



# Me: by Jimmy (Big Boy) Valente

*Garrison Keillor*

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An uproarious political satire about a professional wrestler who's elected governor

"For a professional wrestler with a shaved head and a Fu Manchu to be elected governor of Minnesota -- all I can say is, WOW. Election Day, 1998, was the greatest day in my life. It will be surpassed only by Inauguration Day 2001."

So reveals Jimmy (Big Boy) Valente to his ghostwriter Garrison Keillor in the opening pages of ME. With all the press attention focused on Jimmy and his sensational life, he has decided to set the record straight and tell his own story -- from his illegitimate birth and unhappy childhood to his Vietnam War experience, his career as world heavyweight champion of professional wrestling, and his come-from-behind electoral triumph last November. Jimmy told his story to Garrison one weekend the two spent on Maui in January, and Jimmy said, "Print it," and Viking, not wanting to alienate the big guy, will put the book on sale nationwide on March 1, 1999.

And what a story it is...Jimmy was conceived in 1954 on a ten-foot oak table at a Minneapolis country club, and given up for adoption, to be raised by Arv and Gladys Oxnard, who named him Clifford. A fearful child, persecuted by his stepsister Eunice who marked an "A" on his forehead, chased by big dogs and gangs, Clifford has a redemptive encounter with a circus freak that leads to a program of body-building and enlistment in the Navy.

Clifford enlists under the name Jimmy Valente, and is accepted into the top-secret WALRUS program (Water Air Land Rising Up Suddenly). In Vietnam, his unit vanquishes hordes of Viet Cong, assisted by Jimmy's defector buddy Victor Charlie, "The Rodent," who later comes to haunt Jimmy. When his tour of duty ends, he makes his way to Alaska, where he signs up with a wrestling promoter and creates the ring persona of "The Flower Child" (with daffodils on his head and wearing beads and sandals), a classical wrestling "heel."

From wrestlers such as The Duke of Dubuque and Svend the Yellow-Toothed, Jimmy learns the trade and, in one dramatic fall, meets his true love, Lacy Larson, and reinvents himself as "Big Boy" -- a new persona modelled on James Arness, Larry of the Three Stooges, Spiro Agnew, The Grand Exalted Potentate of the Zuhrah Shrine, and Bo Diddley, taking the best from each. By incorporating both good and evil into one character, Big Boy breaks through the old stereotypes and brings wrestling into the modern era. He assembles his Super Team and goes on the road for twelve years, earning millions of dollars and introducing explosives, monster trucks, chain saws, guillotines, and cruise missiles into the sport.

At his peak as a wrestler, Jimmy is approached by Earl Woofner, chairman of the Ethical Party of Minnesota, anxious to find a gubernatorial candidate to break the liberal chokehold and open up politics to common sense and honesty. Jimmy throws his hat into the ring for the 1998 election and rides around Minnesota in a rented motor home, campaigning on a simple platform -- that he is not a politician, will never lie, will do his best, and that "it will be fun, doggone it" -- , and he is swept to victory.

Jimmy closes his book with a glimpse of his future plans: a match to fight Mashimoto Ishi, the 800-pound Emperor of the East, for six million dollars, and a run for President. "Al Gore, look out," he predicts, "you're obsolete. The fringe has become the center."

And that's the story of Jimmy (Big Boy) Valente, as told to Garrison Keillor.

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