saw my political opinions gracing the pages of Newsweek and Time. I pictured myself a contender for the Pulitzer Prize. I imagined my candidate thanking me personally in his inauguration speech.

I came back to reality.

Okay, maybe a single letter wouldn’t earn me a mention in Doonesbury or change the voting opinions of the entire nation, but perhaps it could be a small start for making a small difference. There was only one catch: I didn’t know what to write. Sure, I knew who I wanted to win the election, but when it came down to the facts about specific issues, I was embarrassingly ignorant. So I did something I never thought I’d do: I started paying attention to the election news. I read entire profiles of the candidates in the newspaper, not just the headlines. I didn’t change the radio station when campaign stories were aired. And I started to think for myself, which sadly was more than I had done in previous elections.

With more political knowledge than I had ever had, I penned a brief yet heartfelt letter to the editor and waited for it to be published. Waited nervously, I might add. True, I wanted to make a difference in the world, but I wasn’t used to sticking my neck out and expressing my views

so publicly. Would my letter generate a flood of vicious, hate-filled rebuttals? Would I be shunned by my more conservative neighbors? Would people stop buying my children's books?

The next week my letter was published – and none of my fears materialized. I didn't receive a single death threat or anonymous harassing midnight phone call. In fact, I heard nothing. Unsure if the lack of response was a good thing or not, I waited for Election Day, proud to be among the folks making political change happen.

And when the presidential results were announced...my candidate lost again.

Once more I was stunned. Things were supposed to be different this time.

I was discouraged. I was frustrated. I was worried about our country's future. But there was one thing I wasn't. Ashamed. Okay, maybe my letter hadn't been as dramatic as a press conference in front of the Statute of Liberty, but it was by far the most active I had ever been in a political campaign. And even though my presidential candidate had lost, I had least made an effort to make change happen, and that felt good.

My dream for the next election is that all the people who care about the world we're leaving our children, who care about a clean, sustainable environment, and who care about quality education and health care for all, will do more than vote for the candidates their friends recommend. I dream that people will step out of their comfort zones and do at least one thing more than they've done in the past to make their concerns and opinions known. I dream that instead of listening to the political pundits, people will think for themselves

and ask which candidate which will provide children with a better future.

Yes, I know that it seems like everyone else is more qualified, but what if those other people are busy doing something else?

And yes, I know it can be frightening to express an opinion. Personally I'd rather eat a burnt rubber tire than tell the waitress she got my order wrong, but if we continue to be quiet, passive voters and wait for others to voice our concerns, we might end up feeling ashamed for a lot longer than the day after the election.

What can we do? Plenty.

Attend a political rally. Baby-sit so a neighbor can vote. Campaign for a favorite candidate. Share the AIC website with a friend.

Or write a letter to your newspaper. Even if your letter isn't picked up by Newsweek it might change the mind of one other person in your town, who might talk to somebody else, who could tell her friend who does end up writing an editorial that appears in Newsweek.

And what am I going to do this time around? I'm searching out the bios of the county commissioners running for office. I'm speaking up when my friends talk about politics (even if it still makes me uncomfortable). And I'm sharing my dreams in this essay for AIC.

Will it make a difference in the election? I don't know. But I do know that my dreams won't become a reality if I sit back and do nothing.



### **David LaRochele**

David LaRochele has written or illustrated over 30 books, including the YA novel *Absolutely, Positively Not*, winner of the Sid Fleischman Humor Award, and the picture book *The End*, a backwards fairytale. When he's not writing, illustrating, or visiting schools, he loves to carve fancy pumpkins which can be viewed at his website, [www.davidlarochelle.net](http://www.davidlarochelle.net).

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