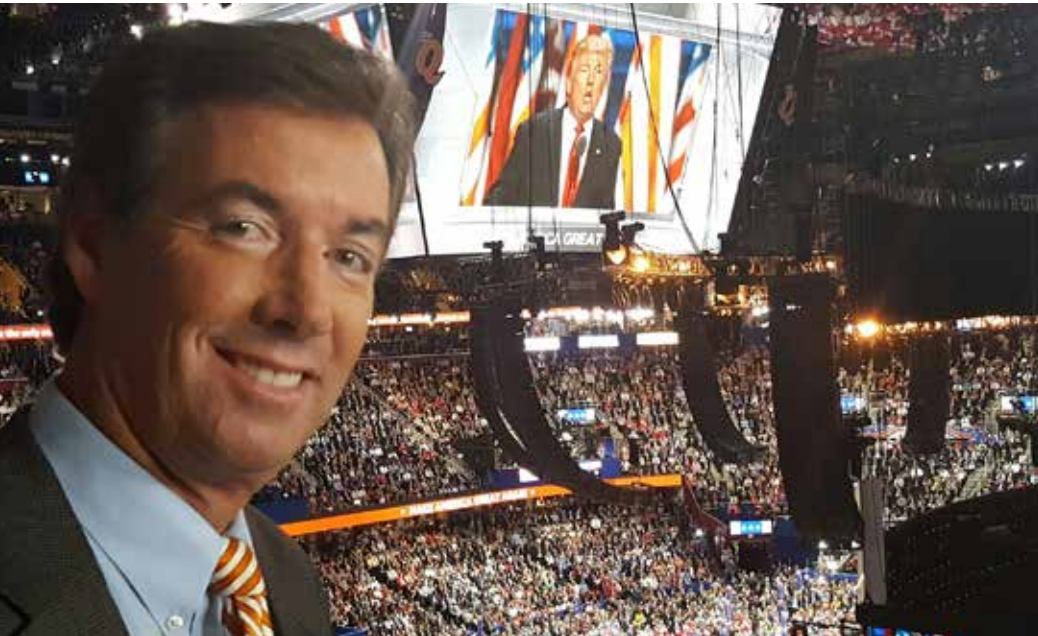


# BEHIND THE SCENES of the National Political Convention



**I'VE BEEN FORTUNATE ENOUGH** to have cobbled together an exciting career in the media. Since my father's good friend first gave me access to his television station in the 1970's when I was 12 years old, I've been enamored by the business.

Some forty years later, and having since covered thousands of stories around the country, I had a chance to be up-close-and-personal at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland at the Quicken Loans Arena.

By now, you've read the headlines—and you may even have hit the saturation point for political coverage...and that's why the Editors at Family Beautiful magazine asked me to do a lighter approach to some of the behind-the-scenes items I encountered, that you won't read or hear about anywhere else. I was happy to oblige. Here's my Top Ten list...

**1.** Each day began at 9am, preparing

for a 9:45am conference call to my TV station...and the day ended when I returned to the hotel room around 1am. Throughout the day, I had to find fresh locally-interesting interviews for my station, as well as our two sister-stations who helped foot the bill for our visit.

**2.** Early on in the week while walking through downtown Cleveland, I got turned around and asked a police officer where the arena was.

He said, "The what?"

I said, "The arena, how do I find the arena?"

He pointed down a road and walked away practically shaking his head.

I said to a woman who overheard the awkward exchange why it was confusing to ask where the actual convention is taking place.

She said, "Because most people call it 'The Q', not 'The arena.'"

**3.** I saw former Texas Governor Rick Perry walking in my direction. A year earlier, I had a pleasant and relatively in-depth conversation with him at Robarts Arena in Sarasota. We had talked about our respective back surgery, and I thought I'd re-introduce myself and see how he was doing.

But as I stepped in his direction, his handlers and security materialized out of nowhere and I was blocked to the side. Welcome to the big leagues, I guess.

**4.** With 15,000 members of the media present, we had to share our workspace with many other outlets. As I stood in the arena with my back to the convention floor each night, talking to Sarasota, I was standing a foot away from a reporter from Miami or New York or South America.

I became friends with "Mike," a sixty-something political reporting legend from South Florida and we shared our mutual love of tennis. We stood side-by-side each night, offering each other tidbits the other might have missed about that night's events.

Make no mistake, it was hard not to get distracted while we both began talking simultaneously to our respective anchors hundreds of miles away.

**5.** We had to prepare our stories at the Cleveland convention center and then take a shuttle bus to the actual arena with other reporters. One night in my haste to get in position, I left my suit-coat behind. When I came in the suite where we

stood to deliver the news, I saw another reporter about my size from New York who was going on after me.

I said, "I left my jacket back at the filing center, is there anyway I could borrow your jacket for five minutes?" He was immediately willing to help me. Although he was watching me when I finished, making sure I didn't forget and run off. I wouldn't forget.

**6.** I saw a lot of network "stars" that week—but didn't come face to face with many. However one afternoon I saw Katie Couric a few feet away by herself. Knowing she's from Virginia—and knowing I had worked in Richmond—I heard myself say, "Hey, I'm from Richmond!"

Without missing a beat, she looked up at me and said, "So, what do you think, will Hillary pick Tim Kaine?" (Senator Kaine is a former Mayor of Richmond.)

And so it went, she and I chatted about Kaine, Richmond and Virginia for a few minutes. It probably was only 45 seconds, but I was struck by how natural and friendly she was. I thought to myself, "No wonder she has done so well for herself, she's very likeable and natural."

I had the foresight to ask one of her assistants before I approached Katie if she'd be open to a picture. His answer surprised me: "Yeah, she'll do it—but you have to put the flash on."

**7.** I recall walking back in the designated area from where I was watching the convention all week in the arena, and seeing Senator Ted Cruz rapping up his remarks to the delegates. "Thank you and God bless America," he said. But the audience began booing! I thought, "What part of 'God bless America' in

controversial these days?" Turns out he hadn't mentioned the party host, Donald Trump, and many of the delegates thought that was bad form.

**8.** One night while trying to return to the arena from the filing center between newscasts, the Secret Service Agent on our bus (Security was everywhere) told us a protest had broken out down the road on our route back to the arena. He said, "You can wait it out, I'm not sure how long it could be—or you can walk the mile-and-a-half to the arena."

Not knowing how long we could be sitting there, I rolled the dice and began walking with another reporter to the arena. A Washington, DC-based reporter named "Cal" from "The Economist" all but joined arms and walked together though the protest and to the arena.

**9.** On our final night, having worked five 16-hour days, one of my colleagues and I broke down and decided we were going to buy a can of beer each to consume in our respective hotel rooms while we packed for our early morning flight. We were so tired, but it seemed like the right thing to have a cold one.

We walked into the gas station convenience store at 1:10am in our suits and media badges, after covering an absolutely exhausting week of a major political party choosing it's Presidential

nominee. We walked up to the counter with our respective cans of beer, feeling a little silly that this was the extent of our celebration after covering this major event.

"I can't sell you beer."

"Why not?" we asked the clerk, nearly in unison.

"It's past 1am, and Ohio law says...."

I exchanged it for a bottle of Gatorade. Somehow beer would have tasted better with my peanuts.

**10.** It was a week of crowds, security, packed elevators, long lines for the restroom and for food, plastic utensils, and constant deadlines. When we finally touched down for our layover on the way back to Sarasota, I found a diner in the airport and ordered a plate of bacon and eggs with a cold glass of orange juice.

You'd never believe how good that meal tasted. It didn't realize how deprived I was that week, until I tasted that hot meal. It was my first sit-down warm meal of the week.

So how was it? I was glad to go, and just as glad to come home! – Ray Collins

