

# On Duty with Bill Clinton

BY CAROL JOHNSTONE

"I've got to warn you, it won't be glamorous," the Canadian Associated Press (AP) Bureau Chief Jeff Ulbrich said. "We'll be putting you on the 'Death Watch.' If Clinton goes jogging at five in the morning, you'll be there."

About a month earlier, I'd seen a flyer at King's College where I was completing a one-year program in journalism, saying AP was looking for three students to help out at the G7 Summit in Halifax where the leaders of the US, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Canada, and Italy would meet to discuss economic issues. This year, Boris Yeltsin had also been invited as a guest.

"Will I have to jog?" I asked, somewhat alarmed. Though I'm the same age as Clinton, 49, I'm not nearly as fit. Ulbrich said "..... that when he'd done it, he'd traveled behind him in a cart.

Thus reassured, I said "OK, sounds fine. How much does it pay?" "What? You wanna be paid?" Ulbrich asked. "Well, I am a single parent," I said, not sure he was joking. He laughed.

So for \$100 a day plus expenses, on June 15, Thursday, I began my three-day career as an AP White House pool reporter traveling in a press van in President Clinton's 20-car motorcade. Ever since John E Kennedy's 1963 assassination, when the only photographer present was an amateur, representatives from major US press services travel with the POTUS (President of the United States) wherever he goes. Journalists fly on Air Force One, the President's plane, ride in his motorcade, and stay in his hotel. AP and UPI (United Press International) wire services get front row seats—because they service thousands of newspapers—while the television networks have to rotate days.

Our instructions were simple.

"Don't get separated from the pool," said Washington Bureau Chief Merrill Hartson. We were given cellphones and told to call the local filing center if Clinton said or did anything interesting. If anyone shot at him, we were to call the Washington Bureau immediately. I wrote the numbers on my hand. Later, Pulitzer prize-winning AP photographer, Marcy Nighswander, who's

van window, I could see the two identical Presidential limos and the "War Wagon" that accompany the POTUS on a C5A transport plane wherever he travels. The War Wagon is a black Chevy Suburban with about seven antennas poking out and no upper tailgate, into which the CAT (Counter Assault Team) would leap and immediately turn around to scan the crowd,

transcriber back at the filing center, while I crouched down next to a cement garbage can on the wharf with my back screening out Bosnia-like sounds of fireworks overhead.

Being on the Death Watch was a lot like doing a Kasung shift: lots of waiting in parking lots, keeping a vipashyana eye out, and moving when "he" moved, and, following the soldier's creed: when you can eat, eat; when you can nap, nap; and when you can pee, pee—just make sure a sherpa and/or an agent is with you when you do it.

The next day I sat in the press pool van in the Ashburn Golf Club parking lot for about five hours while Clinton played 18 holes in the rain with Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien. The reporters with me hoped it would pour so they could get back on Air Force One and go home. I said, "Well, his plane isn't scheduled to leave until 10 p.m." Kevin, a CNN producer sitting next to me, said dryly, "Carol, the plane leaves when he leaves." Oh. Right. Unlike the Sakyong, no need to rush Bill Clinton...

We finally drove out to Shearwater airport by a most circuitous route, lined with cheering people. Upon arrival, the other reporters disappeared into the POTUS 747, gauzy curtains framing a table lamp in the front window. I waited under the wing until the Clintons got on the plane, then moved back to fulfill my last task: calling the Washington Bureau of AP to say, like a good Kasung, "Air Force One is in the air."

I hitched a ride back to Halifax in another pool van—dazed, tired, and wired. I did get some great pics and I never did have to jog. And, as I kept hearing, "It'll look good on your resume." *Carol Johnstone is a journalist living in Halifax.*



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traveled in the White House Press pool for eight years, lent me her grease pen and told me to write the numbers on the back of my security pass. Without that pass, I wasn't in the pool.

Security was tight. There were about 15 of us in the pool at any given time. We were always accompanied by a "sherpa" (high-ranking White House policy advisor and "guide") and an "agent" (Secret Service) who, yes, did talk into his sleeve from time to time. Looking out the

Uzis discreetly tucked away, when the POTUS was about to move.

The only "real" reporting I did was on Friday to attend a briefing with a "senior administration official" in a parking lot after a performance by the Cirque du Soldi for the heads of state. The topic was what the "7" and Yeltsin had discussed during a dinner meeting at the Waegwoltic Club, mainly, a proposal by Yeltsin calling for a meeting to discuss nuclear safety next year in Moscow. I played the tape over the cellphone to an AP