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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arterburn, Stephen.

Josiah / Stephen Arterburn and Angela Elwell Hunt.

p. cm. — (Young believer on tour ; 1)

Summary: Thirteen-year-old Josiah accepts a spot in the nation's hottest young band in spite of his scoliosis which, if discovered, could result in his dismissal.

ISBN 0-8423-8335-2 (sc)

(1. Scoliosis—Fiction. 2. Christian life—Fiction. 3. Musical groups—Fiction.)

I. Hunt, Angela Elwell. II. Title

PZ7.A74357Jo 2003

(Fic)—dc22

2003020555

Printed in the United States of America

10 09 08 07 06 05 04
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

We are the music makers,

We are the dreamers of dreams,

We are the future's caretakers,

Come be a part of our team . . .

—Paige Clawson and Shane Clawson



FROM "COME ON (IT'S TIME TO TAKE YOUR STAND)"
YB2 MUSIC, INC.



Prologue

Josiah Johnson sat bolt upright on the couch, his eyes darting toward the clock on the mantel. “What time is it, Dad? Did I miss it?”

His father laughed softly as he shifted in his recliner. “No, Son, it’s only 11:25. Leno doesn’t start for another five minutes. But if you’re really tired, maybe you should go up to bed—”

“I’m not tired. Not at all.”

Josiah blinked the sleepiness from his eyes. Although he had swallowed what must have been nearly a gallon of Coke just to stay awake, the local news had lulled him into a light doze. But he wasn’t going to bed. He’d stay awake until 3 A.M. if necessary—anything to see his favorite group on TV.

His mom came out of the kitchen and set a big bowl

of popcorn on the coffee table. “Here,” she said, winking at him. “Thought you might want a little snack.”

“Cool.” He took a handful of the buttery stuff and munched on it. On TV, the news anchors said good night, then the screen dissolved into a commercial.

His dad lifted his head. “Tell me again why we’re staying up late tonight?”

Josiah rolled his eyes. “I told you, Dad. YB2 is going to be on with Leno. I hear they’re going to sing and everything. They’ve been talking about it all week.”

“Who is ‘they?’” his mom asked.

Josiah reached for another handful of popcorn. “All the kids at school. And all the commercials. And the YB2 Web site has been plugging it a lot.”

His eyes widened when the trumpets of Leno’s theme song blared through the speakers. Josiah reached for the remote and cranked up the volume, then winced when his father got out of his chair and tapped the volume button back down.

“Your sisters are sleeping,” he said, his voice matter-of-fact. “We said *you* could stay up to watch. I don’t want all the girls down here.”

Josiah kept his eyes glued to the screen. He wouldn’t have minded if his parents went to bed and left him alone, but he’d talked so much about YB2 they wanted to check out the group for themselves.

“They came from out of nowhere,” he heard himself explaining, “but their first album has gone through the

roof. No one can believe it, especially since they're only about my age. There are five in the group—three guys, two girls. I think the oldest guy is only sixteen. Anyway, everybody at school thinks they're hot, and you don't get on Leno if you're not."

"Hmmm." His father lifted a brow, but suddenly Leno was on the screen, grinning and shaking hands with the audience. Josiah listened and crunched his popcorn, but all he cared about was seeing YB2.

After telling a few jokes, Leno cut to a commercial for Hot As Blazes car wax. Josiah reached into the popcorn bowl, discovered it was empty, then gave his mom a sheepish smile. "I guess I was hungrier than I thought."

She smiled at him. "You're a growing boy. Growing boys are almost always hungry."

"You actually might like YB2, Mom. They have a great sound."

"Can I understand the words?" Dad asked. "I don't like those groups where I can't understand the words. I could understand the Beatles—"

"I'm sure you'll understand the words, Dad. Most of their songs are written by two members of the group—their dad is the director. And you'll like the music, Mom. It's—"

The sound of an electronic piano cut him off. He turned to the TV and saw YB2 standing on a darkened stage, with five spotlights backlighting the silhouettes of five singers. He could pick out Shane, the tallest guy,

and Liane and Vance and Noah. Paige stood behind the piano, and even in the darkness he could see the profile of her trademark sunglasses.

“I don’t see—” Mom began.

“Shhh,” Dad interrupted. “Let’s see what all the fuss is about.”

The lights came up slowly as Liane began to sing in a soft and easy rhythm:

“We are the music makers,
We are the dreamers of dreams,
We are the future’s caretakers,
Come be a part of our team.”

“Not bad,” Dad said. “I understood every word.”

Josiah leaned forward as the tempo increased.

Unseen drums began to pound in a lively rhythm as the other singers pivoted to face the audience. The lights went dark, then a spotlight hit Shane. He began to sing, echoed by the others.

“We (we) want to reach back into the past,
Grab what is good and celebrate life,
We (we) want to make the good things last,
Use them to reflect the True Light.
So come on and take me by the hand,
Come on, it’s time to take your stand,
Come on, I’ll lead you into the land
Where dreams become reality. . . .”

Lights flooded the stage as something that looked like sequins began to float down over the singers.

"So come on," Liane sang, smiling through the rain of sparkles, "and take me by the hand."

"Come on—" Noah followed—"it's time to take your stand."

"Come on—" Vance stepped forward—"I'll lead you into the land . . ."

"Where dreams become reality."

The drums faded as the singers melted into a surprising five-part harmony as rich as Josiah's mother's chocolate pie.

For an instant no one spoke. Even Leno seemed surprised by the unexpectedly harmonious ending of the song, then he led the audience in wild applause.

Josiah glanced at his parents. His mom was staring at the TV with a thoughtful expression on her face. His father was nodding. "You sing as well as those kids, Joey. You ought to put together a little band or something."

Josiah closed his eyes. Honestly, sometimes his parents lived in a dreamworld. Yeah, he could sing, and he'd love to sing in a group, but anything he put together would sound like garbage compared to the singers he'd just heard on TV. Even at thirteen he knew groups like YB2 came along once in a lifetime.

The Beatles had broken ground in their day, and 'N Sync and the Backstreet Boys had paved the way for boy bands. YB2 was something completely different,

something *fresh*, and the odds of even seeing them live in concert were slim when you lived in the mountains outside Roanoke, Virginia.

Josiah sat without moving as Leno called the band over to his sofas and spent ten minutes laughing and joking with the singers. From comments made in the interview, Josiah could tell that Vance and Shane were the leaders of the group. Liane's speaking voice was as beautiful as her face, and Noah and Paige were quick with witty punch lines.

When Leno promised to return after a commercial break with the star of the latest James Bond movie, Josiah's mother pitched a pillow in his direction. "Okay, kiddo, you've seen them. And since you have school tomorrow, I think it's time you hit the sack."

He grumbled as he got up, but his feet practically floated up the stairs. As he lay on his bed and stared at the stars outside his window, Josiah whispered his prayers.

And when his eyes had become too heavy to open, he closed with one final request.

"Please, God," he murmured drowsily, "if it's not asking too much, could I please see YB2 in concert sometime?"



1

Sunday, August 1

The chance of a lifetime, the agent had said. An opportunity for which a million other kids—*ten* million other kids—would happily give up a year or two of television.

Josiah looked out the rectangular plastic window. A week ago he'd have given up a year of television *and* his baseball card collection, but as the jet lowered through the thick white clouds over Florida he wasn't so sure. Maybe he would have been better off staying home.

Next to him, his mother was fumbling through her purse. "I know I put that disposable camera in here—have you seen it, sweetie?"

"No," he mumbled, not bothering to lift his chin from its parking place in his palm.

"I want to take your picture as you're getting off the

plane. And I want to be sure to get a shot as you get into the car—do you think they'll send a limo?"

Josiah closed his eyes as his stomach churned. At the moment he didn't care if they sent an ambulance—maybe that was what he needed.

He was thirteen years old and already regretting the biggest decision of his life. He loved to sing and thought it'd be fun to perform somewhere, so he'd pushed his parents to send his audition tape to the talent scout in downtown Roanoke. He'd been amazed when that scout called and invited him to sign a contract. His friends at Cave Spring Middle School had congratulated him on signing with an agent, but school had recessed for summer break when Josiah wanted to share his greatest news—somehow his audition tape had ended up in Orlando, Florida, where YB2, the nation's hottest new group, was actively searching for a new singer.

Now he was sitting in the first-class section of a jumbo jet and traveling to Orlando, home of Mickey Mouse, Universal Studios, and Ron Clawson, manager and director of YB2.

"Joey, want some candy? I found a roll of Life Savers at the bottom of my purse—"

"No." He croaked the answer from a tight throat. Any other time he'd have accepted, but his stomach felt as tight as a clenched fist, without room for even a Tic Tac.

"You feeling okay, honey?" His mom reached out,

catching his chin. She turned his face to meet her worried eyes. “It’s not like you to refuse food.”

“I’m okay, Mom. Just nervous, I guess.”

“Well.” Her eyes went misty. “I think that’s completely natural. It’s not every day you get up and fly hundreds of miles to your first real job.”

Her voice cracked on the last word, and Josiah swiveled back to the window as his own eyes threatened to fill with water. He couldn’t cry, not here, not now, and he couldn’t let his mom know how much he would miss her and Dad. And even though his younger sisters drove him crazy, it would seem strange without Josie, Jenny, and Jackie underfoot.

“If things get to be too much, Joey, you can always come home.” His mother’s voice had gone soft. “We’re proud of your talent and your willingness to try new things, but you’re still a kid, after all. And if anything gets too hard for you—”

“I’ll be fine, Mom.”

The one thing he would never do—*could* never do—was quit. While his other friends had been shocked into silence by his news, his best friend, Aaron Hill, had laughed when Josiah announced that he’d be going to Orlando to join YB2. “No way! You’re not that cool, dude.”

“You don’t think so?”

Aaron held his sides and rocked with laughter. “No way! How can you possibly be as cool as Shane and Noah? No offense, but face it—you’re Captain Freako!”

Josiah had managed a weak laugh, but the comment

stung. Aaron had called him “Captain Freako” ever since that first night Josiah wore his scoliosis brace. Josiah had felt like Captain Freako for about a week after getting his brace, then he got used to it. He was wearing it now, between a cotton undershirt and his loose-fitting pullover . . . and never had it felt so alien.

His mother had assured him that his brace wasn’t noticeable. When he wore his baggy jeans and big shirts, no one could tell he was wearing it. He could walk, sleep, and play baseball in it with no problem, but he’d never really tried to dance in it.

On that crazy afternoon when his mom took the first call from Ron Clawson, Josiah had told her there was no way he could join YB2. They were the coolest group on the current scene, hotter now than ‘N Sync, Jump5, and Relient K had ever been. And they weren’t a typical boy band. Like Jump5, YB2 had *girls*, really pretty girls that made Josiah feel even better about tacking the group’s poster on his bedroom wall. The guys at his school were nuts about Liane and Paige, the girls of YB2, while the girls went crazy over Shane, Noah, and Vance. But for some reason Vance had left the group, and by some miracle someone had spoken to someone who had seen Josiah’s audition videotape.

He shivered. *Miracle* was the right word. His parents had always told him that God had given him a talent that needed to be used, but he had never expected God to move so quickly. People didn’t get their callings until they were old and out of college. Nobody offered jobs to

thirteen-year-olds, and no normal parents would even consider letting their kid drop out of school and home and the real world to become a superstar at age thirteen.

But, wonder of wonders, his parents had proven themselves amazingly cool. They'd had reservations at first, but after asking Ron Clawson a million questions and learning that he and the other team members were Christians, they had agreed to let Josiah join the group. And he wouldn't actually be dropping out of school—YB2 provided tutors, so when he wasn't performing he'd be studying. He'd also have an incredible opportunity to travel around the world, record albums, appear on television, and meet famous people.

The last few weeks had felt like an endless dream. At any moment someone would pinch him and—

"Would you raise your seat, please?" The flight attendant at the end of his row spoke in a firm voice. "We'll be landing in a few moments."

Josiah felt his stomach turn over as he pressed the button near his armrest. Once they landed, it'd be a matter of minutes before he met the kids he'd idolized for months. YB2 had been big news for about a year, and a reporter on *Entertainment Tonight* had said they weren't likely to fade away any time soon. "Not even the loss of Vance Gerkin will hurt them," the entertainment reporter had told a television audience last night. "Ron Clawson, director of the group, told *ET* that they've found a new and amazing talent."

Josiah had felt his heart skip a beat. He was supposed

to be the “new and amazing talent,” but right now he felt like a quivering mass of Jell-O.

His mom leaned over and squeezed his arm. “You getting excited?”

He forced himself to nod.

“They seem like real Christian people, Joey. I’m sure they’ll take good care of you.”

Josiah nodded again. Mr. Clawson had sounded nice on the phone, but what could you tell from a telephone call? If they’d had more time, Mr. Clawson explained, he would have flown up to audition Josiah and meet his family, but Vance Gerkin had left unexpectedly and the group needed to fill the vacancy as soon as possible. So they had invited Josiah’s mom to come along and meet everyone, just to put her mind at ease. “And we’ll consider that first week a sort of trial period—if Josiah doesn’t like being part of the team, or if he’s not able to handle our routines, then we can part ways at the end of the week with no hard feelings,” Mr. Clawson had said. “But I’m certainly not expecting any problems.”

But if a problem did arise, Josiah would be back on a plane bound for Virginia. Ron Clawson probably had an entire filing cabinet of audition tapes and glossy photographs. “New and amazing talents” could be found in almost any city—with one casting call, YB2 could fill Josiah’s spot with someone who could sing and dance and look good . . . someone who wasn’t Captain Freako.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning our descent to Orlando International Airport.”

Josiah turned his attention to the flight attendant standing before the locked cockpit. She caught his eye and gave him a smile. "The temperature in Orlando is ninety-nine degrees. Enjoy your visit in the Sunshine State."

No wonder he'd begun to sweat.



Y B Alone?

You say you're brokenhearted,
You say you're all alone,
Why let yourself stay in the dark
When there's love enough within his heart
To reach you . . . and hold you.
You say your life's a waste of time,
You say you're barely getting by,
Why let yourself listen to the lies
When there's love enough within his eyes
To catch you . . . and keep you.

Chorus:

'Cause I know (Yes, I know)
The source of all love
I know (Yes, I know)
Who puts the power within,

It's not (No, it's not)
The star on the TV show,
It's God,
Who created us all. . . .

You say you're looking up now,
You say you're standing tall,
Be sure you stand on solid ground,
In the Rock alone true hope is found,
And that hope . . . is forever.

Chorus:

'Cause I know (Yes, I know)
The source of all love
I know (Yes, I know)
Who puts the power within,
It's not (No, it's not)
Rich man counting out his dough,
It's God,
Who created us all. . . .

The One who yearns to love you,
(Why be alone?)
Is always right beside you,
(No, you're not alone),
So never stop believing,
(He'll never let you go)
He's calling out your name
(Now and forever . . .).

Chorus:
'Cause I know (Yes, I know)
The source of all love
I know (Yes, I know)
Who puts the power within,
It's not (No, it's not)
Experts who are in the know,
It's God,
Who created us all. . . .

—WORDS AND MUSIC BY RON CLAWSON, SHANE
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