

## FROM THE COW KILL TO THE COW PALACE: PRESENT AT THE BIRTH OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

I had a few experiences as an undergrad at Loras which were meaningful and impacted the direction of my life. One such experience was our Mock Political Convention. In 1964, my senior year, the more interesting political convention would be the Republican one since the Democrats held the White House and Lyndon Johnson was certain to be nominated and run again. The big unknown was who was going to be the Republican nominee? So even though Loras was a Catholic school [and thus overwhelmingly Democratic], and Dubuque was a union [and thus Democratic] town and most of the student body would be Democrats, we held a Republican Mock Convention. Everybody pretended to be Republican. I was Chairman of the Massachusetts Delegation, and we succeeded in nominating our favorite son, Henry Cabot Lodge, for president, beating out Barry Goldwater.

The keynote speaker was an emerging, young Republican Congressman from Michigan by the name of Jerry Ford, with whom I would cross paths a dozen years later. So it was a lot of fun and especially meaningful because I began dating one of the members of the Massachusetts delegation--an attractive history major from Clarke College named Kathy Griffin, who would become a very serious girlfriend, and someone with whom I discussed marriage.

But in terms of an immediate political experience, what happened as a result of the Mock Convention, came in the summer shortly after I graduated in 1964. One of the local Republican Party leaders had reached out to a classmate of mine, a fellow Political Science major named Pete Geisler, who was really a conservative Republican. The party leader invited Pete to come to the real Republican Convention in San Francisco and to bring along a couple of his friends, even if they weren't Republicans. So Pete invited two of us-- me and Mike Mihm [another Political Science grad who would later be a federal judge in Illinois] --to go with him.

We jumped into Pete's Chevy Corvair and started driving west on Highway 20 from Dubuque. After a couple of very long days passing through Wyoming and places like Elko, Nevada, we finally got to San Francisco. Our Dubuque Republican host had a system for getting us into the Cow Palace, where the Convention was being held. A colleague of his had two official tickets. He came out to meet us and then one by one gave us the extra ticket and escorted us into the hall. Once inside, we would return the ticket to him and he went back outside and repeated the process twice more. So suddenly, there I was on the floor watching the convention that nominated Barry Goldwater.

We wandered about and at one point were recruited by the comedian Marvin Kitman who was "running for president" as a comedy routine. He was disappointed when, after initially leading

him on, we had to admit that we weren't real delegates. But I have this amazingly vivid memory of one other part of the Convention that seems especially relevant today.

In my mind, I witnessed the birth of the conservative movement in American politics, the one that you now see manifested in the Tea Party and the Freedom Caucus wing of the Republican Party and the anti-media elements of the Trump populist movement. It was just getting started back then in 1964. Barry Goldwater in his book *The Conscience of a Conservative* had hit a nerve and generated the support that had carried him to the Republican nomination. But, the moment I remember more than anything else was seeing large numbers of the delegates, those who were the really strong Goldwater conservatives, standing and shaking their fingers up at the three network television press booths that were high up on the side of the Cow Palace. I was transfixed watching them shouting--shouting at the mainstream press from whom they considered they did not get fair treatment. This is a theme still so very evident more than 50 years later. But in 1964, it was an absolutely new phenomenon. So, that was an amazing experience for me to be present at what I consider to have been this seminal moment.

When we had arrived in San Francisco, we had no place to stay, and all the hotels were either full or priced way out of our range. Sitting in the bar of one of the main convention hotels wondering what to do, we were befriended by a political insider, who, feeling sorry for us, went to the front desk and helped us score a room on a high floor. It seemed like a miracle. Our room, by chance, was directly opposite a penthouse apartment in a neighboring hotel. It ended up being the suite which would be occupied by Representative Bill Miller, the little known Congressman from upstate New York whom Goldwater would choose later that day as his running mate.

This decision was something of a political earthquake at the time. There had been a strong push from the conservative wing of the party for Goldwater to take Miller, rather than the moderate Pennsylvania Governor Bill Scranton who had been Goldwater's main rival for the nomination and was the conventional wisdom choice to be the Veep. We saw Scranton parading down the street still trying to generate the enthusiasm he would need to convince Goldwater to pick him as his running mate.

The conservative theme at the time was a "Choice not an Echo," and Goldwater's selection of Miller can now be seen in retrospect as the beginning of a historic trend within the Republican Party of not compromising with moderates. At the time, however, many observers were inclined to see the entire Goldwater experience as an aberration, especially after Goldwater suffered such a lopsided defeat in the general election, winning only six states.

In any event, we had advance notice of which choice Goldwater would make as we had a front row seat and literally were able to watch Miller and his family arrive and move into this fancy suite which would be his operating base during the apogee of his political life.

After our experience at the Convention, we started driving south stopping in the incredibly charming sea-side town of Carmel, which seemed as close to paradise as I had ever experienced. Mike Mihm had an aunt who lived in a spectacular home near the ocean. It was incredible. California truly seemed like the Promised Land in 1964. Everything was new and modern and so different from Iowa. Mike then suggested we stop and visit a girl he knew who attended Clarke College in Dubuque.

We stopped in Las Vegas along the way which was still in its infancy without any tall hotels along the strip. We had met a young priest when we stopped at a local church to go to Sunday Mass, who ended up taking off his collar and going to a casino with us. He had a great time dancing, while urging us to call him "Joe" and not Father. We next drove to Prescott, Arizona to visit the girl who attended Clarke whom Mike knew. She and her family were welcoming so we had a place to stay and eat for a day or two. It was a real western frontier town in the mountains, and we felt out of place like eastern dandies at the town cowboy bars. We even saw a cougar or mountain lion crossing the road at night.

From Arizona, we headed back to Dubuque via a drive along the legendary Route 66. We had almost no money left, so we just took turns driving all night. I recall that we stopped once in Lenexa Kansas to rest. It was dollar night at the local drive-in theater, so we sat on the ground outside the car, pretty exhausted. I was driving when we made it to Des Moines, which we bypassed on a small section of the new Interstate Highway system that was just being built. I fell asleep at the wheel, and was only awakened by the rumble strip along the side of the road vibrating the car. I pulled off and went to sleep.