



(Note: This is an early cover idea—not necessarily the finished cover.)

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Ron Erhardt

This book takes place at a fictitious elementary school in Mandan, North Dakota, named Ron Erhardt Elementary. Ron Erhardt was a great football coach at all levels of the sport and a wonderful human being. Among his many accomplishments, Ron was the quarterback of the Mandan Braves State Championship football teams in 1947 and 1948, then he played quarterback at this author's alma mater, Jamestown College in Jamestown, North Dakota. Ron had a record of 45-9-2 as a high school head coach in North Dakota and an unbelievable record of 61-7-1 as head coach of the North Dakota State Bison. Ron won two Super Bowl rings coaching for the Super Bowl Champion New York Giants. After that, he was the offensive coordinator for this author's favorite team, the Pittsburgh STEELERS, for four years, and he helped them get to the Super Bowl in 1996. During Ron Erhardt's many public speaking engagements, he always talked about his education in Mandan as being second to none.

Chapter 1

“Bye, Mom!” Jana called, opening the front door of their farmhouse. “Don’t forget! We’re going out for Ohm’s hamburgers tonight, and it’s my treat!”

Ohm’s was their family’s favorite place to eat. It was a small restaurant in Mandan, a town just four miles away.

“We’ll be ready,” Mother called from the basement. “Love you, Jana Banana! Have a nice Valentine’s Day in school!”

“Thanks, Mom! I’ll sure try! Love you!”

Jana walked outside and closed the front door behind her. She smiled. The weather couldn’t possibly be any nicer for a Valentine’s Day in North Dakota. Jana only had to wear a light jacket over her pretty Valentine’s Day sweatshirt. If it got as warm as it was expected to, most of the remaining snow would probably melt this afternoon.

Jana sighed. It was hard for her to believe. As a fifth grader, this was really the last *official* school party of her elementary school years. She was really going to miss Ron Erhardt Elementary School. She had so many great memories of her time there over the years.

Unfortunately, with their new principal, Mr. Doopinski, in charge, Jana’s last school party didn’t promise to have much to

get excited about. You see, Mr. Doopinski had strict rules about school parties. They weren't even supposed to start until there were only 45 minutes left in the school day. Besides that, this year there were no valentines allowed at the Valentine's Day parties, and fun foods like cupcakes, cookies, candy, and pizza weren't allowed either. Sure, Jana's teacher, Mrs. Wolski, was a great teacher, and she would probably do everything she could to try to make Valentine's Day fun, but—

Jana stopped walking. Her eyes were drawn skyward toward a large white cumulus cloud that seemed to be rapidly changing shape while the rest of the sky showed almost no movement.

“That's amazing!” she said out loud.

Jana watched, wide-eyed, for the next 30 seconds, as the cloud continued to change form. She couldn't believe what was happening! She watched in disbelief as the cloud took a familiar shape.

“Wow!” Jana whispered excitedly. “A valentine in the sky on Valentine's Day!”

As she continued staring up at the cloud, a small red dot clearly appeared on the beautiful white cloud. During the next 30 seconds, the red dot got larger, and then it slowly moved downward, away from the cloud.

“This is incredible!” Jana exclaimed, wishing there was someone around her that she could share this with. “I think it’s coming toward me!”

It was. Jana had no sense of danger, but she certainly was totally amazed at what was happening. A red object was getting larger and larger, and it was headed *directly* toward her.

As she watched, mesmerized, it gradually got close enough so she could see what it was. It was a red paper airplane, slowly floating through the air.

Eventually, the paper airplane got within 30 yards of Jana, and she started walking slowly toward it. ... As it continued to slowly float through the air toward her, now within ten yards, Jana reached out with her right hand.

Chapter 2

Jana’s whole body shook with excitement as she examined the paper airplane in her hand. This had to be a dream! How could this all be happening to her on Valentine’s Day?

Wait! Jana noticed some writing on the paper airplane. Her hands trembled as she unfolded it carefully. It was a letter—and it was written in the neatest cursive writing she had ever seen!

Jana's eyes got huge as she read it out loud:

Dear Jana Banana,

*We've noticed what a caring, empathetic person you've been since you were a little girl. We would like to give you a wonderful, magical Valentine's Day gift today! All you have to do while you are in school today is think about ... or say out loud ... exactly what you would like to wish for. Then just say **Valentine Shmellentine**—and what you wish for will come true.*

Jana, you must keep this a secret or the magic ends immediately. Otherwise, your magical gift will end when the last bell rings at the end of school today.

Have fun, Jana Banana!

This paper airplane will disappear in ten seconds.

Jana stared at the letter in disbelief! Her whole body tingled with excitement as she quickly read it over again, wanting to remember exactly what it said. One second after she was done, the letter disappeared in her hands.

"No way!" she said. After thinking for a few seconds she said, "I've got to test this out before I forget it."

She reached into her pants pocket. All she found was an old gum wrapper, all wadded up.

Jana took it out of her pocket and said, "I wish this was a dark chocolate heart." As she spoke, she envisioned a dark chocolate heart, the size of her hand, wrapped in red foil. Then she said, "Valentine *Shmellentine*."

Suddenly, a chocolate heart appeared in the palm of her hand. It was exactly like the one she had envisioned, wrapped in red foil and everything.

The bus driver honked his horn in the distance.

"Oh, no!" Jana said, as she put the chocolate heart into her jacket pocket. "I'd better hurry or I'll miss the bus! There's no way I want to miss any of *this* Valentine's Day in school!

Jana ran the rest of the way to the bus stop. The bus driver opened the door to let Jana in.

"Happy Valentine's Day, Jana Banana!"

"Happy Valentine's Day, Mrs. Leingang!"

Jana had a quick thought. She reached into her jacket pocket. "Oh, here's a little something for you for Valentine's Day."

Jana handed the chocolate heart to Mrs. Leingang.

“Why, thanks, Jana Banana! That’s so nice of you!”

Chapter 3

Jana sat in her seat on the school bus. Her mind raced. This was so unbelievably exciting! For some reason, she had been given a magical gift beyond anything she could ever have imagined! Now, how was she going to use it?

Jana was almost too excited to think. She took a deep breath and thought to herself: *Before I get to school, I’ve got to think about ways to make this the most fun Valentine’s Day in the history of the world at our school! ... But how can I possibly do that with Mr. Doopinski around? ... Maybe that’s the answer! I’ll have to start with Mr. Doopinski—but what can I do? ...*

Chapter 4

As the school bus pulled up to the front of Ron Erhardt Elementary School, Jana felt a tingle run up and down her spine. This definitely promised to be the most incredible day of her life!

Jana had to force herself not to hop out of her seat and run out of the bus. She took a deep breath and waited until the other ten kids were off the bus.

“Have a great day, Mrs. Leingang!” Jana said as she walked past the bus driver to exit the bus.

“Have a fun Valentine’s Day, Jana Banana!” Mrs. Leingang said, with a big smile on her face. “Thanks again for the special treat!”

“You’re welcome,” Jana replied, as she stepped off the bus and walked onto the sidewalk in front of the school.

Jana glanced at her watch. There were still about ten minutes until the bell rang. She looked out on the playground. She immediately spotted several of her friends over near the four square area—Sarah, Hannah, Katrice, Eliana, Caleb, Crew, and Trace. She decided to go over there to join them.

“Hi, Jana Banana!” Trace said, as Jana approached the four square area.

“Hi, Trace!” Jana answered enthusiastically. “Happy Valentine’s Day, everyone!”

Jana got in line behind Eliana, who was the last person waiting in line to move into the first square.

“I’m not sure how *happy* it’s going to be,” said Crew.

“Yeah, *right!*” added Hannah, as she hit the ball into the second square. “There’s no fun allowed at Erhardt Elementary with Doopinski—*especially* on party days like this.”

“I wonder what his problem is,” said Sarah.

“I’m guessing Cupid’s arrow missed him by a mile,” Katrice said, giggling.

“Huh?” Crew asked, standing in the second square, looking puzzled.

“I’ll explain later,” said Katrice.

Jana was holding back a big smile. “I have a strong feeling this day will turn out better than we expect,” she said.

“Jana Banana, you’re always such a positive person,” Caleb said with an admiring look.

“Thanks, Caleb,” said Jana. “That’s actually what I like so much about all you guys. You’re all such optimistic people.”

Crew hit the ball really hard into the corner of Hannah’s square, and it quickly rolled away on the playground’s blacktop surface.

“I’ll get it!” Jana volunteered, running after the ball.

Jana chased the ball more than 30 yards. She had just about run it down, when she noticed big John Skager in her

path. John was the biggest, strongest kid in the school, and he was eyeing the ball as it came directly toward him.

This was too tempting for John. As the ball approached him, he got ready to kick it as far as he could.

“Oh, **no!**” Jana said, anticipating what was going to happen next. Jana figured John could kick the ball halfway to Fargo!

“BOOM!”

Jana was right! John Skager connected perfectly with his right foot and launched the ball into the air at an almost perfect 45 degree angle. It gained altitude, as many students on the playground watched the ball rocketing on a path that would easily carry it over the fence, into the street, then into a neighbor’s yard.

Playground supervisor Karen Fischer saw everything that had happened from the time John had kicked the ball. She started walking toward John to reprimand him as she watched the ball approach the fence.

After some quick thinking, Jana whispered, “Valentine *Shmellentine.*”

Jana watched with many others on the playground as the ball easily cleared the fence by more than 10 yards. But after that, it curved abruptly to the right, then it curved back around in a path that defied all the laws of physics. The ball was

actually traveling in the opposite direction it had started! Then it slowed down and flew directly back toward the four square area. It hit the ground, bounced twice, and Sarah ended up catching it, looking totally perplexed.

John Skager looked dumbfounded. Scores of others who had witnessed at least part of the incredible flight of the ball couldn't believe what they had seen either.

The bell rang!

Jana smiled. This was going to be a fun day!

Chapter 5

Mrs. Wolski had a little trouble settling her students down when they got into the classroom. Everyone who had witnessed what had just happened out on the playground wanted to tell her about what they'd seen. Mrs. Wolski promised them that they would talk about it after they said the Pledge of Allegiance, took the lunch count, and listened to the announcements.

Jana quickly checked in with Mrs. Wolski, then she headed down to the school's TV studio, located just off the library. Jana ran the camera for the principal's morning announcements each day. She was also part of the special news program that

the fourth and fifth graders produced and presented every Friday morning.

Meanwhile, down in his office, door closed, Mr. Doopinski glanced at his watch. He was dreading having to face this *awful* day—Valentine’s Day!

Mr. Doopinski brushed some dandruff off the shoulders of his dark suit. He thought back to his Valentine’s Days in elementary school, having to make those stupid valentine boxes and always getting the worst valentines from the girls he really liked. And those *disgusting* little candy hearts with the words on them! Yuck! He disliked everything about school parties, but Valentine’s Day was the *worst!*

He took a deep breath, got up, and opened the door to leave. The school’s secretary, Mrs. Nelson, looked up as he passed. She knew better than to say *anything* to Mr. Doopinsky on a party day.

Jana looked at the clock on the wall in the TV Studio. It was impossible for her to calm down, knowing that Mr. Doopinski would arrive soon.

“Okay, Mr. Doopinski,” Jana said quietly, “From this point on, you’re going to *love* Valentine’s Day. This is exactly what’s going to happen when you get down here to the TV Studio ...”

Jana described in detail the plan she'd hatched when she was in the school bus on the way to school.

"Valentine *Shmellentine!*" Jana said as she watched Mr. Doopinski approach the TV Studio through the little window on the door.

Suddenly, Mr. Doopinski's dark suit changed to a bright red. His brown shirt and dark blue tie turned into a red shirt and a white tie with little red hearts on it.

Wow! Mr. Doopinski looked like Mr. Valentine himself!

"Happy Valentine's Day, Jana!" Mr. Doopinski said enthusiastically. "Is everything ready?"

"Happy Valentine's Day, Mr. Doopinski!" Jana replied. "We start in less than 15 seconds."

Jana counted down the last ten seconds. Then Mr. Doopinski appeared on the television screen in every classroom, with something on his face no one in the school had ever seen before—a big smile.

"Happy Valentine's Day!" he said. "This is my favorite holiday! My healthy food rule will not be in effect today. In fact, today I would like to buy everyone pizza from A&B Pizza. Teachers, please get your classroom orders to me by 10:00 this morning so I can get everyone's pizzas to you by noon. I'm also encouraging extra art time so everyone can make some

beautiful valentines. I'd also like to have everyone take extra recess time—just because I *like* you so much. ... Oh, and one more thing. Have a lot of fun today, but please give the custodians in this school a special gift, too. Allow some time at the end of the day to clean up your mess as best you can so our fantastic custodians won't have so much extra work to do. Now, I'll let you go! Please have the best Valentine's Day in the history of Ron Erhardt Elementary School!"

All around the school, there was a bit of shocked silence—followed by lots of enthusiastic cheering! It was hard to believe what had just happened!

"Mr. Doopinski!" Jana said with a big smile. "That was so awesome of you! I can't wait to get back to my classroom!"

"Uh ... thank you, Jana Banana," Mr. Doopinski replied, smiling, but looking a little dazed and confused. "Have a great day!"

Jana opened the door to go back to her classroom, while Mr. Doopinsky stopped to talk to the librarian.

Chapter 6

Jana was feeling a little guilty about what she had just done magically to Mr. Doopinski down in the TV Studio. On the

other hand, there was no possible way her plans for Valentine's Day could work without Mr. Doopinsky's complete cooperation. After all, he was a big key to everyone having a great Valentine's Day at Ron Erhardt Elementary.

As she was walking through the halls, Jana Banana could feel and hear the excitement that Doopinski's announcement had generated throughout the entire school. When she walked by the office, Jana glanced in and stopped. Mrs. Nelson, the school secretary, was sitting by her desk with a look of total disbelief on her face.

She had seen Mr. Doopinsky just a few minutes ago! He had been wearing a dark suit then, and he was in his usual bad mood in the morning, especially on party days. There's no way that guy she had just seen on television could have been the same guy!

What was she going to say to him when he returned to the office? ... Maybe she should go to the teachers' lounge and try to regain her composure. ... Her mind wandered to a movie she had seen about alien abduction. Is that what happened?

Jana walked on. When she got back to her classroom, she quietly opened the door and walked in. Mrs. Wolski was having a lively discussion with her students. She stopped when she saw Jana.

“Jana Banana, please come here for a moment,” she said.

Jana walked over and stood next to Mrs. Wolski in front of the classroom.

“The announcements just now must have been especially *interesting* to you,” Mrs. Wolski said.

Jana had no clue what to say.

“Yes, they were,” Jana finally answered. “I really liked Mr. Doopinski’s new suit.”

There were quite a few giggles.

“Were you as surprised as the rest of us about the whole thing—his message and that outfit?” Mrs. Wolski wanted to know.

“No doubt,” said Jana. “But I’m really happy we get to have fun on a party day for a change.”

“Thanks, Jana. You may sit down.”

Jana walked over to her desk and sat down.

“Mrs. Wolski, do you think Mr. Doopinski’s lost his marbles?” Michael asked.

There was lots of laughter.

“Look,” said Mrs. Wolski, who was wondering the same thing, “I think that most people don’t change this quickly, but let’s not try to figure out *why*. Let’s just try to enjoy it.”

“Are we going to make valentines?” asked Olivia.

“We will make lots of extra art time this morning for that,” Mrs. Wolski replied. “I just wish I had more red and pink construction paper,” she said, moving over toward one of her cabinets to check to see how much was in there. “We might have to use our colored pencils and colored markers on white paper to make due.”

Jana put her hand over her mouth and whispered softly, “Valentine *Shmellentine*.”

All over the school, lots of extra reams of pink and red construction paper magically appeared in every teacher’s storage area.

Mrs. Wolski opened up the door to her cabinet.

“Oh **wow!**” she said. “I can’t believe I have this much pink and red paper! It looks like we’re in great shape for all the paper we need.”

“Mrs. Wolski,” Trace asked, “are we *really* going to get pizza?”

“You bet!” she answered enthusiastically. “Let’s see. We have about 15 minutes until gym class. Let’s all move our desks into a big circle right now, and then we can talk about our pizza order and some other things we can do to make this an extra-special day.”

Chapter 7

Mrs. Wolski led her class down to the gym. When they walked through the gym door, Mr. Stumpf immediately greeted them all with a huge smile.

Mr. Stumpf had been the gym teacher at Ron Erhardt Elementary for many years. Four of the teachers at the school actually had Mr. Stumpf for a gym teacher when *they* attended the school.

“Happy Valentine’s Day, everyone!” Mr. Stumpf exclaimed. “I have no idea what’s gotten into Mr. Doopinski, but I intend to take full advantage of it. We’re going to have *lots* of fun today. I’m going to let you pick the activities we do.”

The class cheered!

“Have fun!” Mrs. Wolski said as she waved to her students and they waved back to her. “I’ll see you in about 30 minutes,” she added and then exited the gym.

“All right!” said Mr. Stumpf. “Let’s quickly get into our squads.”

The class got into six squads and sat down, facing Mr. Stumpf.

“Now,” began Mr. Stumpf, “no need to raise your hands, but call out what you want to do today at the count of three! One ...two ... **THREE!**”

“Dodgeball!”

“Crazy Ball Challenge!”

“Dodgeball!”

“You’re making this really easy for me!” said Mr. Stumpf. “Why don’t we play dodgeball for a while, then we can finish the half hour with the Crazy Ball Challenge. If you break your record for the Crazy Ball Challenge, I’ll give you a special Valentine’s Day treat. If you don’t break your record, you’re *still* going to get a special Valentine’s Day treat.”

The class cheered enthusiastically!

“What’s your record again?” Mr. Stumpf asked.

“Nine!” they replied.

“Yes,” said Mr. Stumpf, “and the all-time school record is 14. So, let’s get going. All right, squad leaders. You can follow

me into my office to get the equipment we will need for both activities, and then we'll get started right away. Squads one, two, and three—you can line up on that end line of the gym, and squads four, five, and six can line up on the other end line.”

The equipment was brought out of Mr. Stumpf's office. The squad leaders placed yellow foam balls in the neutral zone. Everyone lined up at their designated end line and waited for the whistle.

“You know all the rules,” Mr. Stumpf said before blowing the whistle. “Remember, no throwing above the shoulders or you're out.”

Mr. Stumpf blew the whistle.

What followed was a flurry of chaotic fun as player after player got hit and eliminated and sat down on the benches on the sidelines.

Jana noticed Kellie Schmidt, the new girl in class from Idaho, wasn't enjoying herself very much. She got hit right away and was the first person out each of the first two games. She seemed to be the only person not having a lot of fun.

Before the third game, Jana had a quick thought, then she whispered “Valentine *Shmellentine*.”

Mr. Stumpf blew his whistle. Everyone rushed forward for the balls, then retreated and started throwing at the opposing team.

Robby spotted Kellie and zeroed in on her legs. He threw at them, fully expecting Kellie was going to be an easy target to get out.

Kellie casually jumped almost two feet straight up and the ball missed her by a few inches. Her eyes got really big, as did Robby's. How did she do that?

A few seconds later, Michael threw the ball right at Kellie's waist. Kellie held out her hands and caught it. Michael was shocked, and he was out. Kellie couldn't believe what had just happened!

It was eventually down to just two people, Kellie and Drake. Drake was quarterback of the best football team in Mandan, and he looked at Kellie as easy prey.

Kellie threw her ball at Drake, and it bounced harmlessly in front of Drake's feet. Drake was confident he was going to win now. It was just a question of where to hit her.

Drake threw at Kellie's knees. He was positive she wouldn't be able to get out of the way. But Kellie knelt down slightly, reached out, tipped the ball into the air, then caught it on the way down.

Drake was dumbfounded at what had just happened and he was out. Everyone cheered for Kellie, who had a look on her face that was part smile and part disbelief. Drake went over and shook her hand.

“You were awesome!” Drake told Kellie.

“Thanks, Drake,” Kellie replied. “I think I just got really lucky or something.”

Mr. Stumpf looked at his watch and said, “All right! Time for the Crazy Ball Challenge!”

The class cheered.

“You know how it works!” Mr. Stumpf said. “Each of you will pick out your favorite type of ball, then you’ll spread out somewhere behind the half-court line facing the large barrel we’ve placed down there near the basket. At the count of three, everyone tries to throw the ball they’ve go into the large barrel. You have just 20 seconds to throw your ball. What’s your class record again?”

“Nine!”

“And the school record?”

“Fourteen!”

“All right. Let’s get ready,” said Mr. Stumpf.

One squad at a time, each fifth grader picked out a ball. Then they took a position behind the half-court line facing the large barrel that was placed halfway between the free throw line and the basket.

“Ready?” said Mr. Stumpf. “One ... two ...”

Jana couldn’t resist. “Valentine *Shmellentine!*” she whispered, covering her mouth with her right hand.

“**Three!**” Mr. Stumpf called out.

The next 20 seconds all the different types of balls—softballs, baseballs, kickballs, soccer balls, dodgeballs, and basketballs—were thrown. Three of the balls bounced once before they went in! One basketball actually hit the front of the barrel, bounced back, then bounced forward and went in!

ALL the balls went in! Every single one of them!

The fifth graders **CHEERED!**

“Oh, my *gosh!*” Mr. Stumpf said, eyes wide, not believing what had just happened. “I thought I’d seen it all! That’s more amazing than a hole-in-one in golf! No one’s *ever* going to believe this!”

Chapter 8

Mrs. Wolski went down to the gym a few minutes before the class was finished. When she walked in, Mr. Stumpf was handing out colorful stickers that had the words “Awesome Record-Breakers” printed on them, and each fifth grader was picking out two candy bars from a large box that Mr. Stumpf had placed on one of the gym’s benches.

“I’m not sure what got into your kids today,” Mr. Stumpf said to Mrs. Wolski. “I’ve never seen anything like it! They did some incredible things!”

“That’s fantastic!” said Mrs. Wolski, looking around at her students, all with big smiles on their faces. “I’ll have to have them tell me all about it when we get back to the classroom.”

“Mrs. Wolski, would you like a sticker and a few candy bars, too,” Mr. Stumpf asked.

“Ye, thankss,” Mrs. Wolski replied, and she walked over and got a sticker and two Milky Way candy bars.

“Happy Valentine’s Day!” Mr. Stumpf said as Mrs. Wolski’s class finished lining up by the gym’s door.

“Happy Valentine’s Day!” Mrs. Wolski and her fifth graders replied, and then they filed out of the gym.

The wonderful smell of freshly-popped popcorn brought lots of smiles as Mrs. Wolski's students got close to their classroom. When they got inside, they all sat down in their desks around the circle.

Mrs. Wolski had some of her students help pass out little bags of popcorn to everyone. During this time, they took turns telling about their incredible gym class experience. Mrs. Wolski listened and started believing that there was something *really* magical happening at Ron Erhardt Elementary this Valentine's Day.

"All right," said Mrs. Wolski. "Now, I want to give you a nice long chunk of time to work on valentines and valentines bags. I'm going to keep making popcorn for us while I'm making some valentines right along with you."

"This is going to be fun, Mrs. Wolski!" said Katrice.

"Can we make valentines for some of our other teachers like Mr. Stumpf?" Crew asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Wolski answered. "Some of you may even want to make valentines for some of the noon supervisors, the custodians, and our secretaries and principal. You've got almost two hours before our pizzas arrive, so that should give you a chance to make lots of valentines for lots of people. I've got plenty of construction paper and paper bags on those tables

over there, and please feel free to share markers and other materials when you need to. Once you all get organized a bit, I'm going to put our favorite radio station on, and we can listen to music."

"I think this is going to be my favorite day in school *ever!*" said Sarah.

"For me too," said Mrs. Wolski. "Oh, and sometime during the next two hours or so, I think we will go outside for a recess. I'll check with the other fifth grade teachers to find out when they're going out. All right ... any questions?"

There were none.

"Let's get started then," said Mrs. Wolski.

As most of the other fifth graders left their desks to get construction paper and other materials, Jana walked to a corner in the back of the classroom near the aquarium, away from the commotion. She picked up the container of fish food and gathered her thoughts.

Jana knew that *lots* of special magic would have to happen if the next part of her Valentine's Day plan was going to work. She estimated that 50 more Jana Bananas would be needed all around Ron Erhardt Elementary if she was going to accomplish what she had in mind. Each Jana Banana would have to be aware of what every other Jana Banana was doing. Also, it

wouldn't be good if anyone saw two or three Jana Bananas in one place at one time.

"This is certainly going to test the limits of the magic I've been given," Jana said quietly. She carefully thought through everything she wanted to accomplish and how, then she said, "Valentine *Shmellentine*."

Suddenly, in Mrs. Careful's second grade classroom, one Jana Banana was sitting and talking to one of the second graders and writing something down. In Mrs. Volk's kindergarten room, there was another Jana Banana talking to one of the kindergarteners and writing something down. Yet another Jana Banana was talking to one of the fourth graders in Mrs. Lipp's room. All around Ron Erhardt Elementary, there were Jana Bananas working hard, talking to students and teachers and making valentines.

After the next 90 minutes had gone by, one of the Jana Bananas walked by the office and glanced at the clock. She couldn't believe how well things were going! Everything was a little ahead of schedule. She felt like she and the other Jana Bananas had an excellent chance to get everything accomplished that they wanted to. All around the school, kids were having a blast making valentines. All of them were getting a chance to talk to one of the Jana Bananas too.

After almost two hours had passed, Mrs. Wolski said, “I think this might be a great time to go out for recess. We will have some time to finish up with our valentines after that.”

The *original* Jana Banana in Mrs. Wolski’s class thought, “*This is going to be a challenge. I’ve got to be the only Jana Banana anyone sees out at the 5th grade recess.*”

She put her hands over her mouth. “Valentine *Shmellentine,*” she whispered.

Chapter 9

Jana exited the school door and walked onto the playground. She was followed by her good friends Katrice, Hannah, Trace, and Caleb, all intending to head straight for the four-square area together.

“Hey, Jana Banana!” called someone from a nearby basketball court. “You and your friends want to take us on?”

It was Bobby Greenfield, the best basketball player in Mandan—and he let everyone know about that, too. Bobby was over on a nearby basketball court on the playground with Nick Ressler and Danny Hilligoss, two other excellent basketball players. They were hogging the basketball court as usual, daring

anyone to take them on, which no one had done since the fourth grade.

Jana was an excellent basketball player and Bobby had challenged her several times to a one-on-one basketball game—mostly because he liked her. But Jana wanted nothing to do with a hotdog like Bobby. Any other day but this particular magical Valentine’s Day, Jana would have totally ignored Bobby’s challenge. This was anything *but* an ordinary day.

Jana suddenly had a few thoughts rush through her brain. *“It would be so nice to shrink Bobby’s big head a little. This just might be the perfect time to do it”*

Jana had recently finished reading a book about two of the greatest basketball players of all time. Both were put in the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1998—Marques Johnson and Larry Bird. Marques Johnson played for the Harlem Globetrotters, and he was known as the greatest dribbler of the basketball *ever*. Larry Bird of the Boston Celtics was one of the greatest players of all-time, and one of the best outside shooters in the history of basketball. What if she gave *their* basketball skills to two of her friends and herself ... and they took Bobby, Danny, and Nick on.

Before she knew it, Jana said, “Hey Bobby! If Caleb and Trace agree, we’ll take you on, as long as *we* get the ball first.”

Bobby looked surprised, but pleased. “Heck,” he replied with supreme confidence. “We’ll even give you six points, and we can play up to ten.”

“No need for free points,” said Jana. “If Caleb and Trace will play with me, we can play first team to eight points wins. We still want some time afterwards to play some four-square.”

“We’ll beat you real quick so you can get right to your four-square game,” Bobby promised.

“That’s very considerate of you,” said Jana, faking sincerity.

Trace and Caleb looked at Jana like she was crazy. Caleb was a good hockey player but he wasn’t that great at basketball. Trace was pretty good at many sports, but basketball was definitely not even his first or second best sport. However, they both weren’t about to let their good friend Jana Banana down. They shrugged their shoulders and walked toward her.

Jana got in a huddle with her two friends. “Thanks, you guys,” she said. “I have a good feeling about this. Just shoot whenever you’re open. Let’s have some fun, even if we get beat.”

“OK,” said Trace, not looking very happy.

“You owe me, Jana,” said Caleb.

“I’ll take the ball out,” Jana said, smiling.

Several fifth graders started gathering near the court to watch. This would be interesting. They expected to see a real blowout, but it would be fun to watch.

Bobby threw the ball to Jana under the north basket. Jana took the ball out of bounds, then she thought about giving herself and her two friends all the basketball skills of Marques Johnson and Larry Bird. After that, she turned her head away from everyone and whispered, “Valentine *Shmellentine*.”

She looked at the basketball court in front of her. Bobby was guarding her out of bounds, smiling. Nick was guarding Trace, and Danny was guarding Caleb.

Jana threw a pass to Trace who suddenly got big eyes as he was able to dribble the basketball with the skills of a master dribbler. Nick tried to steal the ball, but Trace casually dribbled it behind his back and threw it down the court to Caleb. Caleb stood 17 feet away from the basket and his eyes suddenly got bigger. He looked at the basket like a hungry person looks at a big, juicy hamburger.

“Shoot!” Danny said, standing back a few feet from Caleb, taunting him.

“Okay!” Caleb said politely to Danny.

Caleb took a beautifully arching shot that *swished* through the net! A big cheer went up from the kids who were watching!

“Lucky shot!” Bobby called out.

“But it’s two-zip anyway,” said Caleb, smiling, throwing the ball to Nick to take out under the south basket.

Nick threw the ball inbounds, throwing it to Danny. Danny dribbled it down court and threw it to Nick who passed it to Bobby under the basket. Bobby wanted to back Jana in close to the basket, then shoot a jump shot over her.

Bobby bounced the basketball once, turned around—and on the way up, Jana reached up and pulled the basketball away from Bobby with catlike quickness that surprised the boy. Immediately Jana threw the ball down the court to Caleb who dribbled once and quickly threw it to Trace about 20 feet from the basket. Then Trace suddenly stopped.

“Shoot!” Nick said, taunting Trace as he stood more than three feet back from him.

Trace was more than 20 feet from the basket, a shot he would normally make about two percent of the time.

“If you insist,” said Trace, and he launched a long shot that arched high into the air and *swished* through the net. It was 4-0!

Trace smiled and fist-bumped Jana Banana and Caleb. A growing group of kids watching the game cheered loudly. Something very magical was happening!

“You guys are *so* lucky!” said Bobby, a little stunned but still confident they would win.

“Yes, we are,” said Trace. “But I guess it’s four to nothing anyway.”

Jana smiled. This was more fun than she could ever have imagined, but she wondered if she might have overdone the magic just a bit.

Meanwhile, Nick took the ball out and threw it to Danny. Bobby held up his hands under the basket, more determined than ever to make a basket while Jana was guarding him. Danny threw it to Bobby. Bobby didn’t dribble the basketball at all this time. Instead he decided to shoot one of his unstoppable hook shots over Jana, a shot no one had *ever* blocked.

He took his patented hook shot! Suddenly, Jana jumped off the ground more than three-and-a-half feet and grabbed the ball out of the air with her right hand. Bobby looked shocked! He wanted to yell “**Goaltending!**”—but he couldn’t get the word out of his mouth.

Jana threw the ball down court to Trace who dribbled twice and threw to Caleb, who was five feet from the basket.

Caleb went in the rest of the way, making a layup that bounced off the backboard and in, for a 6-0 lead.

A loud cheer went up from what had now become a large crowd. Bobby, Danny, and Nick were noticeably flustered, but they were just as determined as ever. Nick took the ball out.

Jana Banana started to feel a little sorry for Bobby and his two buddies, but not that much. Still, she decided to give the boys a little magic of their own—the same basketball abilities as the ones that she and her two friends had.

“Valentine *Shmellentine*,” she whispered.

What followed the next three minutes and nineteen seconds would become legend around Mandan, North Dakota. The ever-growing crowd of students and teachers would witness some magical basketball wizardry that would have impressed the Harlem Globetrotters!

Bobby, Nick, and Danny got the ball and they put on a basketball exhibition that included lots of crisp passing and fancy dribbling. But every move they made was contested closely by Jana, Trace, and Caleb. It was a lot like watching the great Harlem Globetrotters playing themselves in fast motion. After a dizzying display of incredible basketball skills, Danny finally took a jump shot from the right side of the basket about 15 feet way—*swish!* It was 6-2!

The ever-growing crowd cheered, not believing what they'd just witnessed.

Jana Banana called Caleb and Trace over to her as she was walking over to take the ball out. She whispered something to them. ...

(Note from Author Kevin Kremer: How would you end this chapter? Send your best ideas to me at KevinKremerBooks@aol.com. I might even use them in the final book.)

Chapter 10

After recess was over, Jana Banana got back to work in Mrs. Wolski's classroom. All around the school, the other 50 Jana Bananas worked frantically to complete all of their remaining work.

With so many Jana Bananas around Ron Erhardt Elementary, it did get a little tricky that morning, trying to make sure that two Jana Bananas never ran into each other. Jana's magical powers were amazing, but there were still some awkward moments.

During a second grade recess, for example, Paula Goldmann, who was in Mrs. May's class, had a very interesting conversation with her good friend, Connie Kesler, who was in Mrs. Paulson's second grade class.

As they were swinging on two swings right next to each other, Connie asked Paula, "Are you having fun?"

"Yes, lots of fun," Paula replied. "I just got to talk to a fifth grader who's been working on a special Valentine's Day project with us."

Connie said, "We've had a fifth grader in our class working on a project, too. She's really nice."

"Ours is really nice, too," said Paula. "Her name is Jana, but she said I could call her Jana Banana."

Connie looked over at Paula with the biggest eyes ever. "That's who's been working in *our* class all morning!"

Another awkward moment occurred when the school secretary, Mrs. Nelson, was running some errands around the school, delivering messages to some of the classrooms. After she left the office, she walked by a first grade classroom where

the door was opened. There she noticed Jana Banana sitting in a chair next to a desk, talking to one of the first graders.

Right after that, Mrs. Nelson went to Miss Ereth's third grade classroom to deliver another message. She opened the door—and there was Jana Banana again, sitting in a chair next to one of the third graders, talking.

Mrs. Nelson shook her head and took a deep breath.

“I'm not going crazy! I'm not going crazy!” she whispered to herself.

For a brief moment, she thought of checking another classroom for Jana Banana, but then decided against it.

By the time the pizzas arrived, all the Jana Bananas had completed all of their work. Just before the pizza delivery man knocked on the door to Mrs. Wolski's classroom, Jana Banana said, “Valentine *Shmellentine*” and all the other 50 Jana Bananas disappeared from around the school.

Jana sat in her desk with Katrice on her left and Hannah on her right, enjoying a piece of Canadian bacon and sauerkraut pizza.

Katrice said, “Hasn’t this been the best Valentine’s Day *ever* so far!”

“It sure has,” Hannah replied.

“I’ve had a great time!” Jana Banana smiling, thinking about what was going to happen all around the school very soon.

“I can’t wait to open up the valentines!” Katrice added.

Mrs. Wolski said, “Try to finish up all your valentines and eat some pizza, too. After that, we’ll play a few relays, then open up those valentines you’ve been working on. How’s that sound?”

“GREAT!”

Chapter 11

“All right!” said Mrs. Wolski. “It looks like the pizza’s all gone! Let’s play a few of your favorite relays before we look at all the awesome valentines you’ve worked so hard making all morning. Let’s start out with Gossip Game and then we’ll play Eraser Tag.”

There was a loud cheer.

The Gossip Game started when Mrs. Wolski whispered a short phrase to Farrall Davis--“Valentine’s Day is more fun than fuzzy pickles!” Farrall was sitting in the desk in the circle to Mrs. Wolski’s right.

Then Farrall whispered what she had heard to Dakota, who was sitting to her right. This kept going all the way around the circle until the person on Mrs. Wolski’s left, Olivia, whispered what she had heard to Mrs. Wolski.

Olivia giggled when she whispered in Mrs. Wolski’s ear, “Valentines can’t run on icicles!”

Mrs. Wolski laughed, then explained to her fifth graders, “I started this Gossip Game out with *Valentine’s Day is more fun than fuzzy pickles*. When it had made its way all the way around the circle, it ended up as *Valentines can’t run on icicles!*”

Other fifth graders shared what they had heard when the *gossip* had gotten to them.

Matt started the next Gossip Game. He whispered, “The Vikings will win the Super Bowl before pigs fly.”

By the time it made its way all around the circle, it became, “The queen’s chin is in a cereal bowl flying!”

After they played the Gossip Game, they played the Bean Bag Pass. That game involved two bean bags—one had a Spider-Man picture on it and the other one had a Mickey

Mouse picture on it. Mrs. Wolski gave the Spider-Man bean bag to Kellie and the Mickey Mouse bean bag to Michael. When Mrs. Wolski said **GO!**—Kellie and Michael passed their bean bags to the person beside them so the bags were going in opposite directions around the circle. The bags were passed as quickly as possible, and the Mickey Mouse bean bag got back to Michael before the Spider-Man bean bag got back to Kellie, so Mickey Mouse won the first game.

After they had played the Bean Bag Pass four more times, Mrs. Wolski said, “All right! Let’s open up our valentines!”

Chapter 12

Everyone started digging into their bags for their valentines. The valentines that Jana had made were hard to miss because they were so large and pretty, and each one was inside a beautiful handmade red, white, and pink envelope.

Crew was the first to open his Jana Banana valentine. He took the large valentine out and whispered as he read what was on the front:

“Happy Valentine’s Day, Crew! I asked each person in class to write down one of the nicest things about you that they could think of. I hope this helps make your Valentine’s

Day the best EVER! Thanks for being such a great friend since kindergarten!" Jana Banana

Crew glanced to his left at Jana, five desks away. He held up his valentine and smiled at Jana. Jana smiled back at him.

Crew started reading silently all the things his classmates had written about him. "I'll never forget when you helped me catch up when I missed a month of school in second grade." Caleb's name was written after that.

Crew glanced over at Caleb directly across the circle of desks and smiled. He had forgotten all about that.

He read the next thing from Abby. "I like how you treat everyone with kindness."

The next one was from Michael. "You give me your desserts all the time in the cafeteria!" Crew chuckled.

He kept reading all the nice things his classmates had said about him. "You helped me with long division when I couldn't get it. ... Remember in the third grade you gave me one of your sandwiches when I forgot my cold lunch? ... You are the hardest worker on our soccer team by far. ... I like your good attitude. ... "

"No way!" Crew said, looking up from his valentine over toward Jana. "How did you do all this, Jana Banana? This is so cool!"

Jana looked over at Crew and smiled. “It was so much fun!” she said.

It didn’t take long before everyone was reading their special Jana Banana valentine. Kellie Schmidt had tears in her eyes as she read some of the nice things people had written about her. She couldn’t believe how many of the kids in class wanted to get to know her better.

After reading several of the nice things people had written about him, Michael chuckled and said, “Hey! These things you all wrote about me make me sound a lot better than I really am! I could get a big head!”

Everyone laughed.

Katrice said, “This is so cool, Jana Banana! I don’t even remember you asking us to tell you nice things for each person.”

Jacy was one of the quietest students in the class. She had moved to Mandan from Nevada after Christmas and was having a little trouble getting used to everything in her new town and new school. She couldn’t believe how many nice things her new classmates had written about her. Kinley had written, “I’m so glad you’re in our class because you are awesome! I hope you will come to my birthday party on March 19.”

Mrs. Wolski had tears in her eyes as she read all the nice things her students had written about her. She said, “I can’t believe this! ... Jana, I can’t imagine how you were able to do all this in a few hours, but it’s just wonderful. I’ll treasure this special valentine *forever*.”

“Me, too,” said Trace, “Thanks, Jana Banana! Thanks everyone! Whenever I have a bad day and need a boost, I’m going to read this valentine again.”

“Me, too,” said Drake. “I think I’ll put mine in a frame. Thanks, everyone! Thanks, Jana Banana!”

Chapter 13

When Jana Banana saw how much the valentines meant to the fifth graders in her class, she wondered what was going on around the rest of the school. She was especially curious about what was happening in her kindergarten teacher’s classroom.

Jana Banana decided she would use a little of her magic to find out. She held her hand over her mouth and whispered, “Valentine *Shmellentine*.” Suddenly, multiple images appeared in the air in front of her, like small television monitors. Jana

Banana could actually see and hear the reactions of people all over Ron Erhardt Elementary, but no one else could.

Jana focused on the little monitor with her kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Volk, on it. Mrs. Volk was reading her Jana Banana valentine. After she opened it up and started reading what some of her kids had said, it didn't take long before she had tears in her eyes.

Mrs. Volk had been sad for the past few weeks because her beloved sheltie collie, Mr. Biffle, had died. Her kindergarteners loved Mr. Biffle, and they all felt really sad too.

From Matthew: "I love you, Mrs. Volk, and I love Mr. Biffle up in heaven. From Matthew"

From Amy Harding: "You are the best teacher in the world, and I miss Mr. Biffle!"

Jana watched the kindergarteners react to their own special valentines, and she couldn't believe how excited they were to read them and share them. Jana smiled, knowing what was going to happen next.

There was a knock at the door of Mrs. Volk's classroom. Mrs. Volk answered it, and a lady at the door handed her a box.

"We were supposed to deliver this to you at school this morning," said the lady. "Please open it up right away."

“Who is it from?” Mrs. Volk asked.

“I was just supposed to tell you it’s from a bunch of people who loved Mr. Biffle and love you,” she replied.

“Oh! Thank you so much,” Mrs. Volk said, looking surprised.

Mrs. Volk carried the box over toward the large rug on the floor where they often had story time. She had all her students gather around her, and she slowly opened the box.

“It’s a sheltie collie puppy!” one of her students exclaimed.

It was a beautiful sheltie collie puppy!

Jana Banana tried holding back the tears as she watched Mrs. Volk and the kindergarteners playing with the puppy, but she couldn’t.

“Jana, are you all right?” Katrice asked.

“Yeah,” replied Jana, taking a deep breath.

Jana got back to watching some more of the action around the school, while she tried to also open up some of her own valentines. It wasn’t easy trying to do both things at the same time.

She watched as third grader Roddy Rieger read his special valentine. “Roddy, you always try so hard, you make me try harder too! ... You really are a good wrestler!” ...

Jana smiled as she watched her fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Lipp, reading her Jana Banana valentine. Mrs. Lipp wasn’t having a very good school year. She thought her students didn’t like any of the creative things she tried to do to make learning more fun. Mrs. Lipp thought she had lost her touch, and she was thinking about quitting teaching. As she read the nice things her students had told Jana Banana, she realized she still had the magic touch.

“Mrs. Lipp, I want to be a teacher just like you. You are the best teacher in the world.”

“Mrs. Lipp makes learning fun!”

“I like coming to school every day this year because of you!”

Next, Jana Bana watched as big tough fifth grader, John Skager, in Mr. Hellman’s room, smiled like never before as he read the all nice things his classmates had said about him: “John is the biggest, toughest kid in the school, but he always seems to stick up for the underdog like me. ... John has helped me get stronger by showing me the pull-ups he does every day. ... John wouldn’t let the big kids beat me up when we were

Trick-or-Treating on Halloween ... John gave me one of his Spam sandwiches when I forgot my lunch. ... John taught me how to hit the baseball better.”

Down in the office, Mr. Doopinski was reading his special valentine. It had more than twelve pages to it, and it looked like there was a brief thank-you remark from everyone in the school—all 358 students, teachers, and staff members. They all thanked him for the pizza and the fantastic Valentine’s Day. Many of them also mentioned how much they liked his Valentine’s Day suit. ... Who could have done all of this?”

He walked out of his office with his valentine and approached Mrs. Nelson, who was holding a piece of Kleenex as she was reading *her* special valentine with tears in her eyes. “The school wouldn’t be the same without you! ... I can’t believe all the nice things you do for us! ... You should be paid a million dollars for all the things you do at our school! ... You are the *bestestest* secretary in the whole world!”

“Do you have any idea who did this?” asked Mr. Doopinski.

“I’m not sure,” said Mrs. Nelson, “but based on the handwriting and artwork, I’m pretty sure it’s Jana Banana Masset in fifth grade. Isn’t this *wonderful*?”

“It really is!” said Mr. Doopinski. “After some of the things that I’ve seen and heard around this school today, I’m not going to even try to guess how Jana could have done all this!”

Mrs. Nelson was tempted to say, “*Yeah! And it all started with you and your red suit this morning!*”—but she didn’t.

Longtime school custodian, Barb Frison, was surprised to see a large valentine setting on the chair in the boiler room when she took her break. She opened it up and read all the comments from the students in the school. Barb couldn’t believe it! Almost every student could remember something that she had said to them or done for them while they were at Ron Erhardt Elementary. This was the nicest thing *ever!*

“Barb, you always seem to know when I’m having a bad day and make it better. ... I like it when you always tell me about the good books you’re reading. ... You taught me how to tie my shoes. ... Remember the time I fell off the slide in first grade and you were the first person to help me. ... Barb, you make our school the cleanest and shiniest in the world!”

Chapter 14

Valentine's Day couldn't have turned out any better than it turned out that day at Ron Erhardt Elementary School.

When the last bell rang, Jana knew the magic was over.

"This has been the best Valentine's Day I could have *ever* imagined!" she said. She looked up, "Thank you! Thank you so much!"

When the school bus stopped for Jana that afternoon, Mrs. Leingang said, "Good bye, Jana Banana!"

"Good-bye, Mrs. Leingang!" Jana replied as she started exiting the school bus. "Enjoy the rest of your Valentine's Day!"

"Thanks, Jana Banana!" Mrs. Leingang replied. "You helped make it my best ever. I'm not sure how you were able to hide that special valentine in my coat pocket, but it was one of the most special gifts I've ever received."

Jana got off the bus and started walking back home. She had a big smile on her face. There's no way she could have had a better day than this! It had been amazing and wonderful and fun and magical and *more!*

Suddenly, Jana sensed some movement above her in the sky. She looked upward and noticed a gigantic white cumulus cloud changing shape rapidly. Her heart almost jumped out of her chest! She stopped and watched excitedly, anticipating what would happen next.

Within 20 seconds, the cloud took the shape of a gigantic banana, and soon a small yellow dot appeared on the white cloud, then it slowly moved downward toward her. During the next 30 seconds, the dot got larger, and Jana was pretty sure it was a yellow paper airplane, slowly floating toward her.

Jana watched for the next 30 seconds, anticipating what might be written on this paper airplane, and the events of the entire wonderful day flashed in front of her. As the paper airplane approached her, she caught it with her right hand, then she quickly unfolded it and read the note that was written on it out loud:

“You were WONDERFUL, Jana Banana! The valentines you made for everyone in your school will be treasured for many years. We want you to have a little souvenir of this day. Please keep this as a reminder of this wonderful Valentine’s Day that you helped make possible! ... This note will not disappear because we want you to keep it. We love you, Jana Banana!”

Jana smiled the biggest smile *ever*. She looked up in the sky. “I love you too!” she called out. “Thank you! Thank you so much! This has been the best Valentine’s Day ***EVER!***”