



E-mail to a friend



Print this Page



Add to My Links List

## Garfield's AdReview

October 25, 2004

QwikFIND ID:

By [Bob Garfield](#)

It may come down to a commercial.

This has been most divisive, polarized and dishonest presidential campaign in recent memory. It has stunk of lies and sleaze and Swiftboat veterans who have long memories but no clue about what democracy is, much less patriotism. It has unleashed an unprecedented onslaught of messages from the candidates and their proxies to so-called swing voters who may finally be too bludgeoned and exhausted to swing back. The latest desperate roundhouse: A knockoff of a 1984 Reagan commercial in which the bear threatening to kill us all has been updated to a pack of wolves.

And, yet, if the president is re-elected, it may well be thanks to a single spot not even officially from his campaign.

The commercial is from Progress for America Voter Fund, a 527 shadow of the Bush-Cheney leviathan, about a stump encounter in Lebanon, Ohio, with a teenager named Ashley Faulkner, whose mother died on Sept. 11. George Bush famously embraced the girl and told her, "I know that's hard. Are you all right?"

"He's the most powerful man in the world," Ashley says now, "and all he wants to do is make sure that I'm safe, that I'm OK."

And that's good enough for her dad, widower Lynn Faulkner: "What I saw is what I want to see in the heart and the soul of the man who sits in the highest elected office in our country."

That may also be what voters want to see in the heart and soul of their president: a powerful but compassionate father figure, who can hug us all and tell us, don't worry, everything is going to be OK.

Of course, everything isn't OK. Everything, from the economy to the bloody Iraq fiasco to our basic American freedoms, is in a shambles. But one thing the polls show is clear: In moments of crisis, the people have a deep-seated psychological need to trust Our Leader, no matter how manifestly untrustworthy he may be. This commercial has seized on that need like no other message in this long, ugly campaign.

Does it exploit the catastrophe of Sept. 11 for political gain? Of course it does, but there is nothing wrong with that. Sept. 11 does not belong to its martyrs, nor to their survivors. It belongs to us all. It is on everybody's mind, has touched everybody's life and is central to this election. Kerry's campaign has trotted out its own victim, activist widow Kristen Breitweiser, who speaks of presidential betrayal:

"I fought for the 9/11 Commission, something George W. Bush, the man my husband Ron and I voted for, didn't think was necessary. And during the Commission hearings we learned the truth: We are no safer today. I want to look in my daughter's eyes and know that she is safe, and that is why I am voting for John Kerry."

The argument is not unconvincing, but her delivery is stiff, polemical and emotionally barren. This may be a fatal deficiency.

Though Kerry finally got off the defensive to attack the administration's record, and though polls show the electorate finally agrees with him, there is no reason to think this election will hinge on reason. If Bush wins, he should go back to Lebanon to give Ashley another hug and say, "Don't worry, sweetheart. I'm OK."

Bob Garfield's book, "And Now, a Few Words from Me" is now out in paperback from McGraw-Hill.

Progress for America Voter Fund

McCarthy, Marcus & Hennings, Washington

3.5 stars

Your article purchase will be accessible to you on AdAge.com for 14 days from date of purchase by visiting your [AdAge locker](#).

**Source:** ~~AdvertisingAge~~ PRINT EDITION

The leading source of advertising marketing and media news providing today's most comprehensive coverage of a vast and ever-changing marketing landscape.

[Subscribe to Advertising Age Print Edition today](#).

## More Relevant News from Advertising Age Print Edition

---

### [The Player: Sortito brings adroit touch with film tie-ins to Spyglass](#)

by **WAYNE FRIEDMAN**

Hollywood theatrical and TV production companies have rarely kept an in-house marketing executive on staff. But increasingly, producers are looking for someone to monitor, question and steer film studio and TV network marketing efforts. The growing five-year-old ...

June 23, 2003

**PayPoints: 3**

**Word Count: 484**

---

### [SPECIAL ADVERTISING](#)

see printed publication for the following: Three Big Days

...

June 23, 2003

**PayPoints: 3**

**Word Count: 9**

---

### [100 Leading National Advertisers](#)

by **R. Craig Endicott**

Advertising by the nation's top 100 advertisers returned to some semblance of normalcy in 2002, rising 4.8% to \$83 billion to put behind them a numbing 2001 in which their total ad spending dropped 1.3%, the first decline in 10 years. The rise in large part ...

June 23, 2003

**PayPoints: 3**

**Word Count: 733**

---

### [Unilever expands Slim-Fast to create a diet megabrand](#)

by **STEPHANIE THOMPSON and JACK NEFF**

Increased competition in the booming diet arena has sent Unilever scrambling to extend its Slim-Fast brand into convenient-meal segments, including soups and pastas. Later this month, Slim-Fast Foods will launch a total of 15 products, from sippable soup cups ...

June 23, 2003

**PayPoints: 3**

**Word Count: 455**

---

### [Spots: Land Rover](#)

Land Rover North America wants more exposure for its top-of-the-line Range Rover sport utility vehicle, which gets its first TV spot in more than five years. WPP Group's Y&R Cos., Irvine, went to Thailand and used local talent for the Ford Motor unit's 30-second ...

June 23, 2003

**PayPoints: 3**

**Word Count: 63**

---

Copyright © 2004, [Crain Communications](#) Inc. - [Privacy Statement](#)  
[Chaffee Interactive, Inc.](#): Programming, Technology & Hosting Services

[Home](#) | [News](#) | [Search](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Marketplace](#)