

Or, How the Dreaded Media Waded Through the Maze in Miami

By Sally Quinn

MIAMI BEACH—A reporter wandered up to a giant peanut who had been stationed for several days in the lobby of the Fontainebleau Hotel. "Excuse me, sir," said the reporter to the peanut. (At the Republican National Convention you call everybody sir and ma'am. It's compulsive.) Taking out her notebook and pencils, the reporter asked: "Whom do you represent?" The peanut man stiffened. "I have been instructed," he replied icily, "not to give interviews to the media."

The peanut man was not the only one. And the reporter was not alone, either, in somehow finding herself—as a member of the dreaded "media"—and Alice in Wonderland. Trekking through a maze of bizarre images, a victim of suspicion at best, abuse at worst, she found herself constantly dismayed at the rapidity with which the world changed size and color and rabbits, red queens and cheshire cats came in and out of focus.

The mediums A media? An media? The medias?—they didn't even know what to call us.

Art Linkletter, in his duties as the master of ceremonies at the "See How She Runs" breakfast with Pat Nixon, called us, "all those people out there who will be watching you from now on, morning, noon, and night." It was reminiscent of George Wallace on the race issue, telling white voters "You know what I mean."

The press badges read "Limited Access." Press schedules were handed out with strange advisories such as "media availability." It's run, quick, over to

the press and to the people, to see what is happening.

"I'm sorry, ma'am," said the security guard, "but you can't go in there."

"Why not? It's a press briefing and I'm press."

"Well, your badge says limited access."

"I see."

On the floor of the convention hall, up and down the aisles with notebook in hand, staring at delegates, delegates staring back, is the official place for the press to be. A hand reaches out, clutches savagely at the reporter's arm. "Get going," screamed an elderly little man in a gold jacket wearing a security personnel badge. "Why? I'm allowed to be here."

"You heard what I said," his little face reddened and contorted.

"Get going. I'm in charge here. Who do you think you are, bigshots all of you, media bigshots, think you're so swell don't you, well I'm in charge here," and sputtering speechless he pushed a stunned reporter all the way down the aisle. "Go ahead, write that I pushed you. I dare you." And he disappeared.

At the other end of the convention hall at right angles to the speaker's platform (not underneath the press platform where it had been during the Democrats) was the VIP stand. It had a high white beveled shield in front of it and a red carpeted platform between that and the floor—not too accessible. The VIP box was a Norman Rockwell still life executed by Salvador Dali. Yes, there were Tricia and Eddie and Julie and David and Judy and Kim and Sammy Davis Jr. and his wife, Algodis. Boy, did they look un-

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comfortable. All of them. (At a women's brunch earlier in the week, GOP cochairman Anne Armstrong had announced to Davis that we were so proud that your ancestors came over from the old country to make this country a better place for all of us in which to live.) "Sammy is about as comfortable being a Republican as a whore in church," said one high-ranking Republican. David Eisenhower sat stiffly next to Davis with a "Please God, make this go away" look on his face. Sammy sat glumly with his arms folded, displaying his large "Montana" and "Percy" buttons and his tiny Nixon button. During the "Pat" tribute when the lights went out, Sammy and Algodis split.

That left Julie and David and Tricia and Eddie to deal with the press. Staring down at the press like Christians, they would pit them against one another with a thumbs up or thumbs down for an interview while the unlucky roamed restlessly below taking good-natured swipes at each for lack of anything else to do.

Back out on the streets where the demonstrators were making some noise, a reporter stood taking notes. An elderly man approached, and, shaking a finger, yelled: "This is all for your benefit, you know. If it weren't for you people this sort of thing wouldn't happen."

Few would give anyone with a pad and pencil his or her name. "What's it to you?" Or "What for?" they would blurt out, and then move away quickly. "They tell us to talk openly to the press; then they tell us what to say," said a Nixon youth.

Shortly before the convention, the "hippies," as they were to be baptised, staged a "throw-up" in front of the Fontainebleau. The young Republicans observed, then termed the whole thing, "Gross." Later the "hippies" came back with nicely printed, nautical-looking blue-and-white bags. They were inscribed, "Your nausea bag for the '72 Republican Convention."

The kickoff of the 1972 convention was a worship service. It was a little hard

to tell whether it was a religious worship service or a patriotic worship service. For every hymn there was a song about America, for every prayer, a pledge, and for the sermon, there was a lengthy chauvinistic testimony about our country by the mayor of Birmingham, Ala. But it was okay, because the service was non-denominational with at least one of each of the following —A Jew, a black, a Catholic, a senator, a mayor, a cabinet member, a beauty queen and an astronaut. Not so the congregation. It looked like a meeting of a committee to "Keep Our Country Club Clean." The service was by invitation only and was therefore picketed by the Christian Information Committee who suggested with all due respect that the next be held at the Rose Bowl so everybody could come. "We are convinced that such a worship service would be acceptable to the Father," read their flyer.

Later in the day there was a volunteer party for Pat Nixon. An impromptu singing group called "Together" (they weren't) sang, "On the Street Where You Live," while Pat smiled and Tricia and Eddie signed autographs. A young man with a black armband identified himself as a "Group Leader," not a Vietnam Veteran Against the War. "I'm a veteran. I'm not one of those kooks. I'm for the war," he snapped. Pat Nixon left the party through a roped-off section of the

lobby serenaded by the Dixieland trio of Jerry Marshall, who had been instructed to follow Mrs. Nixon "so she will have music where ever she goes."

At 5 o'clock that evening, a group called "Celebrities for the President," held a press conference for the press. At the conference were John Wayne, Jimmie Stewart, Ethel Merman, Terry Moore, Ruta Lee, Mary Ann Mobley and others less mentionable. Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr., who were in town for the entire convention, did not attend. Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, who had lent a wonderful surreal quality to the Democrats, did attend. This time they were outclassed and, they knew it. They never appeared again after the celebrities' press conference.

Each celebrity, stood up and told why she or he was for Mr. Nixon. "I'm here because I want Nixon to be elected," elucidated Wayne. "I'm a card-carrying, devout, California Republican, said Mary Ann Mobley, a former Miss America. "You know why I'm here," said Glenn Ford. One of the celebrities fell off the stage at that point but order was resumed shortly. "I'm one of those patriots who choke up over the flag and cry over the Star-Spangled Banner," said Ethel Merman. "This is the proudest and happiest moment of my life." The floor was then opened to questions. They waffled on the Watergate bugging, Mick Jagger, bombing dikes,

and Jane Fonda, although Wayne did say that everybody had a right to his own opinion and Terry Moore allowed that if Jane Fonda didn't love her country she should leave.

On Sunday night was the big party for the 3,000 "Young Voters for the President." Such familiar performers as Danny and the Juniors, the Coasters and the Five Satins entertained

them for hours with oldies but goldies. There was a moment where one could have been in a time capsule, hearing the music and seeing the happy youngsters in their bermudas, buttoned-downs, short haircuts and loafers. "Gimme an N," said the D.J. and they knew what to do. "Whaddya think of Nixon," he asked. Shoo wa doobie, doobie do. "He's the greatest for '72."

Monday afternoon Tricia had an autograph-signing party in the Fontainebleau lobby. Everybody else wore red, white and blue. Tricia wore pink. A word should be said about Tricia's hair. Tricia's hair is more platinum, longer, more teased, more bouffant and stiffer than ever. That's enough about Tricia's hair. The young Nixon kids demonstrated for Tricia. Their signs read,

"Nixon is good for children and other living things," "Nixon cares," "This is Dick-xie Land," and "Nixon knows Captain America."

Monday night after the convention, there was a salute to America's heritage with many Republicans coming in the costume of their ancestor's old countries. A list of the American Mosaic on the program had 52 countries on it. None were Afri-



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

Nixonettes and friends wait outside the Fontainebleau Hotel for the arrival of the Nixons.

can. After the usual Pledge of Allegiance, National Anthem, and invocation which characterized every event at the convention, John Volpe, the Secretary of Transportation, was introduced by a Jimmie Durante-like character who called him the "Horatio Alger of the Italo-American community."

Back to the convention floor. The priorities for getting into the hall were simple. Vietnam Veterans Against the War with passes could not get in. Sen. Jacob Javits had trouble getting in. The girl who was supposed to say the Pledge of Allegiance and had left her pass at home, got in. But it didn't really matter, because nothing was happening. Once in, a floor pass was easy to get and easy to keep because nobody wanted one. There was no place to be or to be seen.

You could stare at the VIP box but they never talked or anything. You could watch the movies or you could listen to the speeches. That was about it. The only activity was the unspontaneous cheering of the Nixon youth. "We are just being used," said one. "All we've done is just scream and yell a lot when the cameras are on us." But nobody ordered them to stop and at one point as Barry Goldwater's speech was interrupted for the fifth time with their chant, "Four More Years," he said, "If this keeps up we will be here four more years."

While all this was going on the millionaires were having parties on their yachts by invitation only (the only signs of them were at 8:30 in the morning when they would return to the hotel suites in black tie) and the "hippies" were slashing tires outside. "Will you look how they ruined all those beautiful Cadillac tires," deplored one woman.

It was all too much. One man complained in the elevator that he had planned to stay a week but was leaving a day earlier instead. "It was just exhausting blowing up all those balloons."