



PROTESTING the RNC

An Elon alum shares his experience as a protester outside the convention

Jack Duval

Guest reporter

On August 29, at 12 p.m., a half million people gathered between 15th and 22nd Street in lower Manhattan to protest George W. Bush and the Republican National Convention. They converged toward Seventh Avenue from Ninth on the West Side and Fifth on the east and formed a line over two miles long at its peak as they marched past Madison Square Garden, the temporary Republican bastion.

I was with them.

Like 500,000 notes of a raucous party tune, Americans from all over the country formed a slow moving protest song, shuffling and shouting its way up Seventh Avenue. The human verse/chorus/verse held variations from irresistible drum line rhythms to delicate parodies set to traditional songs, to raw fist-in-the-air call and response anthems.

Despite coming from seemingly infinite world views, 500,000 voices were in emotional harmony – equally upbeat at the prospect of so many like-minded citizens gathered together and fiercely on key with the anti-Bush message.

Let's listen.

"Everywhere I hear the sound of marchin' chargin' feet, boy!"

Today, those feet were propped up on the metal runners of a chrome wheelchair and belonged to a frail woman with paper-thin skin. Though her white hair was disheveled and her head hung to the side, her knobby fingers unwaveringly held a poster reading: "97 years old and outraged."

In front of us was a group of middle-aged patriots, dressed up like Paul Revere with three-point hats and white frilly shirts with

oversized cuffs playing flutes and drums. They seemed to have practiced and played traditional songs. Lyrics were handed out on small slips of paper. (I saw a copy crumpled up in those knobby fingers.)

"If you go talkin' to people of Chairman Mao, you're not gonna make it with anyone anyhow."

Some things never change. The Communists for Violent Revolution were up ahead and to the left, dressed like NVA regulars and carrying red flags with yellow crescent moons and stars. They were mostly young Indian girls, and every now and then one would jump up and shout something about the revolution, but it never rhymed, and this, after all, is New York City, where style counts. They got no play.

"Five to one, baby, one in five. No one here gets out alive."

Statistics were in vogue, here are two: 971 U.S. soldiers dead; 13,714 Iraqi's dead. Phone numbers were written on the arms of many people – contacts to legal defense groups and family members who knew their names and blood types.

"Everywhere is freaks and hairies, dykes and fairies, tell me where is sanity?"

The freaks were out, all right: young parents holding their children's hands, fathers carrying their daughters on their shoulders, mothers pushing sleeping babies in strollers, old women carrying poodles, and the occasional pregnant protester, waddling forward.

"Well I came upon a child of God, he was walkin' along the road, and I asked him: tell me where are you goin' and this he told me."

All of God's children were present, in the full colored splendor of youth. I saw one standing on a green port-o-john, with cutoff



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More than half a million people gathered outside the Republican National Convention at Madison Square Garden in New York City to protest. Elon alum Jack Duval was among the crowd that held signs and chanted for several blocks.

camouflage shorts, a black sports top, tattoos and wraparound shades, her hands on her hips, observing the streets like she owned them. And she did, because stretched out before her were 500,000 Americans with pink hair and dreadlocks, piercings, tattoos, homemade clothes and a crumpled up woman in a wheelchair holding the crumpled-up lyrics to a song she didn't sing. Out loud.

"And the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls and tenement halls."

Homemade posters mostly. Bush's face superimposed on Munch's "The Scream," "Freedom Fries" and "Got Democracy?" written under renderings of the hooded prisoner from Abu Ghraib, Mr. T and PeeWee Herman posing rhetorical questions, puns on Bush's destruction of the spoken word, such as

"Redefeat Bush," and the lewdly humorous poster "Asses of Evil" with the administrations faces painted into backsides.

"Find the cost of freedom, buried in the ground."

Around 24th Street a parade within the parade of flag-draped coffins was silently carried through the crowd. One thousand, all told.

The coda is that the music of 500,000 souls cannot be ignored, it cannot be mitigated or explained away. The ferocity of its peacefulness will stand as a testament to its power. I hope it is the first chord of the music that will calm the savage beast our country has become.

Thirty-four and outraged.

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