

FOR NON-RELEASE

March 5, 1976

POOL REPORTDrop-by of Aggie the Ewe at Peoria Hilton, Peoria, IL

A red pickup truck swung into the garage entrance of the Peoria Hilton at 11:30 p.m. A dozen White House correspondents, a newsmagazine photographer, three advance men, a Secret Service agent and a Peoria couple looking for some place to get a drink swarmed from the motor lobby to greet the truck. Ron Naffziger, an area farmer, rolled down the window on the passenger side of his cab. "Here she is," he said.

Naffziger swung open the passenger door. The Washington contingent, along with the good-time Peoria couple, looked directly at the hind quarters of a sheep weighing about 60 pounds. Merriment occurred. Naffziger looked on with bemused detachment. No one made a move toward the sheep. No one, to tell the truth, knew how to make a move toward a sheep. "Don't you have a leash?" asked John Mashek.

The whole caper was simple enough. Tom DeFrank, boy correspondent for Newsweek, was a graduate, or so he said, of Texas A&M. As everyone knows, Texas A&M has a surplus of A's and M's, but a paucity of coeds. One is given to understand that, under such conditions, bonds of affection naturally enough develop between Aggies and sundry sheep which roam the campus. DeFrank had never quite acknowledged his own conquests in this regard, but he had never disabused his friends in the press corps of the prevalent notion that there had been such conquests either. DeFrank's colleagues, being by and large a sympathetic lot, had decided that inasmuch as the President was making farm policy a feature of the Illinois campaign trip, it was only fitting that a surprise assignation be arranged for DeFrank with a local ewe. Although this plan was kept from DeFrank with evident success, virtually everyone else was aware of it and, during the long, nervous wait for the arrival of the ewe at the Hilton, there were typical manifestations of interest. Muriel Dobbin of the Baltimore Sun arranged for the lady at the piano bar to play the Whiffenpoof song. Peter Kaye of the President Ford Committee inquired frequently whether the sheep was being brought to the hotel in a "ewe-haul." The informal reception committee hummed such old standards as "I'll Be Loving Ewe, Always." DeFrank, unfortunately, took it upon himself to retire for the night.

With the arrival of Naffziger--arranged in what much have been but a secretive aberration in an open White House staff by various advance men, who, as Richard B. Cheney was later to remark, "can do anything"--the whole scheme seemed on the verge of going seriously awry. The door to Naffziger's truck stood open. The ewe stood beside Naffziger. The Washington press-advance-Secret Service corps stood in awe. Eric Rosenberger, fortunately, had the wit to suggest that the truck be driven closer to the service entrance of the hotel in an alley where, we had been assured, there was but a Pinkerton guard who "doesn't look too swift." How swift did one have to be to notice a sheep climbing the backstairs?

The truck maneuvered into the alley. The press corps etc. followed in its accustomed sheeplike fashion. There were titters. There were whoops. There were handclaps of glee.

Meantime, by prearrangement, Press Secretary Ron Nessen telephoned from the lobby to Room 801, suggesting that DeFrank return to the ground floor for some important piece of information that would be laid on him surreptitiously.

(More)

Naffziger once more opened the passenger door of his truck in the alley. He lifted the ewe by its considerable woolly coat and placed it gently on the alley pavement. A dozen of the most ingenious minds ever to report from Washington on wars, pestilences, Presidents and pettifogs wondered what the hell they should do. "Grab her," suggested Naffziger. "Firmly. On both sides."

Reluctant hands grabbed the matted wool and aimed in the general direction of the service door where the Pinkerton man stood, holding open the door as if it were a frequent occurrence to admit a late night ewe. Hunkered over and holding on lest, as almost happened, the sheep should suddenly light out for the downtown street, four White House correspondents shuffled into the doorway and onto a service elevator. A small, football-shaped, brown memento was left in the entryway by the ewe for the Pinkerton man.

The elevator rose to the eighth floor. An advance party determined that DeFrank had not yet left his room. The group waited in the elevator. The ewe lay down, accepting the murmured endearments of various members of the group, particularly the good-time-seeking man from Peoria. There was much "shush"-ing, for fear DeFrank would learn what was, so to speak, afoot. The ewe, by now being called variously "Aggie" or "Peoria," nuzzled the knee of a nearby White House correspondent.

DeFrank ultimately went in search of whatever Nessen was to impart, no doubt dreaming of the glories and riches that would arise from his latest coup on behalf of the Periscope section of Newsweek.

The motley group, four of its members again bent over and holding on to assorted portions of the sheep, trod down the carpeted eighth floor hall to Room 801. Using a key obtained through a ruse, the group gained entrance to the room.

Aggie scampered about, looking for a place to do whatever it was she chose to do. Within moments she chose to moisten the carpet between the two beds in the room. The group of DeFrank friends scattered, some to the corner of the hall outside, one (fortunately a photographer well equipped with film and flash attachment) to lurk behind a bed, Rudy Abramson of the Los Angeles Times into the clothes closet and the remainder of the group into the darkened bathroom.

The sheep kept trying to get into the bathroom, pressing her nose against her reflection in the mirror on the bathroom door. Walt Rodgers manfully pressed his bulk against the inside of the bathroom door to prevent the ewe from entering and, curiously for a person known to one and all as "Jaws," kept shushing the assemblage, especially the good-time-seeking Peoria lady who was wont to make such remarks as, "Do you do this sort of thing often?" Aggie left the mirrored door long enough to deposit another brown, football-shaped memento at the foot of one of DeFrank's two beds.

MORE

David Wendell advised the group that DeFrank had seemed to settle in at the downstairs bar, no doubt because Nessen had informed him that the important information could not be imparted for several minutes.

Out of the hiding places came the people in Room 801. "That closet is worse than the one they kept Patty Hearst in," remarked Abramson, attempting to straighten up.

Shortly before midnight, word flashed to the assemblage in 801 that DeFrank was en route there. People scrambled back to their appointed hiding spots. Silence ensued for an interminable length of time.

Finally a door key-scratch-scratched in the lock. DeFrank entered. Susan McElhinney's flash attachment went off. The ewe looked at DeFrank and backed off. DeFrank looked at the ewe and backed off farther, into the hallway, against the wall. Curiously, he did not seem pleased. He seemed, given all the trouble to which his friends had gone, altogether peevish. He seemed, in a word, untrue to A&M.

Convinced that DeFrank was merely shy, several friends grasped him by the arms and pushed him into Room 801 where, as if by prearrangement, Aggie demonstrated her own mixture of coquettishness and lust by spreading her hind legs and moistening another section of carpet.

DeFrank, by nature a man of jollity, managed to contain his glee. "You made my ulcers act up again," he said to his friends. "Out," he said to Aggie.

Aggie maneuvered into the bathroom and stood there (too late, clearly--two additional brown, football-shaped mementoes having already been left in the room) eyeing DeFrank with what was unmistakably a case of nuptial night jitters. "Out, Aggie," said DeFrank.

Perhaps if they were alone for a while, without a gallery. Everyone left Room 801 save DeFrank and Aggie, closing the door gently. Several moments passed. The door opened. "Out, Aggie," said DeFrank.

What might they saw at the Texas A&M Animal Husbandry Hall of Fame? Sympathetic to a fault, DeFrank's friends instantly conspired to keep secret the spasm of celibacy which overcame him. Never would we concede that he had not been able to play in Peoria.

Sadly, the entourage made its way back down the crowded-lonely corridor, onto the service elevator, down to the service entrance, past the again courteous Pinkerton man, into the passenger side of the cab of Ron Naffziger's red pickup truck. "Baa," said Aggie.

Mashek, US News
Dobbin, Baltimore Sun
Barnes, Star
Growald, UPI

Abramson, LATimes
Rodgers, AP Audio
Naughton, NY Times
Good-Time-Seeking Man
Good-Time Seeking Lady

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