

***Adventures of Media Girl: Notes from the 2004 Democratic Convention  
Boston, Massachusetts  
26-29.July.2004***

***Judi Paparelli, Reporter/Radio Host***

***Pre-Convention...***

Late Saturday night, 24.July.2004, I arrived, from Florida, at the Hyatt Harborside hotel in Boston...one of 15,000 journalists to pour into the city from all over the world.

***Sunday morning...***

With my specially coded invitation in hand, I attended the DNC Talk Radio Hosts Breakfast at the Sheraton Hotel in Downtown Boston. Speakers Terry McAuliffe and Tad Devine each downplayed the idea of a campaign poll "bounce" and laid out their hopes that the country would have a chance to "get to know John Kerry."

Kandy Stroud, DNC Director of National Radio Communications, who had contacted each of us weeks before the convention to assess our broadcast and print needs, briefed us on access to radio guests and officials.

Over breakfast, I compared notes with other hosts/reporters regarding ridiculous cab fares to and from hotels in the area (what should have been a 12 dollar ride cost 42 dollars), and other forms of price-gouging which would become a daily part of the Boston convention experience. My cab driver explained to me that, because impending massive road closures left cab drivers' ability to earn money during convention week in question, we should expect extremely high fares all week. "Hey...we've got to make the fares any way we can," he said.

***Sunday afternoon...***

My attempts to locate my friend, writer Paul Clerici, and his mother, at Bill Clinton's Prudential Center book signing, failed, even after security guards, who remembered me from my years in Boston, walked me through the long, winding lines of people waiting to meet the former President. I never found them, but they found Bill Clinton.

So, it was on to the Westin Hotel lobby to pick up convention credentials and instructions regarding equipment set-up for the week's broadcasts. Ellen Ratner, Adam Sharon and the staff of Talk Radio News Service (these pros amaze me) carried out the almighty tasks of distributing credentials, supervising equipment set-up and anticipating the coverage needs of scores of radio and print types.

Next, I headed toward the "east media entrance" to Boston's FleetCenter, home of the 2004 DNC, with North Carolina radio host Jerry Agar and independent film maker David Creech, who was putting together a documentary on Jerry's convention experience.

Our first of many security checks was a bit of a wait, but, overall, a surprisingly painless experience. Once through the barricades, we were met by bomb-sniffing dogs that examined our radio equipment, secret service agents who questioned us and guards who hand-searched our notebooks and bags. Their level of professionalism was impressive. My perfume was confiscated, but all of my radio equipment made it through. Two checkpoints later, we were inside the FleetCenter, and met with other hosts setting up their equipment at Radio Row on the first and 4<sup>th</sup> levels.

My set-up at the 9<sup>th</sup> level required a special pass each day, so I headed up to my position alone, with the intention of finding Jerry and David after set-up was complete. Hours later, I could not find them anywhere and would find them only by telephone late that night, back at the hotel. Trying to hook up with colleagues proved to be no easy task throughout the week.

The 9<sup>th</sup> level of the FleetCenter is, by my standards, a perfect location for broadcast and reporting purposes. My assigned position, it turned out, offered me one of the best views in all of the convention hall, as well as the ability to pen and describe what was happening at all times, day and night. Once my radio equipment was hooked up, line-tested and ready to operate, I was ready to get started on-air early the next day.

During a two-hour search for Jerry and David, I interviewed other journalists in the process of setting up for convention coverage (many had no lines available with just minutes to go before broadcasts began). I had dinner in Boston's North End with a Boston TV reporter, one of many Boston friends in the business I would catch up with during convention week. We ate at the same restaurant where I had dined with my parents, years ago, after carrying the Olympic Torch for the City of Boston. The place was crawling with hungry media and security officials.

By 2am, I was tired from a long day of set-up and preparation, had spent one hundred eighty-eight dollars on cab and parking fares, but was excited about all the coverage to come.

### ***Monday...***

Day 1 of the DNC began at 5am and ended at 3am the next day.

On my way out of the hotel, to start the day, I informed the Democrat volunteers stationed at the DNC hotel information desk that media and delegates were having a terrible time negotiating the city and finding proper entrances and exits to and from the convention hall. This was to be a big story on Day 1...much bigger, it turned out, than ramifications of the massive Boston road closures which would come later in the day, for security purposes. Fear of unimaginable traffic jams sent thousands of Boston residents out of town for the week, and the horrific tie-ups never materialized. Neither, it turned out, did the huge business boom that Boston Mayor Menino had promised city residents.

By 7am, I had passed through FleetCenter security, grabbed some coffee and sat ready to broadcast and write morning reports to stations and papers in several states. From my 9<sup>th</sup> level perch, I watched workers put final touches on the stage and convention floor, listened as technicians tested microphones, and reported as Hillary Clinton and her entourage arrived for an early-morning run-through of her introduction to her husband's highly-anticipated prime time speech. Wherever Hillary strolled, throngs of reporters and TV cameras followed, and it was clear on opening day of the convention, that Bill and Hillary still ruled the Democrat world.

After morning reports, I headed down to the lower levels to seek interviews and, while walking toward the guarded 9<sup>th</sup> level elevator, was greeted by Reverend Jesse Jackson, who boarded with his entourage. Everyone who is anyone, from the Clintons, to Ben Affleck and P. Diddy, travels with an entourage at the DNC.

Whipping out my recording device, I asked Rev. Jackson if he might grant me a quick interview on the elevator ride down. His handlers said no, he was heading to several TV interviews, but Rev. Jackson agreed, after learning that one of my stations, WFLM in Fort Pierce, Florida, is based in his wife's hometown. As the elevator doors opened at Level 1, Rev. Jackson was flooded with TV camera lights, but stayed and completed his interview with me.

My walkabout through the FleetCenter halls yielded interviews with Donna Brazille, John Podesta, Al Franken, Michael Moore and many delegates arriving for their first session.

Heading outside the convention center, I saw more of the same confusion about which I had warned the DNC volunteers. Delegates, most of them from out of town, were being sent blocks and blocks out of their way by police officers and guards, who seemed unable to give proper directions to lost visitors. To further complicate matters, many of these misdirected delegates, once outside the security barriers, were forced to wait in long security lines in order to get back into the convention perimeter.

At hotels all over Boston, DNC transportation officials did not know where buses were dropping off and picking up delegates and media. Communication seemed non-existent.

As 35,000-plus delegates and media poured out of the FleetCenter after Monday night's prime time speeches by Bill and Hillary Clinton, most had no idea where to walk, and many waited hours to find and board their delegate buses.

After several telephone calls addressing this matter, I was informed by a DNC official that "things will be different tomorrow." Sure enough...they were. By Night 2, officials with bullhorns directed exiting delegates and media, and confusion was greatly reduced.

The ride back to my hotel each night with a busload of buzzing delegates provided a wealth of convention info. After Night 1, these delegates were calling for a ticket headed by Hillary, and there was already anticipation of the appearance of the party's

bright new star, Barack Obama, who was set to deliver the keynote speech Tuesday night.

From the perspective of political party planners, Monday had been a success. The DNC was off to a fine start, with a high level of enthusiasm. From my personal perspective...written reports, interviews and my radio show had all gone smoothly.

The long day ended at 3am.

### ***Tuesday...***

More of the same. Morning reports, daytime interviews, evening reports and a prime time speech roster highlighted by Barack Obama, who, amazingly, surpassed the impossibly high expectations his party had placed upon him. What a star. What a gifted communicator.

The Tuesday night ride back on the delegate bus featured talk of a Hillary Clinton/Barack Obama ticket, and about the "strangeness" of Teresa Heinz Kerry.

One delegate told me she just did not know "what to make" of this woman.

Celebrity sightings included P. Diddy and, of course, Ben Affleck, who was EVERYWHERE, all week long.

After the session ended, VP candidate John Edwards, his wife Elizabeth and family arrived at the FleetCenter for a run-through of their Wednesday night appearances.

Again, the long day ended at 3am.

### ***Wednesday...***

While leaving my harborside hotel for the FleetCenter, I noticed an intense security sweep of the area by Secret Service officers.

Convention fatigue was setting in for delegates and media alike. The focus this day was on the arrival of John Edwards, who was received enthusiastically, but was eclipsed by Al Sharpton, who gave a rousing speech.

While viewing the speeches from my 9<sup>th</sup> level position, I had a fascinating discussion about media coverage with a producer of the PBS Jim Lehrer Report, who sat next to me. We were amazed at the audacity of the networks and cable news channels (with the exception of PBS and CSPAN), who limited their coverage, and chose to feature commentary on the speeches which were taking place, rather than airing the speeches themselves.

### ***Thursday...***

THE BIG DAY began with extreme fatigue, and lots of buzz about the arrival of John Kerry, who was to make his grand entrance to Boston.

After my morning reports, I rushed back to my hotel to do some sound editing for my reports later in the day. While editing, I glanced out of my hotel room window and saw the KERRY/EDWARDS campaign plane heading in for a landing at Logan Airport.

Remembering the secret service security sweep of the day before, I called a Boston reporter friend to confirm that John Kerry would make his entrance via Boston Harbor, in a boat, accompanied by his Vietnam swift boat crew. Putting two and two together, I grabbed my recording device and ran to the hotel's back entrance. Sure enough, the place was crawling with secret service agents, who spotted me and made it clear that no interviews were allowed, "unless the Senator approaches you, himself." I agreed, stood near the back door, where they had positioned me, and waited. Moments later, John Kerry and his entourage came straight toward me, with the Senator motioning to me that he'd "be out to talk in a moment" as he had to "use the facilities." So, as he exited the hotel doors, I had my quick moment to chat, and asked him if he felt ready for Boston. He said, "You bet I am," chatted a bit, and boarded his boat for the grand entrance into Boston.

Armed with my tape of Senator Kerry, I headed back to the FleetCenter. My cab driver headed directly into the path of an oncoming protest march, which was headed off by guards who moved in from every direction and swiftly ended the protest.

As the final night's session began, exhaustion was rampant in the FleetCenter. Police, guards, delegates, media and candidates were bleary-eyed and running on pure adrenaline and caffeine overload.

The crowd gave Senator Kerry a thunderous welcome, delegates gave his speech good reviews, and all said they were tired, but energized for the campaign ahead.

The balloon drop malfunctioned, and those of us who had interviewed the balloon company's proud owner felt badly that the big moment had come up short.

As the convention ended, the 9<sup>th</sup> level elevators were shut down to accommodate wheelchair delegates on other levels. So...many of us packed up our heavy media equipment, and hiked down nine flights of cement steps to exit the FleetCenter.

The day ended at 4am.

### ***DNC Impressions...***

Whatever your political party, the DNC put on a beautifully produced convention.

The event showcased the best and worst of media coverage.

Ironically, despite the convention's "made for TV" nature, print and radio journalists did a far better job of "painting the pictures" and capturing the excitement of the DNC.

Television coverage, with the notable exceptions of PBS and CSPAN, completely missed the swift boat.

PBS and CSPAN were rewarded with increased ratings, for letting the candidates, speakers and their event speak for themselves. Other TV networks and cable news channels insulted viewers by deciding what they should and should not see, and by filling their self-limited airtime with commentary, rather than speeches. They showed lack of respect for both their subject and their viewers.

Of course political conventions are scripted events.  
Of course they aim to place their candidates in the best possible light.

Viewers know this. They do not need to be "protected" from the views of each party. Rather, all media outlets should assume voters' intelligence and ability to make up their own minds.

Let the Democrats express themselves during their week.  
Let the Republicans express themselves during their week.

Let the puffed-up, ego-laden, banter-crazed, self-important TV commentators keep their drivel to a minimum.

And let Americans make up their own minds.

And now...it's on to New York for the RNC.

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**(2004 Republican National Convention Audio Diary can be found under RADIO heading)**

**Veteran Reporter/Radio Host Judi Paparelli  
covered the 2004 Presidential Conventions for  
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