

# CONVENTION COMEDY FROM UNCONVENTIONAL COMEDIAN

BY SCOTT BLAKEMAN

**B**arack Obama and I both took the stage in Denver during the Democratic Convention. His crowd was a little larger than mine, though.

I didn't get to meet our new President in person, but I did pose next to a cutout of him at the Media Welcoming Party. I was in town to perform my political



**Friar Scott Blakeman with President Obama, sort of**

humor show, *Breaking Convention with Scott Blakeman*, with fellow Friar John Marshall, Will Durst and Jimmy Tingle. We did four shows at the hundred and fifty seat Bug Theater. No, the rental package didn't include an exterminator.

For a news junkie like myself, walking around Denver felt like being a kid in a candy store. In addition to running into journalists like George Stephanopolous and our own Friar Marvin Scott, I saw political personalities like John Kerry and Barney Frank. But even less well known Democrats seemed like celebs that week in Denver. Where else would you hear someone shout, "Look, there's Illinois congresswoman Jan Schakowsky!" Angelina and Brad wouldn't have attracted as much attention as she did.

Like a candidate campaigning for votes, I left postcards for the show in bookstores, put up flyers and even promoted the show performing for the lunch crowd at the Progressive Democrats of America event. They laughed between bites.

After our standup performances, I interviewed a guest at each show. Tip O'Neill's son Tom told me how this convention was unlike any of the many he had attended. The authors of *Goodnight Bush*, a parody of *Goodnight Moon*, had the entire book sung by a choir. A lawyer and author who I met belly dancing in the park (she was dancing, not me) talked about being Muslim in America. But the highlight was when my scheduled guest didn't



**Scott outside the Pepsi Center**

show up, and I asked, "Is there a guest in the house?" I wound up interviewing audience member Tyler Arthur who wrote a book about going from working in the first Bush Administration to becoming a progressive Democrat. You never know who's out there in the crowd.

Denver was pretty amazing outside the convention too. We were lucky to stay at a house in the mountains with friends of my wife, Ruth. As a city boy, I don't know from wild animals. When our friend asked if I had ever seen mule deer, I thought they were referring to comedian Gary Mule Deer. Sure enough, the first morning we looked outside and saw two mule deer casually lounging on the deck. I gave them postcards to my show.

In addition to being in Denver to do my show with some great comedians and friends, Ruth and I wanted to experience the convention in person. But with no credentials and no friends in high places, what were two shy Jewish kids from Brooklyn going to do?

On the first day of the convention, after attending an Americans for Democratic Action event, I spotted a well-heeled gentleman with a stack of convention credentials. I have to admit I was listening in on his cell phone conversation, in much the way AT&T and Verizon do. I could hear him offering passes to exclusive receptions and VIP suites. Sensing an opportunity, I did what I usually do in a situation like that—I told my wife to go over to him.

She politely asked him if there was any way that we could have two of the coveted credentials. He asked us what we did and when I told him I was a political comedian performing in town, his eyes lit up. "You just hit the jackpot," he said, and handed them to us. A few short hours later, we were pinching ourselves as we sat in the Pepsi Center watching speeches by Michelle Obama and Ted Kennedy. And the unfortunate speakers who went on right after them, who had to talk over the din of twenty-thousand people talking. I know the feeling. I once had to follow Friar Pat Cooper.

In a normal election year, attending one night of the convention might have been enough. But Ruth and I still held out hope that we could schmooze our way into the final night of the convention on Thursday at Invesco Field. Barack Obama was going to speak to eighty-thousand people that night, and we wanted to be among them. As I entered the theater for our matinee show on Thursday, Jimmy Tingle handed me two passes to the

convention that night. I knew Jimmy was a great comedian, but I didn't know he had the power to make dreams come true.

The last night of the convention, like the whole week in Denver, was unforgettable. Ruth and I sat ten rows



**Scott witnessing history at Invesco Field**

off the field, even though one of our tickets was for the upper deck. Even the ushers were smiling upon us that day. As a Jets season ticket holder, I wasn't used to sitting in a stadium with eighty-thousand people who were coherent and good natured.

It truly was a magical night. Obama gave a wonderful speech, we met some great people, and that was just the beginning of the evening. Alan Colmes had asked me to be a guest on his Fox News radio show that night, so Ruth and I made our way to the deserted Pepsi Center, where I was Alan's only guest for an hour. And then, once again due to Jimmy Tingle's largesse, we headed to Coors Field for a Massachusetts delegation party, where we got to walk on the field and go in the dugout. Ruth and I had hit the trifecta, going to all three Denver sports venues in one night, and we had a winning time in each of them.

After Denver, we headed to St. Paul for the Republican Convention. Although Will Durst and I had fun doing the shows, and the owners of the beautifully restored Mounds Theater were a delight to talk to, the usually lovely city of St. Paul resembled a police state. That point was brought home to us when we tried to go to the legendary Mickey's Diner after a show. "You don't want to go there," a riot-gearred policeman told us, "there's a lot of tear gas and demonstrators." Since we were looking for bagels and lox, not tear gas and demonstrators, we headed back to our hotel.

In hindsight, the contrasting mood in Denver and St. Paul during the conventions mirror how most Democrats and Republicans are feeling right now. And I guess if John McCain had won instead of Barack Obama, I might have written more about my time in St. Paul during the Republican Convention. But I'm glad I didn't have to.