

KID PRESIDENT

BY JULIE JACOBS



He is the “self-appointed voice of a generation,” spreading the word about how love, hope, wisdom and “all things awesome” can make the world a better place. He is also a YouTube star and the host of his own television show on the family-friendly Hub Network. And he is the draw for a legion of fans and followers that is poised to grow even bigger. He is Robby Novak, aka Kid President, all of 11 years old but with a boatload of charisma and character that has helped make him a viral phenomenon.

Robby’s messages are simple but substantive and expressed from a kid’s-eye view. To cite just a few: “It’s easier to make fun of stuff, but it’s cooler to make stuff.” “Treat everybody like it’s their birthday, every single day.” “What if Michael Jordan had quit?...He wouldn’t have made Space Jam...What’s your Space Jam?”

This president’s key agenda is to get kids and adults working together for the greater good. But it’s his highly likable persona that has really caught on, prompting people to stop, watch and listen to what he has to say whether he’s dancing down the street or sitting behind a desk, always decked out dapper in a suit. His YouTube videos have caught the attention of millions



of viewers, including actor Rainn Wilson (The Office), whose SoulPancake media company has since become the distributor of the Kid President brand. It produced Robby's TV debut, a 10-episode docu-variety series called Kid President: Declaration of Awesome. The show ran on Hub this past June and features Robby interviewing both notable figures and ordinary heroes.

"Kid President is all about letting kids know that they matter, that their voices are important and that they can change the world through joy and love," said Shabnam Mogharabi, CEO of SoulPancake. "That's a pretty powerful message, and a mission that we are proud to support."

Brad Montague, the program's writer, director and co-executive producer as well as Robby's brother-in-law and the brains behind Kid President, knows all about the positive impact kids can make granted the opportunity. He and his wife (Robby's sister) own and operate GO! Camp, designed "to inspire and empower young people into meaningful service and stewardship in their communities." The compassion and creativity they have witnessed among their campers sparked a conversation during a family

vacation back in 2012 that later ignited the idea for Kid President.

"We were talking about how amazing all these kids were and I jokingly said, 'I think it'd be really cool to put a kid in leadership, to like put him in power somewhere.' And Robby was there—he was sort of goofing around in this restaurant, talking to strangers and being very friendly—and so my wife was like, 'Yeah, it would be great if [Robby] were President,' as a joke, and so we just said, 'Let's make a few videos that are just sort of about that,'" Montague recalls by phone from his Tennessee home on a Friday afternoon. "At the time, there was an election going on and there were a lot of opinions on line. People were venting. It seemed like the mood was very hostile, negative."

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Photo courtesy of Kristi Montague



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KID PRESIDENT'S VIDEO CLIPS

WATCH OUR FAVORITE CLIPS OF KID PRESIDENT.



Robby was “very happy to help,” continued Montague, who fashioned a Kid President “office” and then merely turned on the video camera. “He immediately, as soon as he got into the suit, got behind the desk and started dancing and I just asked [him] questions.”

“He had very definite opinions about how the world should be and how grownups should act. While he is a charismatic kid and naturally funny, I think any kid given the chance to speak their minds, to be given the chance to have a platform and be listened to,

it would come across the same way. And that’s been the thing that’s been very important, that Kid President isn’t about Robby. It’s not about one kid, it’s about that every kid’s voice matters.”

While the original intent was to make a single video, which was shot that July, Montague found himself with an abundance of great material and cobbled together two additional episodes. He posted the spots on YouTube for family and friends to enjoy, and to everyone’s surprise they went viral. One in particular, A Pep Talk from Kid President to You, charted more than 32 million page views, 6 million alone in its first week on line.

“As that happened, it freaked me out. I did not expect that reaction to anything we were making. While it was extremely positive, it was just extreme,” Montague remembers. “My inbox was blowing up, my phone was blowing up. People were showing up in our town. It was just absurd how crazy things got...and I was desperately trying to shield Robby from all of that, where he had no idea that any of this was going on, that life was normal.”

The family regrouped to discuss how to proceed and what story they wanted to tell.

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They eventually arrived at the central theme that now underlies every Kid President scenario—that kids and grownups can work together to make something beautiful — and set about creating more videos. The production has become a sweet and satisfying collaboration between Montague and Robby, with Montague laying the framework for each shoot before the pair fleshes it out together. Their partnership thus far has yielded more than 30 videos, which have been shown in schools and broadcast on SoulPancake’s YouTube Original Channel, ultimately attracting a loyal and giving audience and bringing about the Hub series.

“A lot of people also write quotes from the Pep Talk and they make really cool things, so I like seeing that stuff,” Robby says.

For Montague, Kid President has become not only a voice for today’s youth



Photo courtesy of Robby's family



▲ Robby Novak suffers from osteogenesis imperfecta, a disease that makes his bones brittle. But the nine-year-old doesn't let this get in the way of being positive.

but also a way to stop compartmentalizing generations. "There seems to be something that's getting lost in our society today, where we kind of want to group kids here, grownups here, the elderly way over there," he remarks. Kid President, he says, is about fueling the passion and energy of children and combining such "powers" with the wisdom of adults. "The most important thing is how we treat children, what we're teaching them and what we're saying to them."

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Montague met Robby when the latter was just an infant and has taken an active role in educating him in what it means to be a good person and live a good life. Robby has taught Montague some valuable lessons, too. Living with the congenital brittle bone disease osteogenesis imperfecta, Robby has suffered more than 70 bone breaks since birth. His condition has never defined him nor deterred him from pursuing a happy and fulfilling existence, however. As a clearly inspired

Montague points out, he just keeps going.

The two live across the street from one another and spend a great deal of time together. The Kid President videos have come to serve as a byproduct of their special relationship.

"When we started making these videos and realizing that people were watching and we had a real chance to say something that people would hear, it was important to me that he understood there was a purpose to what we're doing, that this is about making the world a little bit brighter...and that meant a lot to him," notes Montague. "While it's always super fun to make them, and we laugh a ton...the real heart behind it is that he and I feel like we're on a mission."

Robby remains unfazed by it all. He is a typical kid who enjoys hanging out with his elementary school pals and playing basketball



and soccer. And just like most children, he is far from thrilled at the thought of donning fancy clothes.

“The longest part of creating any of our videos is getting him dressed. He’s like any normal boy,” laughs Montague. “Once he’s in [his suit], though, it’s like his superhero costume. He feels confident he can do anything. But, yeah, getting dressed takes forever!”

Joining forces with SoulPancake has fortunately not been such a struggle. When the Kid President videos first exploded on YouTube, a multitude of potential business

associates approached Montague and Robby with the hope of teaming up to reach a larger audience. The problem was they only saw dollar signs and missed the merits of Kid President’s messages.

SoulPancake, on the other hand, was perfectly aligned with Kid President’s goals and objectives. The new media company seeks to connect people by exploring culture, science, spirituality and other thought-provoking topics through a variety of communication channels, from blog posts and polls to creative activities and videos. Its pitch to Montague and Robby was to parlay

what Kid President already had accomplished into a bigger platform to realize greater possibilities.

“First and foremost in their minds was how can we partner with you to help as many

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people as possible... It wasn’t about money,” says Montague. “We found a group of people who cared about not just making stuff, but making stuff that matters.”

The show proved to be a huge learning curve for Montague who, calling himself an “accidental filmmaker,” had to adjust to both working with a huge production team and creating a product for television instead of the Web. Still, despite the change in format, he feels certain that they have kept true to what Kid President is all about and looks forward to learning the impact Kid President: Declaration of Awesome has on its viewers.



Photo courtesy of Kristi Montague

Other Kid President projects are in the pipeline, all aimed to engage even more people, especially kids. Chief among them is a book, *Kid President's Guide to Being Awesome*, released by Harper Collins in 2014. It features the stories of people who are changing the world in unique and exciting ways, as well as chronicles Robby and Montague's many "kid presidential" experiences. Montague chuckles when citing one of the accounts, a humorous anecdote about the time they visited the White House and Robby was scolded for licking a wall in the President's home. He is, after all, a kid.

KP'S GUIDE TO BEING AWESOME

KID PRESIDENT PULLS TOGETHER A LIST OF AWESOME IDEAS AND SHARES STORIES THAT MATTER. BOOK AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

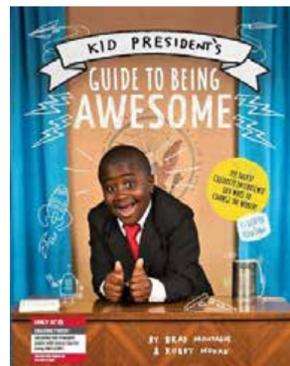
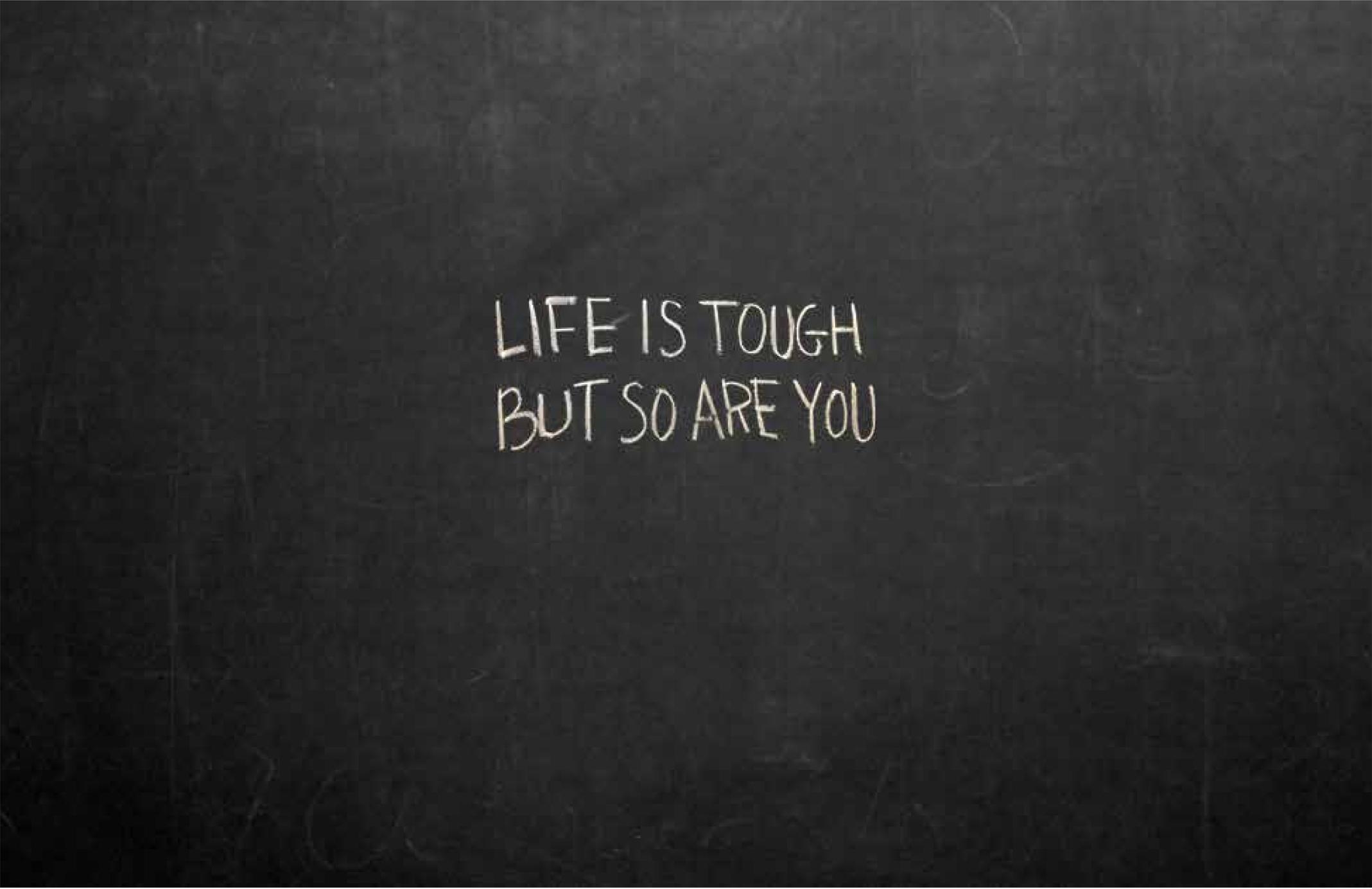


Photo courtesy of Kristi Montague



LIFE IS TOUGH
BUT SO ARE YOU

“We’re honored to be part of this conversation and to be a little part of creating change,” shares Montague, describing how it has been watching Kid President’s fan base continue to expand (more than 207,000 Twitter followers and 153,000 likes on Facebook at press time). “But what completely takes our breath away is the idea that ordinary people can do such extraordinary things and can go on extraordinary journeys.”

“We live in this super small town and then we got invited to the White House. And then we thought, ‘Okay, that’s it.’ And then we got invited to the United Nations, and we’re like the whole world called, okay, like it can’t get bigger than that. And it’s just continued. We see what we’re doing as a joyful rebellion. Normally, a rebellion is associated with something that’s angry or bitter. Instead, what we’ve been working to do is live in a way that’s fueled by joy, a joyful vision of how things could be. It’s been really exciting to see how attracted people are to this.”

As for Robby’s take on the marvel that is Kid President and what inspires his positive attitude? “I just like being with people who are kind and fun and funny,” he offers. “It’s important to be around people who make you happy.”