



Mona Koppelman/Daily Nebraskan

A K.C. jazz singer shoo-bops for the partying press and the mingling media at a Sunday noon brunch in downtown Kansas City.

Fringe benefits . . .

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Jeff Browne and I first picked up our press credentials along with reporters from the wire services, the New York Times, and the like. We first ignored the League of Women Voters' bulky press packet in our excitement — Browne had drawn a pass for the press balcony in the debate hall. Only 400 coveted tickets were available; the other 900 or so reporters like myself would watch the debate on huge TV screens in the Exhibition Hall in the basement.

We finally got around to persuading the press packet, and what did we find?

"As a member of the working press, your press credentials will allow you access to all events listed on the attached schedule."

Great, we thought. Rallies, protests, forums . . . everything a budding journalist dreams of.

Oh, blissful ignorance. Beloved naive. For what did we find?

Receptions, lunches, brunches, breakfasts. Free tickets to a concert featuring rock artists Nicolette Larsen and America. Freebies galore. We had to dig for the scheduled rallies and demonstrations in the back pages of discarded newspapers.

While 1,000 people of diverse groups marched in the Saturday afternoon rain to advertise their beliefs, a few hundred journalists drifted in and out of the "Comin' to Kansas City/Welcome Reception." Harpists harped and flautists fluted as rain pattered gently on elegantly draped windows. Media folk, hosts and business sponsors munched on meats and cheeses while staring disinterestedly at beautiful slides of greater Kansas City flashing on six wall screens.

While Richard Q. Cooper silently demonstrated against discrimination and Bruce Weiner protested indifference for Soviet Jews Sunday morning, media members and business sponsors first brunched from 9 to 11 a.m., then lunched from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

The banquet hall was decked out in red, white and blue bunting, streamers and balloons. Champagne flowed freely. Barbecued beef and pork, salads and fixings fed perhaps 2,000 people.

When I asked other journalists if feasts and freebies were common along the campaign trail, I got two kinds of responses: "Go away, little pleeb, we're here to have a good time. Be a good social butterfly and don't bother me."

Or they just turned their backs. Meanwhile, Richard Q. Cooper and Bruce Weiner blew on their cold hands and watched the privileged folk splatter barbecue sauce on their chins.

After dinner, many media members trotted back to their hotels to collect more freebies, courtesy of local businesses and the League of Women Voters: pens, bumper stickers, posters, tickets to elite — though public — forums.

Media attendance at the rallies and demonstrations was minimal. More cameramen and reporters showed up in crowds cheering the arrival of both candidates.

After a hard afternoon's work, media folks returned downtown for the "Taste of Kansas City" buffet thrown by fine Kansas City restaurants. More wining and dining from 4 to 6 p.m., until the journalists departed to settle in for the debate.

Browne left to take his debate hall seat; I retreated to the basement. Nine hundred floor seats faced two huge screens. It was very much like a media drive-in movie theatre. The young and inexperienced journalists sat primly in front, tittering occasionally.

The older, jaded journalists

hopped in the back seats — discrete, and closer to the food.

Safeway grocery stores put out a spread of meats, cheeses and fruits to feed an army of surprisingly hungry people. Coors brought in a hundred or more cases of their best brew.

We even had popcorn.

As I grabbed an apple and three cookies, I thought of Donna, the cleaning woman, and her comments from the day before.

And I wondered why those comments never seemed to keep me from eating my share of the freebies.

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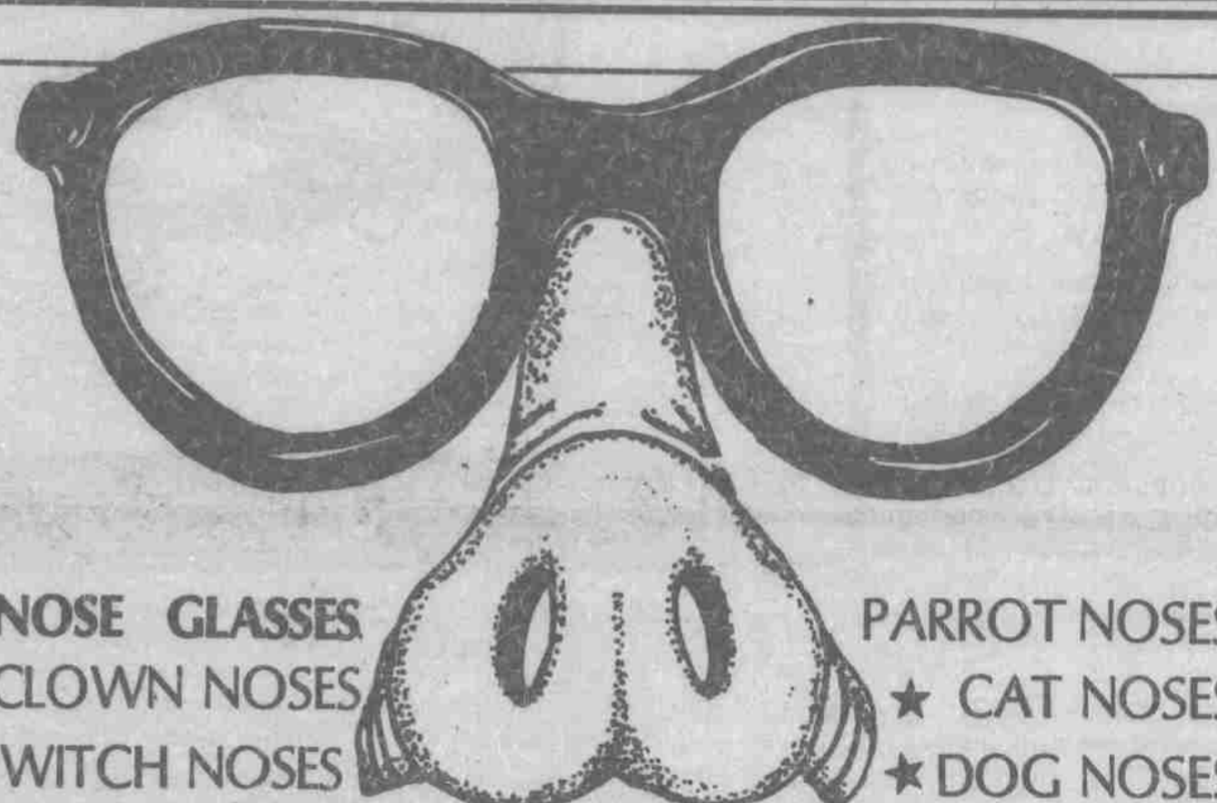
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