



New novel makes unlikely pairing: *politics & perspective*

Starbuck native pens a political novel with a twist: a fresh idea plucked straight from American history

By Deb Mercier
News Editor

Before we start here, I should admit that I'm not a fan of politics. Seriously. If you ever want to get rid of me, just whisper the word and I'll run from the room howling like a deranged Wookiee. Better yet, turn on a televised debate where candidates arm themselves with half-truths, blatant lies, sparkling teeth, dumbed-down catch phrases and then commence random flinging.

All you'll see is dust.

However, I am a fan of new ideas. I hadn't thought that pairing the two—politics and new ideas—was any more possible, or palatable, than pairing ketchup and Cocoa Roos.

But, as is often the case, I was wrong. (If you hear the sound of scissors, don't worry—it's just my husband clipping that sentence from the paper.)

Anyway, I got an email last August from Matt Anderson, a Starbuck native and MAHS graduate who is now pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church in Plymouth. He's the son of Rep. Paul Anderson and Faith Anderson of Starbuck, who both worked on staff at the Tribune at one time. In his email, Matt said he'd written a book and wanted to let the Tribune know about it.

Here's another admission. I wasn't too excited about it. When I read that the book was a "non-partisan novel that could prove influential in this year's election season," I had to quickly stifle the Wookiee response lest my co-workers think I'd finally given up and gone mad.

But the credentials looked good, and I have a soft spot for fellow writers. Matt's book, *Running Mate*, had been endorsed by former Governor Al Quie (a Republican), MN State Rep. Paul Marquart (a Democrat), and local political expert Dr. David Shultz of Hamline University.

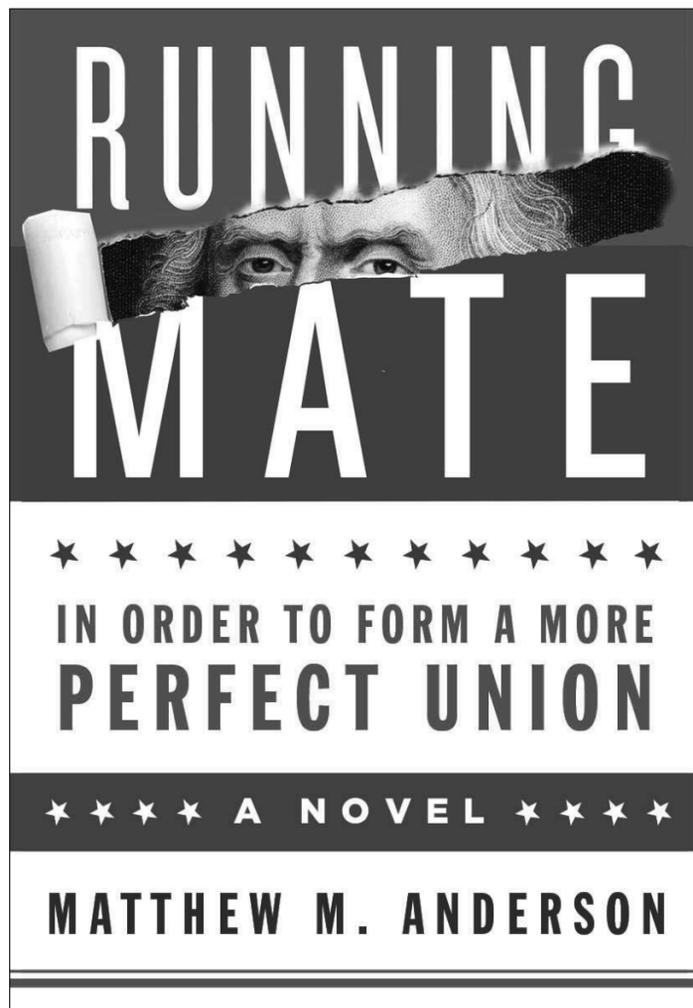
With creds like that, and the fact that "partisan" was spelled correctly, it was worth a look. I looked up *Running Mate* on Amazon. And though the directions always seem a bit enthusiastic, clicked on "click to LOOK INSIDE!"

I read the first two chapters on Amazon, then abandoned my desk to run home and download the entire book to my Nook. It was devoured in two days. (The book, not the Nook.) Inside those pages was a world much like ours today: Republicans vs. Democrats, two candidates, each vying for the presidency in a divisive race with the potential to turn mud-slinging ugly. The difference, and the crux of the book, comes when one of those candidates refuses to choose a running mate. Instead, he delves into American history and revives an idea first put forth by the Founding Fathers. He invites his opponent, should she lose the bid for the presidency, to serve as his vice president.

She thinks he's nuts. As does the rest of the country.

But as the novel unfolds and the reader gets drawn deeper and deeper into the rarely-seen political landscape on the other side of the TV screen, the possibility works its way to a whisper, "what if...?"

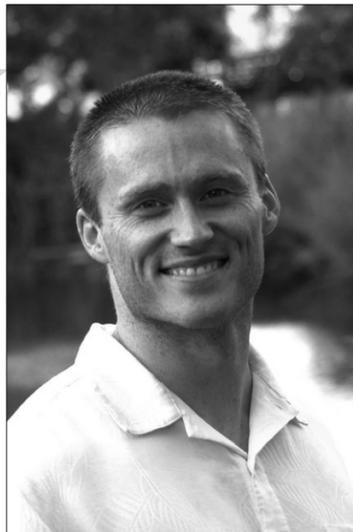
Matt Anderson's *Running Mate* is an interesting, well written read that dares to propose a



novel idea (ha! pun intended): People from both sides of the aisle actually have valid perspectives and ideas. It's the blending, not the dividing of the two that will make for a stronger nation. Disagreement should be a starting point for discussion, not a handy excuse to blather on about who's "right."

The book is now available in paperback or e-book edition. For more information, visit www.runningmatebook.com. Matt will be in the area at the end of September for two book signings. You can stop by to meet him at Lakeside Ballroom in Glenwood on Friday, Sept. 28 from 4-6 p.m. or on Saturday, Sept. 29 from 9-11 a.m. at Dave's Place in Starbuck.

Q&A with Matt Anderson



Matt Anderson

Matt was kind enough to take time from his busy schedule to answer a few questions about *Running Mate*. Here's what he had to say:

Q: In your author bio, you mentioned that you imagined the story for *Running Mate* during the 2008 presidential election. Can you elaborate on that? Was there a specific debate or incident that sparked the initial idea?

A: As a pastor, I was often counseling couples at church, trying to help them improve their communication and conflict resolution habits. After a busy day of working with couples, I went home and watched the two candidates sparring, bickering, and speaking past each other through the media, and I recognized a familiar communication breakdown.

I began wondering what counseling for elected officials would look like, and suddenly I recalled my days as a high school history teacher. I remembered teaching students how the Founding Fathers set up the vice presidency (They arranged for the second place finisher in the presidential election to become the vice president). It dawned on me that the Founders were forcing the two sides to come together after a bitter election in order to reunite the divided nation, and to ensure that the two largest factions of the electorate were represented in the executive branch.

As I pondered this, the basic story of *Running Mate* came into my mind, and I frantically wrote a table of contents and some details of the storyline. Over the next two years, I added meat to the bones as I lived inside the story while following the currents of present-day politics. I finally finished the first draft in the spring of 2010 and decided that if I didn't try to publish the story during this year's presidential election, it would likely sit on my hard drive forever.

Q: From reading the book, it's obvious that you've done extensive research and have a passion for American history. When did that interest begin?

A: I had some excellent teachers in high school and college that turned me from a disinterested teen to a fan of U.S. History. By the time I was about 19, I had narrowed my career path to either pastoral ministry or social studies teaching, and I decided to major in social

studies and history education (at Ridgewater College in Willmar and Concordia College in Moorhead).

My interest in politics grew during the 2000 presidential election, and I was fascinated by the process of how candidates rise through the fray through sharp rhetoric, effective messages and keeping cool under pressure. But teaching history prior to going to Luther Seminary is where I developed a love for it. There is something about teaching that forces you to delve more deeply into the subject matter, deep enough to develop a kind of mastery that enables you to draw others in and creatively inspire them.

Finally, I'm 34, and I find myself gathering a greater appreciation for history as I age. The more I learn about American history, from the horrible tragedies we've suffered to the overwhelming sacrifices made by so many, the more humbled I become. It's just an amazing story.

Q: Were the characters in *Running Mate* modeled after anyone in particular? They seemed like a conglomeration of the best scenario from each party.

A: The lead female in *Running Mate* is named Kathleen Dorsey. I modeled her in part after the female president in the 24 TV series, named Allison Taylor (played by Cherry Jones). I really tried to incorporate Taylor's blend of female sensitivity and presidential toughness, a perfect combination that made her believable, comfortable in her own skin, strong when the moment called for it, and easy to identify with.

The male character, Maurice Franklin, isn't taken as directly from any one individual. He reminds me of a mixture of Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich respectively in the way that he demonstrates fluency from a business perspective and an encyclopedic grasp of American history.

In my mind's eye, I envisioned him as a slightly younger version of John Voight, with a penetrating gaze and a powerful way with words. But I didn't want him to directly remind readers of

any specific person because I needed him to stand on his own as a unique figure. Franklin represents a proposal that has been unthinkable since the days of our Founding Fathers, and I needed him to appear as unique and distinct as the idea itself.

One particular note about Franklin is his first name, "Maurice." Maurice was my late grandfather's name, and my middle name. When I was in grade school, I was ashamed of that name for some reason (they had some dumb TV commercials with Maurice the cat), so I made up a new middle name for myself. Over time I learned to be proud of that name, because it was part of my family's history and part of who I am.

I gave the lead character in *Running Mate* this name not because he represents me or my views, but because he challenges a political culture that demands people minimize their identity, values and views for the sake of unity or compromise. Franklin envisions a scenario where Democrats and Republicans can unapologetically be who they are while committing to an effective means of working together, which is the genius of the Founders' vision. In the book, he puts it this way: "You compromise for the sake of your values; you never compromise your values."

Q: Do you think the idea from *Running Mate* could work in modern politics? Can you see it happening?

A: It could work if there was a clear understanding that the president will make the final decision in all matters after openly and intentionally consulting with the vice president. This would create a sense of "buy in" among all citizens, who currently feel as though presidents tend to make decisions within an echo chamber of like-minded advisors and officials.

It would also be free from the inefficient gridlock that occurs in congress, because the vice president is present to represent the vision and values of the "other half" of the nation that didn't vote for the president, but not given formal authority to impede or filibuster decisions. The president would be accountable to the vice president only in that the vice president would report how eagerly the chief executive incorporated the vice president into the decision-making process.

On the other hand, I think it would be very difficult for the nation to embrace this unorthodox scenario, which is what happens in the book. As much as we want our government officials to get things done, we may not be ready for them to work together. The only thing worse than a reality you don't like is an unfamiliar alternative that you don't understand. Fear of the unknown can easily overwhelm our eagerness to

try new alternatives. For the Founders, the scenario didn't work well from the start because the president didn't intentionally involve the vice president, and because the emerging two-party system undermined elected officials' interest in cooperating with someone of a different value set.

Q: Who is your favorite writer and/or your favorite book?

A: JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* series is unmatched in my opinion. I like Dan Brown's writing style and ability to make history engaging through present-day drama, and I loved William Paul Young's book *The Shack*. And I have really appreciated the work of Patrick Lencioni, who uses stories and fables to teach leadership and business principles (I hope I can get him to read the book, because I think he'd really love Maurice Franklin!). Finally, as a pastor and Christ-follower, I'd say that the Bible is the best and most epic drama ever written because it's true, and because it's a story that includes us as characters, who know the author and outcome of the drama.

Q: What inspired you to put your ideas into a book format?

A: I decided I was only going to start *Running Mate* if I was comfortable if it was never published. It was simply a story that I had to get out of my head and on paper. I think out loud or on paper, so I could only see shadows of the story until I actually fleshed it out. Once I'd written it, I realized that it would be a gigantic waste of time if I didn't at least try to share it, so I pursued the self-publishing process.

Q: When did you find time to write?

A: I sometimes pounded out five pages when my kids were napping, but mostly I had to wait until we took a vacation, where I'd hit 30 or 40 pages in a short amount of time. I also took a vacation day or two from work to make a bunch of progress. It's really a testament to the value of steady work over a long time yielding results.

Q: What are your plans now that *Running Mate* is on the shelf and in the hands of readers?

A: Right now my goal is to sell enough copies to be able to cover the self-publishing expenses! Beyond that, I hope it influences our political climate and opens up for some new alternatives and ideas. I'd love to see *Running Mate* become a movie, and if the story does well, I could see myself writing a sequel.