

Hometown
Heroes
USA

Hometown
Heroes
USA

JOSEPH ROUSH



REDEMPTION
PRESS

© 2011 by Joseph Roush. All rights reserved.

Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any way by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior permission of the copyright holder, except as provided by USA copyright law.

The author of this book has waived a portion of the publisher's recommended professional editing services. As such, any related errors found in this finished product are not the responsibility of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptures are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, *NIV*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scripture references marked *KJV* are taken from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture references marked *NASB* are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © 1960, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-730-7

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2011928607

Apple Valley's Purple Gang

I THINK THAT I will always remember my fifth grade class as the best group of friends a guy like me could ever have. This was the year that the Purple Gang adopted Weird Willie Greene. Weird Willie was so named by Butch Reese, our class big mouth. Butch was also our fearless leader if a group like the Purple Gang could actually have a leader.

“Hey, Andy,” Butch said to me the first day of school, “Get a load of the new kid. Man his head must be two sizes too big for his little body!”

“Yeah, Butch, I see him. He has a head full of really wild curls.”

“Did you ever see such a runt? He must be all of four feet tall.”

“I see him, Butch,” I said impatiently.

“Andy Johnson,” Miss Wheeler said in her soft soprano voice.

“Yes’m,” I replied. It’s always best to be polite to teachers and policemen.

“Andy, I want you to be a special buddy to our new student, Willie Greene. Willie is new to our school and to our town.” I wanted to say, “Why me?” But I didn’t.

Butch Rees and Ikey North giggled like a couple of silly girls. I must admit that Butch is our class big shot and Ikey is Butch’s shadow. Wherever Butch goes Ikey is sure to follow, and whatever Butch says Ikey echoes. I threatened those two with my eyes, but it did not stop the snickering.

I suffered through the next two weeks as Willie's counselor and bodyguard. I could tell by the expressions on Butch's face at recess times that he and Ikey North were hatching up some plot to harass my new friend. Protecting Willie from Butch and Ikey was going to be an impossible assignment.

At the beginning of the second week of school Mrs. Wheeler made an exciting announcement. "Children," she said. "I've decided that a good way to get to meet your parents would be for us to have a pet show. You could bring in your parents along with your pets. You could introduce your pets and your parents to the rest of us."

Mrs. Wheeler went through a set of rules for this new event. Then she sent home notes to our parents. "Those of you who do not have a pet could tell us what kind of pet you would like to have someday," she said.

"Hey Willie," I said. "What are you going to bring in for the pet show?"

"Well now, I've got one that will be sure to win the prize for the best pet ever. I won't tell you what it is until I win that prize."

"Is that so? What makes you think that you can beat out my little dachshund, Heinz?"

"You'll see."

The day of the pet show Mary Lou Stevens brought in her big white angora cat. Her cat was all brushed up and decorated with a red ribbon. Butch brought in Mugsy, his muscular white bull dog. Ikey brought in Caesar, his long-legged, flop-eared hound.

"Where's Willie?" Butch wondered aloud. "I'd like to see his pet."

Soon Willie came bouncing into the gymnasium to join us with our pets. Willie did not have a pet on a leash. Instead he carried a white shoe box. There were several small holes poked into the lid and the sides of that mysterious shoe box.

"Say, Willie," I coaxed, "Let me see your wonderful pet."

"No way!" Willie replied. "Not until the judging event."

"Come on, Runt!" Butch blustered. "Let's have a look."

"Uh-uh!"

Willie hung onto that white shoe box with great determination. He reminded me of an ill tempered pit bull. "I will open this box when the pets are judged," he said. "Not before then."

"Well!" Ikey North said, "And a la-di-dah to you, too."

"Bet he's got a sore-eyed kitten in that box," Butch opined.

Finally our principal and Mrs. Wheeler were successful in getting all of us lined up in some assemblance of order for the judging. This was after about fifteen minutes of chaos featuring barking dogs and hissing cats and tangled leashes.

"Hold still Heinz," I shouted. My little hot dog was getting nervous. He rolled those big brown eyes of his, and he snarled at Mary Lou's white Cat. Heinz does not like cats.

Mr. Laney strolled past each contestant. He paused now and then to utter something brilliant like, "Wonderful! Wonderful." Soon he stood in front of me, and he said to Heinz, "Nice doggie." My principal reached down to pat Heinz's head. Heinz let out a menacing growl, and he narrowly missed chomping on Mr. Laney's hand. For just a moment I could see myself in jail for principal abuse! Mr. Laney hurried on to the next contestant.

The next contestant was Willie Greene and his big shoe box. Well, young man," said Mr. Laney. "What do we have in the box?!"

"We have Herman in the box," Willie replied.

"Herman? What's a Herman?"

Willie quickly removed the lid to the shoe box and out jumped the biggest, fattest bullfrog I had ever seen. Herman hit the floor with a loud splat. Then he jumped on top of Heinz's head. For an instant it looked like Heinz was wearing a bullfrog bonnet. Heinz jumped straight up and he let out a startled yip.

"Garumph!" said Herman.

After Heinz conquered his momentary fright he tore out across the gymnasium floor after the bouncing bullfrog. Herman and Heinz hustled through a mob of startled kids, hissing cats, and shrieking mothers.

"Garumph, Garumph!" said Herman.

"Yap! Yap! Yap!" said Heinz.

"Oh you horrid cat," said Mrs. Wheeler. "You have ruined my new nylons."

"Aw-waw!" sobbed Mary Lou Stevens.

From somewhere came the booming voice of Mr. Laney. He was pleading for some semblance of order. Right now we had chaos. Butch and Ikey North held on stoutly to the leashes for Mugsy and Caesar. I could see that those two were really enjoying what was happening to the rest of us.

“Garumph!” said Herman as he bounced and slid across the gym floor.

“Don’t hurt Herman!” Willie shouted.

“Phsst. Phsst!” shouted several cats.

One mother shouted something very naughty, and Mr. Laney’s face turned bright red. Wiping perspiration from his face, Mr. Laney announced that we should return to our classrooms where he would pass out the awards.

As we settled down in our seats Heinz looked up at me with those big, sad eyes. I hoped that his adventure with Herman had not hurt his chances for a top award.

Well, Mary Lou won a blue ribbon for her cat, Priscilla. Butch’s Mugsy won a red ribbon, and Heinz won a white ribbon. Not bad!

“And now, children,” Mr. Laney announced, “we have a special award for the most unusual and interesting pet. That award goes to Willie Green and his pet frog, Herman.”

Willie nearly leaped out of his seat, and he tramped to the front of the room to receive his prize. He carried his white shoe box, which once again contained Herman. Willie accepted his award and danced back to his seat. He looked over to Butch Rees and stuck out his tongue. That was a terrible mistake. Butch did not take embarrassment well at all! Getting Willie safely home from school this afternoon was going to prove to be a real wild adventure for me.

Most of us who attend Apple Valley Elementary School live within walking distance from the school. On this particular afternoon that spelled “doom” for Willie Greene. Butch and Ikey jumped Willie as soon as he left the school grounds. They took the shoe box away from Willie.

“Don’t hurt Herman,” Willie wailed.

Willie's tormentors played keep-away with the white shoe box while Willie ran in circles shouting, "Don't hurt Herman. Don't hurt Herman!"

Finally Ikey dropped the shoe box, and the lid popped off. Herman did not leap out as he had done before in the gym. Instead he slowly stuck out his head to look around. His eyes seemed glazed and out of focus. I felt the urge to punch Butch on the end of his freckled nose, but I didn't. I couldn't help but recall that a dumb bull frog had won the top prize in our pet show.

Willie picked up the box containing a very dizzy Herman, and then he walked right toward a grinning Butch Rees. "You hurt Herman, you turkey!" he shouted. Then he kicked Butch very hard just below the knee. While Butch howled and limped around trying his best to get sympathy from Ikey and me, Willie stomped away toward his home. The lid blew off the shoe box and once again Herman stuck out his head. He let out a very loud "BURRP!"