

# Prologue

## One from the Gipper

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hey arrived in Washington, D.C., on the morning of May 9, 1988, a beautiful warm and sunny day. A cab took them directly from the airport to the White House. After passing through security, they were escorted to the Rose Garden along with the winners from the other forty-nine states. The grounds were immaculate and the roses were in full bloom.

Jerry was wearing a dark blue suit, Ben an Italian waiter's jacket that he'd ordered out of a Banana Republic catalog for nineteen dollars. They both had ties on, exceptionally rare for two people who almost always wore T-shirts.

Their seats, they were told, were in the front row, which wasn't a complete surprise. Very early that morning, in their hotel room in Chicago, they'd received a phone call from someone at the Small Business Administration informing them that they were one of the four finalists for the national award. "Yeah, we'll be there," Ben reassured the nervous staffer. "We're flying in this morning." Both were more perturbed about being woken up prematurely than excited by the news the caller had conveyed.

When everyone was seated, President Reagan came out, followed by the Vice-President and some aides. "He had an incredible presence," Jerry recalls, "and he immediately took command of the situation."

"The record, quite simply, is incredible," the President said. "Small business provides well over two-thirds of all new jobs; about 40 percent of our aggregate national output; the bulk of new products and technologies; most of the jobs generated for younger, older

and female workers; and over 66 percent of all 'first jobs.' " It was a very standard, small-business-is-the-backbone-of-the-economy stump speech, no different, they assumed, than the one he'd delivered the year before.

Toward the end of his prepared remarks, the President began to make references to the winner of the National Small Business Person of the Year Award. "Beginning with two employees in 1978, the company now employs two hundred, and the \$8,000 in start-up money now generates annual sales of \$30 million, selling to grocery stores in thirty-five states and in forty-five ice cream parlors around the country."

As the President spoke their names, Vice-President George Bush smiled at them, and Ben and Jerry looked at each other in astonished bemusement. Their company was about to introduce a product called "Peace Pops" as part of a campaign advocating massive reductions in the military budget. "Someone on the White House staff," they thought to themselves, "hasn't been doing his homework."

When Reagan finished speaking, he nodded in their direction, indicating that they should make their way up to the podium to receive their plaques. They hesitated slightly, stood up, and shuffled to the stage. On their way up, a man in a suit told them discreetly, "This is the President's show," making it clear that their role was to smile and shake hands, not make a speech. Maybe the White House staff had done their homework after all.

Up to this point, the entire ceremony had been completely choreographed and had come off without a hitch. The one unscripted part of the event was the actual presentation of the award. But the President, ever the Great Communicator, wasn't fazed in the least by having to improvise momentarily. "Which one is Jerry?" he asked with a smile.