

Convention Has Fascination and Drudgery: Sausages to TV

When I decided, many months ago, that I would spend part of my vacation being a volunteer for the Democratic National Convention, I didn't know quite what I was getting into. So far it's involved everything from cutting sausage to stuffing kits for the media to answering silly questions for Channel 4 to shaking the band of Democratic National Chairman Charles Manatt to running interference for Dianne Feinstein.

I got an expensive re-education in how atrocious parking really is in downtown San Francisco. (\$1.25 every 20 minutes is too much, don't you think?) It kind of makes me glad I work in Pacifica.

Some of the key volunteers have been hard at it for two or three months. The fact that they are also working at their usual jobs may account for their haggard appearance at times.

The San Francisco Democratic Host Committee is located in a well-worn old building on lower Mission Street with the creakiest, slowest elevator I've seen.

In many ways the place is set up like a hastily improvised army. The furniture was chosen for usefulness and availability. The whole place is an interior decorator's nightmare. Part of my job was calling other volunteers on phones that had some of the strangest sounds I've ever heard. It was always a thrill to get through to someone. Between the poor phones, and the fact that most volunteers seem to have answering machines ("The sound you hear is my attack dog Spot") it was an exception to connect with a live person the first dial.

My contribution turned out to be working on two big parties that were thrown for the press. The first was held at the Press Club, the second on the upper levels of Embarcadero Center, four blocks of party with bands, fancy food and all the beer, wine and booze anyone could want.



What I learned firsthand was the enormous amount of skill, time—and just plain drudgery—that goes into making such an event a success.

Volunteers have to be flexible. When Diane Feinstein's Press Club visit changed from minute to minute, we adjusted. When her route through the building was changed three times at the last minute, we changed our plans. Feinstein never lost her smile, though it was only a few hours after she had lost her chance to be the vice presidential nominee. She was gracious to everyone. She even stopped on her way out of the building to pose for pictures with some of my fellow volunteers. (One of those who got in the picture was asking desperately the next day for the name of the photographer. "I'd give my left kneecap for that picture," she said.)

Before Feinstein made her appearance and her talk, Democratic National Chairman Charles Manatt, wearing a "Mondale-Ferraro" button, showed up. He had gotten his button at 8:30 a.m. The official announcement of Mondale's choice for v.p. had come at 10 from the Mondale headquarters.

My job, and that of my fellow volunteers, was to keep Manatt and Feinstein from being crushed by the crowd. I was doing that when Manatt turned to me, saw my badge and flapping red ribbon, looked puzzled, then shook my hand. I don't think that was the reason Mondale tried to replace him the next day.

In the process of serving as part of "security" at the press club I learned the club layout very well, got a few souvenirs, including an empty Cabernet Sauvignon wine bottle from the Napa Valley emblazoned with the convention emblem, and met a group of hardworking Democratic volunteers whose enthusiasm was unquenchable. We coped with our own ignorance, fast-changing plans, the inevitable waste motion, the inevitable hurry up and wait, and we did it cheerfully.

There were Pacificans and Marinities and San Franciscans, a psychiatrist's wife from Napa and senior citizens from the Peninsula, young people just graduated from San Francisco State and some people taking off a little time from regular jobs, like me.

One morning, between press parties, I worked at an old warehouse helping put together the packets of information for reporters and other media personnel. When a Channel Four reporter showed up looking for a sidebar story, he zeroed in on me. I think it was because I was the only person there wearing a tie. He asked a silly question, I gave him a flip answer, and the next thing I knew, my family saw me on Channel 4. I hadn't even realized the camera was rolling. In the limelight for 15 seconds.

The second media party was a huge event. They planned for as many as 10,000 people, and it involved the open decks and bridges of all four blocks of Embarcadero Center's Podium Level (third floor).

The restaurants gave out samples of their fanciest

cuisine, from curried lamb to chicken to sushi. The booze, wine and beer were there in copious quantities, so much in fact, that even the thirsty media didn't drink it all. In fact, the only item they ran out of was Crystal Geyser water, which may mean that reporters are more sober now than they used to be.

I met people from all over the country. There was a distinguished gentleman from the Toledo (Ohio) Blade, who is shepherding 14 young interns to their first national convention. There was the cameraman from Channel 7 in Washington, guarding his camera as he ate.

I met Diane Callis of KCBS, and Belva Davis, the very sharp TV reporter, and a woman from the press of the Philippines.

But before the party started I learned the logistics involved when you try to take a handtruck full of sausage from one end of the huge Embarcadero Center to the other, then up two floors, and past a disapproving guard to the "Podium Level." Four blocks is a long way to push a handtruck when you're in a hurry, I found.

Embarcadero Center is a labyrinth of offices, stores, elevators and escalators, multiple levels, stairs and steps. I now know it better than I want to.

But the party was a success, thanks to the volunteers and the contributors and the Center Staff and the restaurants and Anheuser-Busch and everyone else.

The problems that had been anticipated mostly didn't happen, and those that did come up were mostly solved.

So I've been a small part of one small portion of a huge and tremendously involved undertaking, the Democratic Party in convention assembled. It's been fun. And the closest I've been to Moscone Center? I drove through the "Media Village" that fills the parking lots behind the complex.