

# 2005 Liars Contest

First place — Justin Wood of Kanawha County

Second place — Adam Booth of Huntington

Third place — Rich Knoblich of Wheeling

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**Justin Wood**

**Charleston**

**First Place**

**Joe and the Pirates**

2005 first-place winner, Justin Wood, hoists his coveted Golden Shovel prize. Photograph by Michael Keller.

I wasn't actually planning on telling a lie this year. But then my friend Joe called me. He said, "You want to go on a trip?"

I said, "Sure."

What followed was the greatest adventure of my life. Now, you might have read part of it in the paper — about Governor Manchin taking a state plane down to Alabama to get his yacht and bring it up. Now, that's true, but that's not the real story.

You see, Joe calls me up and calls up a couple of his friends and says, "I got a yacht. I got to go get it."

So we all hop on the plane. We all go down to Alabama. Alabama's a nice place to visit, being from West Virginia. When your state ranks 49th continually, it's nice to see who you beat out.

We get on the yacht — beautiful yacht. This thing is decked out. It has a kitchen, two bedrooms, full bath, jacuzzi, shower, ballroom, orchestra, kitchen staff. This thing is, to the "t," the perfect yacht.

So we get on, and we start sailing up, coming back to West Virginia. Do a little fishing, have a little fun. No big deal. Three days pass, and we're almost back in Charleston. We get on the Kanawha, and Joe says, "I want to fish."

I look up to the sky, and I say, "Joe, I think those clouds want to grow up to be thunderstorms, and I think they're growing up quick. I don't think we should fish. And it's the Kanawha — what are you going to catch in the Kanawha?"

He says, "No, we're going to fish."

And I say, "We're going to be cold, and we're not going to catch anything."

And he says, "Justin, fishing's a lot like women. Sometimes it's great, and it's more than you can handle. And sometimes it's cold and angry that you didn't fix the faucet."

Now, Joe didn't make any sense. But if what he said was true, that fish are really like women, I was starting to reel in the Jennifer Garner of fish. Just as I start to feel the tug, the storm starts. We could hear it coming from the side. Big splashes in the water. Hail, rain, piercing thunder. It keeps on coming closer and closer.

I'm trying to reel in this fish before the storm gets there. Joe looks at me, and he says, "Don't give up, Justin. If that rain storm hits us, you just keep on going. 'Cause if I've learned one thing in running for governor, it's never good to give up — and to put your name on everything — but especially never to give up."

That hail, that rain starts coming. Big, monstrous waves are crashing in from either side. I'm scared, I'm worried. But I'm not going to let that fish get away from me. I dig in. The rain's piercing. People start crying out. It was tremendous and traumatic. I was so focused on saving the fish, and they were so focused on saving their lives, that no one noticed the barge coming towards us.

The rain started to let up. The hail left us. Lightning stopped. Thunder stopped. I started to pull that fish in, and I see it to my side — it is none other than Captain Cletus Clearwater's pirate barge. Before I can scream out, the pirates have already come on deck. They're fighting the kitchen staff and the orchestra, who are no match for those hillbilly pirates.

With my last ounce of strength, I pull that fish up, and I start wielding it around like some medieval ball-and-chain. I'm hitting pirates left, right, knocking them out, knocking the two teeth they have out, taking them out.

And then I see him — fear struck my heart. I drop my weapon, fish and all. It was the captain himself. He stood towering before me. His bare feet and overalls, a mining pick in one hand and a hook in the other. His teeth made out of coal. A patch over one eye. And a blood-red cardinal sitting on his shoulder.

Very calmly, he grabbed me and the rest of the crew. He tied us up and put them on the barge. We didn't know what was going to happen to us.

That night, he called Joe and I into his chambers, and he told us the story of his twisted, twisted life. See, Captain Cletus is the product of an unholy matrimony between a West Virginia University Mountaineer and a Marshall student. At the time, such a marriage was looked at as immoral and ungodly — looked down upon by most states, but for some reason, West Virginia allowed it.

The mother of the Mountaineer was so disgusted by it that she put a curse on the first-born child's head. He would sail the West Virginia rivers forever, cold and alone, never finding peace until the day Marshall beat WVU in football.

So, Joe, being smart and intelligent, well, being a talker, starts coming up with a plan.

He says, "Well, I can't promise you a win, but I can promise you some games."

So, with that they negotiate for awhile, and, actually, a pirate and a politician negotiating is amazingly cooperative. But they work it out that Joe will set up the games in exchange for our lives and the beautiful yacht.

So, we come back to Charleston, and here I am today, and we have games set up for Marshall and WVU to play. It's not a happy ending, though. I might be safe and so is our governor, but poor Cletus. He's just a twisted, twisted soul, searching for peace. But we all know it'll be a cold day in hell before the Creator above, who made the sky blue and the sun gold, allows His heavenly and beloved Mountaineers to be beat by the Thundering Herd.

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# **Adam Booth**

## **Huntington**

### **Second Place**

## **The Gospel According to West Virginia**

Well, seeing that you have gathered today as a congregation, and today being Sunday, the Sabbath, I reckon we ought to have us a little Sunday school. So, today's Sunday school lesson shall be called "The Gospel According to West Virginia."

Now, it was in the days — the great glory days — of the coal mining industry. And a woman named Mother Jones had just walked into the land known as West Virginia. She was tired from walking and sat down on the banks of the Kanawha River to take a rest. And she heard a sound, a sound like the bleating of a lamb. And she looked over, and, lo, there was a small child there. And it was hurt and sick.

So she saw someone walking by on the road, and she said, "Come here — help. This child needs help."

This gentleman comes down. He was a coal miner, and they sat there and prayed right there that the child would be healed.

Now, at the same time, in a town known as Keyser, which was about a two-week's walk away, there lived three scientists who every night would come out and study the stars.

On this night, the first scientist took out his telescope and said, "Brethren, look! I see a great light coming from the west, and it beckons us to go to Charleston."

And the second scientist said, "Oh, don't be a fool. That great light's nothing but the gold dome on top of the State Capitol."

And the first one said, "Be that as it may, it beckons us to go. And it beckons us to take gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh."

And the second scientist said, "Oh, don't be a fool. You know we don't got none of them."

And the third scientist said, "We don't even know what those are."

But they went anyway, these three scientists — you could say, these three wise men — from the East-ern Panhandle.

They went to the Capitol and they took with them, not gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh, but they took with them gifts of coal and rhododendron and preserves. Blackberry preserves. And they were all gifts that would warm and feed and comfort the child in the good West Virginia tradition. Can I get an "Amen?"

And the scientists made it, and the child lived. Hallelujah!

Now, Mother Jones and the coal miner decided to take the child as their own. They took him down into the coalfields, and he grew up with the coal miners. It was soon discovered that the problem with him was that he had a bad lung, and because of that, he could not go down into the mines.

Instead, he grew up learning the ways of the coal miners, and he went from town to town teaching the ways of the coal miners. And he was a great teacher. People would come from miles around to hear him teach the ways of the coal miners.

In those days, a great evil came into the land, and a great war sprung up between those that worked in the mines and those that owned the mines. There was shooting and fighting and weeping and bloodshed and gnashing of teeth. And when the great teacher heard about what was going on, he went down there to the coalfields, to the battlefields. And he said, "Stop the fighting. It is not smart to kill those that can work. I cannot go into the mines, but I have lived a good life teaching the ways of the miners. If you want to take someone, shoot me as a sacrifice."

And he stood there, and those that owned the mines took their guns and shot him. He was hit and fell to the ground. All the miners rushed around him and dragged him down to Cabin Creek to wash and dress his wounds. He was out for three whole days.

And on the third day, he began to stir and his eyes opened. When the miners saw him stirring, they rushed around him.

He said, "Brethren, come closer. I can see white mountains and blue skies, and I can hear raging waters. And music of beautiful instruments. I can see all the wildlife and animals and plants of creation. Tell me, brothers, have I died and gone to heaven?"

And one of the miners leaned in close and said ever so softly, "Almost heaven."

And knowing that his purpose had been served, and that the war had been ended, he closed his eyes and died right there.

But the lesson we should learn from this story is that, even though not all of us are miners today, we don't have to be, as long as we remember the law of the miners: to be good people, keep good families, do hard work, and live good, clean lives. We don't have to be miners because of the sacrifice that was made for us by the great teacher. And that while on this earth, our gift is almost heaven, West Virginia.

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