

A NOTE TO READERS

WHEN I BEGAN THE PROCESS OF WRITING THIS BOOK, I wasn't sure what shape it would ultimately take, let alone what the title might be. One thing I did know was that I wanted to be honest—and this edition for young readers is no different. Growing up on the South Side of Chicago in the 1960s and '70s, my parents, Fraser and Marian Robinson, always kept it straight with me and my brother, Craig. They never sugarcoated hard truths or presented their reality as anything other than what it was—because they knew we could handle it. I want to give you all that same respect.

So my promise to you is to give you my story in all its messy glory—from the time I struggled on a question in front of my kindergarten class, to my first kiss and the insecurities I felt growing up, to the chaos of a campaign trail and the strange experience of shaking hands with the Queen of England.

But I hope you don't get too swept up in the glitz of the White House, because the most meaningful parts of my story aren't the ball gowns or state dinners. Instead, they are the little things: the way my grandfather smiled when he put his favorite album on the record

player, the smell of our house when my mom cleaned it each spring, the sound of an ice scraper on a car window in the middle of a Chicago winter.

During the writing process, I realized that there is no memory too small. Every last bit of our story has meaning. Some memories can bring a twinge of pain, particularly those that happen when we are young. I can still feel the embarrassment when I failed in front of my classmates at a young age. I can still feel the knot in my stomach after someone doubted me. And I still feel the pain and the emptiness that came with losing those closest to me. At some point, we all experience the kind of hurt that we can't fix on our own.

But those tender spots—the ones that we try the hardest to keep hidden—are often the parts of ourselves that are most worth sharing. Feelings like discomfort and struggle are signs that we're doing the hard work of discovering the greatest truths about ourselves. And when I look back at my own life, I see that it's only through those moments of great difficulty that I was able to find the strength to make a change or search more purposefully for who I wanted to be.

These kinds of things aren't usually what we feel comfortable sharing with one another. We're usually most concerned with what I like to call our statistics—our test scores, our exploits on the sports field, the kind of jeans our family can afford to buy. But truly, what's most important is our story—our whole story, including those moments when we feel a little vulnerable. So often, it's in sharing those parts of our stories that we see the beauty not only in our own journey, but in someone else's.

So I hope that as you're reading my story, you'll also think about your own—because it's the most beautiful gift you'll ever have. The bumps and bruises, the joys and triumphs and bursts of laughter—they

all combine to make you who you are. And who you are is not some static, unchanging thing. It will change every day and every year, and none of us know what shape our lives will ultimately take. That's what becoming is all about. And just like you, I still have a whole lot of becoming left to do, too.