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The Candidates: Based on a True Country

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***The Candidates***  
*Based on a True Country*  
Matthew S. Hiley

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ISBN (eBook Edition): 978-0-615-55037-4

eBook published by

[MC Writing](#)

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Dedication

*For my wife, Gretchen—  
I'm The Candidates: Based on a True Country glad we're on this crazy ride together.*

*For my kids, Holden, Emma, Ella, and Violette—  
I love you. The Candidates: Based on a True Country Now go read something else.*

*For my dad, mom, and brother—  
Thanks for telling me I'm special for so long, even if I misinterpreted it.*

*For my real friends—  
Thanks for not being my fake friends.*

The Candidates

*Based on a True Country*

by

Matthew S. Hiley

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*“I’m afraid that the days are behind us when truly great men seek the office of the Presidency.”*

— Ed Wallace, Journalist

# 1. The Betty Ford Center

Rancho Mirage, California

At the Betty Ford Center for treatment, addiction, and recovery in Rancho Mirage, California, there’s a large pond behind McCallum Hall, which is one of the men’s housing units.

This pond was meant for the quiet reflection and meditation of Betty Ford patients. It was put there so that people could sit peacefully and get inside their own heads, and figure out where in the hell their lives came so off-track that they would find themselves sitting at a pond at the Betty Ford Center.

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That's why it was there, which is The Candidates: Based on a True Country probably a pretty decent idea. However, it was seldom used for that purpose.

The pond was more often used for people with nothing else to do but to sit and watch what kind of crazy shit the birds that lived there at the pond would do. This was a place where people transcended boredom, and reached an entirely new level of *not doing shit*.

For instance, at any given point in time there might be ten to twenty people sitting at the water's edge and smoking cigarettes in silence. They would just stare at the birds. When The Candidates: Based on a True Country one of the birds floating atop the water would suddenly curl its head under and go for a dive, completely submerging itself, all ten to twenty people watching the pond would raise their arms and look at their watches simultaneously, almost as if synchronized.

They did this because the record for a bird staying underwater at the Betty Ford Center meditation pond stood at one minute and twenty-one seconds, and they wanted to be able to say *they were there* should the day ever come that the record was shattered.

Those same people sitting on the shore of the meditation pond might also be looking up toward the trees, where another amazing spectacle took place. The birds of the trees held another record.

The birds of the trees had but one problem... sticking a perfect landing The Candidates: Based on a True Country on a perfect branch with a perfect view of the pond.

These birds were large, white, and somewhat stupid looking. I The Candidates: Based on a True Country can't quite peg it... but for some reason, they just looked unintelligent. Painfully unintelligent.

As the birds would be on final approach to a branch, they would extend their wings and perform a The Candidates: Based on a True Country spiraling glide downward. You would normally expect birds to be more graceful than these, yet these were completely lacking in grace and

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form. These birds looked as if *The Candidates: Based on a True Country* they were going to crash *every time*.

On their first approach, often times they would crash. Or they might miss the branch entirely. Either way, once they missed a landing, they would flap their big, stupid wings until they were twenty or so feet above the tree they'd just tried to land in, and then they would take off to do a complete lap around the entire Betty Ford Center before making another spiraling downward attempt.

Boring? Well, hell yes it was. But it was also exhilarating. These birds generally would make five or six laps before they ever stuck a perfect landing. Anal little bastards, for sure. And stupid.

The record for laps around the Betty Ford Center by a tree-dwelling bird stood at twelve.

Every time a bird missed a landing, you would see the almost-synchronized raising of hands on extended arms, with a finger extended beyond that marking "one lap." Then a second finger marking the second lap after that. And so on.

No one wanted to say *they weren't there* on the day the record was shattered.

Still sounds boring beyond your wildest dreams, eh? Okay, I'll level with you. It was the most boring shit you've ever seen. But you could feel your heart beating inside your chest when a bird was nearing a record.

On this particular day, there were two men in wheelchairs at opposing ends of the fifteen or so patients at the reflection pond. The story of how these two men arrived on the fine beaches behind McCallum Hall was anything but boring.

Theirs was a story of lust and loss... It was a story of the hunger some men have for power. Theirs was a story of gratuitous violence and lives lost, brought about by hyper-inflated egos. It

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was a story of two men, giants both in their time and in their minds, who had it *all*... and then flushed it down the can for the entire world to see.

You might recognize them if you looked The Candidates: Based on a True Country hard at their burnt, scarred faces. Their faces had graced every website and The Candidates: Based on a True Country news outlet The Candidates: Based on a True Country in every developed country for the past few months. The reckless abandon that brought about The Candidates: Based on a True Country their demise could not have been a bigger story.

And here they were now, bodies and minds completely broken, gazing in misery at the waters of the reflection pond at the Betty Ford Center.

On the surface of the water, at just about the middle of the pond, a bird went under. Just as all had come to expect, somewhere in the neighborhood of fifteen arms came up, as everyone looked toward their watches and marked the time at which The Candidates: Based on a True Country the bird had gone under.

But the two men at each The Candidates: Based on a True Country end of the crowd on wheeled land-transports did not raise their arms. They couldn't. They were paralyzed. They did manage to shift their heads just enough so that they could steal a glance at each other, however. They each glared in hatred at one another for a moment. The hatred was absolutely white-hot and electrifying. They were giving each other the ultimate stink-eye.

After a brief exchange of a horrifying level of displeasure, the two then looked forward, toward the pond. They were focusing hard... preparing their minds for an unthinkable task...

They each found the resolve amidst the hatred they had for one another to focus on the horrific task at hand. At the same time, they moved the mouth-operated joysticks The Candidates: Based on a True Country on each of their wheelchairs so that they went full-speed ahead, toward the pond. They were navigating their wheelchairs into the murky waters of reflection and meditation.

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My calculation was that “full-speed” for them was about one to one-and-a-half miles per hour.

Have you ever heard someone say that The Candidates: Based on a True Country they had witnessed something horrible, and it was as if it was in slow motion? That’s exactly what this was like.

Except it really was in slow The Candidates: Based on a True Country motion.

## **The Candidates Based On A True Country**

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