

That Time ***** Hit Me In The Face

"That all men are created equal is a proposition to which, at ordinary times, no sane human being has ever given his assent."

- Aldous Huxley

I've worked in the entertainment industry, in a subsidiary role, for many years. Possessing many stories about famous people - whom we piquantly regard with greater esteem - makes me an interesting conversationalist for many; it is an indulgent, supercilious "*Name someone, I'll tell you a story*" sort of exchange. I've grown a bit tired of the tales, but a few of them still remind me of the litany of one-of-a-kind experiences.

Naturally, a pivot to News is easy. Modern media has made darlings and starlings of its purported journalists. After burning out on the music and TV industries, I moved over to the (supposedly) simpler, more structured environment of real-time coverage with the world's most notorious network, who shall otherwise go without mention within the scope of the story.

And then I interacted, on two separate occasions, with the world's most famous person:

***** (name obscured to protect the protagonist from retaliation).

The first such occasion was in his element: a tertiary U.S. city, accompanied by perhaps the most impactful Talking Head of them all. A "Town Hall" style event in the local college's arena. Lines formed outside several days in advance, with attendees camping-out as if they'd purchased tickets to a Grateful Dead concert. The upper level seating was covered and obscured; due to demand, additional areas were eventually opened. Several floor sections needed to be expanded to allot for additional wheelchair access.

This was the hottest ticket in town.

Event Day arrived, and so did he: unannounced and in a flourish, the former president (not yet the candidate, not yet a felon) was whisked into a locker room by an entourage that could only be described as a colloid of humanity - Secret Service, personal assistants, private security, advisers. Everything from suits and dark sunglasses to suits and earpieces to skimpy, skin-tight dresses to full body armor and AR15s. Fatigues to Fendi. In the midst of it, the hair and the tie floated by.

"Float" would be generous: his lurching carriage makes him an unmistakable presence. He was not held captive in his secure quarters for long, eventually ambling about the

arena, gesturing curiously yet carelessly at cracks in the wall, shaking hands with VIPs, and otherwise observing his surroundings like a curious child.

My job, however, was to interact with him directly. Armed with only the necessary tools - his security insistent on no additional pieces - I proceeded into his holding area. He stood motionless, surrounded by unidentified blonde women. Wall to wall mirrors adorned the entire dressing room. Half-eaten Milky Way bars sat on an adjacent high table, next to cans of Fanta and Diet Coke. I considered asking if he needed a Big Mac. I kept my mouth shut.

He didn't fully turn, but his head angled and his painted eyes narrowed toward me. He said "hello" and nothing else.

"Mr. President, this is *(insert my name here)*."

I finished my job when it became evident - although my job wasn't fully completed yet - he was clearly annoyed at my presence. He flipped his suit jacket in his usual manner, and his Secret Service saw me out.

As previously mentioned, I have dealt with more notable talents than ***** , including other presidents. Both of the living Beatles, for starters. This was different. There is an entirely unique quality to this man - albeit and generally less wholesome one.

Soon he was onstage, adorned by a raucous crowd. Chants of "Lock Her Up" ensued. When he began speaking, he sounded gosh-darned presidential - for about 30 seconds, before descending into utter nonsense. A Vietnam Vet interrupted from the rafters, only to be promptly exited by Security.

Then, he needed my attention. Onstage. In front of a packed house. On a live TV show. The show doesn't go on, otherwise.

I turned to my Secret Service contact. "Proceed VERY slowly," he said, "if you don't want to get shot."

***** played off the issue with "The Democrats Trying To Shut Me Down" hyperbole, allowing me just enough leverage (and levity) to visit him, fix his issue, and exit cautiously. My Secret Service contact rested a hand on my shoulder afterward. "You're the only sane person in this entire building."

I looked for a place to sit down, as this whole occasion induced a trauma response in me, akin to wiping out - hard - onstage in front of 40,000 people at a previous event. They laughed at me then. They laughed for ***** now. A side room, in which I hoped for a private moment, was instead full of at least 12 S.W.A.T. team members.

“Hey guys. I’m gonna go. Sorry to bother you.” They said nothing.

Eventually, the show was over. ***** was immediately hurried offstage toward the exit. He did, however, catch me out of the corner of his eye on the way to the door. Refusing his handlers, he diverted and approached me.

“You really did a tremendous job tonight. Thank you so much for what you did. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it. Great work!”

Baffled but relieved, I said “Thank you, Mr. President, I hope you had a great time.”

“I did! That was really fun. Let’s do it again soon!”

He shook my hand - no pull-in-trick, either, he shook like a gentleman - and away he went, with an entourage that matched the population of a small country.

Fast forward to a frigidly cold state in early 2024. Another minor landmark of the bumpy campaign trail. A *rinse and repeat*, of sorts - a convention center hall, live televised “News” and the three leading Republican candidates. Every day was a new participant: Nikki Haley led off, disconnected and hands-off. Ron DeSantis was engaging and friendly, shook hands and made small talk. Then it was the former President’s time to shine, yet again.

What could go wrong, right?

The day started with the usual security sweep - at which point, the Secret Service tossed glow sticks to mark the path from the stage to the nearest exit. I inquired:

“Is that a preference thing for the former President?”

“It’s a preference thing for *us*, in case of emergency.” I took a moment to consider that.

Even in a darkened hall, his gait is unmistakable. He shuffled up with “Hi, hello” and immediately prepared for his moment.

“How big is the crowd?” he inquired, avoiding eye contact this time. “It better be bigger than last night, because that was pathetic. We need more people at these things.”

Bewildered, I vomited up a noticeably unconfident reply. “Well Mr. President, regardless of the numbers, I’m *certain* they’ll greet you with a *standing ovation*.”

That comment hung in the air like a fart. I felt him stiffen and half-turn his gaze my way. I think he believed I was being facetious. I looked to the familiar faces in the Secret Service - all of whom regarded me with bemused expressions.

He eventually broke the silence. “Do you need any tape?”

“No, sir. This should work fine” I replied. I was wrong, again. He had the same problems he had onstage as he did previously. This time, he handled them himself. It is worth noting that these issues are caused by his girth. He is a rather heavy-set fellow. He’s also a septuagenarian. Give the man a break.

But before he took the stage, and I was ensconced in my labors, he did his signature jacket flip. The difference this time: his right hand flew up and caught me across the chin.

“Oh my God, are you okay? I am so sorry!” he immediately uttered. His eyes affixed on me, scanning for injury.

“No sir, I’m just fine.” I was indeed unharmed, although I immediately considered how I could leverage this incident into a Cabinet position. He continued his concern. “I’m really sorry. Is there anything I can get you? Do you need anything? I feel so bad.”

“Don’t worry, Mr. President. I’m really okay. That was just a love tap, I know.”

He laughed and said “Okay, thank you again. I appreciate you being so nice about it.”

He moved into position to take the stage. His Secret Service contact, once again, laid a hand on my shoulder.

“Thank you for handling that so well.”

“The check’s in the mail, right?”

He laughed, and demonstrably shook his head.

***** took the stage and played the hits. His messaging seemed considerably more on-topic than our previous engagement, albeit his usual diatribe: the people and propagation of an ailing nation. The crowd, nearly three times that of Haley and DeSantis combined, hung on every (mono)syllable.

You can despise the man, but he knows his audience. He’s properly tailored (ill-fitting suits aside, as I was privy to, in myriad ways) to make grand, sweeping statements of minimal substance and questionable intent to ensure he is consistent, if incoherent; there is no medium in his message. It is the juxtaposition of the rhetoric of fear and anger from a man who desperately wants to be liked, wants to be right. He wants to be in charge. Pundits pontificate on his policy, his ideology; I am by no means an expert in political science, but neither is he. And he doesn’t care to be. Much of this extrapolation belongs in an entirely different essay - one that I am wholly unqualified to write. These are merely oversimplified observations, from within arm’s reach.

When the event wrapped, I followed him awkwardly around the facility to ensure my tasks were complete. Swarmed by adoring fans, admonished with gifts and praise, he still somehow seemed unrequited. I cannot imagine the limousine ride back to the tarmac that ushered him onto the plane that flew him back to Mar-A-Lago. He seemed taciturn, annoyed and genuinely pouty. I assume campaigning gets annoying - which he illustrated later that year in Pennsylvania, playing music and swaying onstage for a perplexingly long time, ahead of engaging with his Town Hall audience.

This time, He didn’t thank me. To be fair, I wasn’t certain I deserved it; more importantly, I wasn’t certain he even remembered I existed. He gazed past me, red emanating from under his usual orange expression. I probably should’ve had tape.

Politicians - career ones, as I’ve witnessed through the lens of fame - never forget a face or a name. They are brilliant tacticians in their efforts to engage with potential voters. Mr. ***** and (what I would consider) his authentic kindness toward me - despite the inadvertent punch to the jaw - leads me to believe he would like to achieve that same end.

It is just not present within his DNA, beyond general pleasantries and genuine concern that only exist within arm’s reach.