

Hannah - new kind of politico

by Peter Barnes
Feature Writer

(Editor's note: UNC students Becky Hannah and Lucy Hancock were N.C. delegates to the Democratic National Convention. Lucy Hancock could not be contacted for an interview.)

It's kind of hard to imagine her in a smoke-filled room—the bright red shirt and blue culottes, the sandals and gold-rimmed brown sunglasses, the white bush-jacket and shoulder-length blond hair all seem more the dress of an aspiring teenage debutant than the uniform of a political veteran.

But in the politics of 1972, a lot of things aren't what they seem on the surface, and UNC junior Becky Hannah is one of politics' dedicated New Breed.

At the Democratic National Convention in Miami earlier this month, Hannah received her political baptism of fire, attending the convention both as an official North Carolina delegate and as a key youth worker in the ill-fated Terry Sanford campaign.

It was the School of Hard Knocks, and the introductory course was a lot tougher than Poli Sci 41.

"We Sanford people were simply waiting for a moment that never happened," Hannah said calmly, obviously disappointed at their lack of success, but resigned to the facts. (Sanford received 77 and a half delegate

votes from 21 states, out of the total 3,016 votes cast.)

"If McGovern could have been stopped on the first ballot, then I honestly think Sanford would have been the nominee."

In many ways, Hannah's trip to Miami was a 10-day exercise in futility—not only was she forced to wait for the second ballot voting that never came, but she didn't even get to officially vote on the first ballot.

The N.C. presidential primary makes this state's first ballot votes completely pre-determined, and Gov. Bob Scott, as head of the delegation, just stood up alone and announced the results. The state delegates didn't even need to caucus.

But for Becky Hannah, there was still plenty to do.

"I got involved in the Sanford campaign 9 months ago, just a naive kid who thought she was interested in politics," she began, settling back in her chair with a reflective nod.

"I am still a kid, and still a little naive, but I am gradually learning a lot of hard cold truth about this politics."

She learned a lot of it doing dirty work in the Sanford campaign all spring—making talks, answering phones, organizing canvasses, passing out literature. The work peaked at Miami, with hours upon hours being spent in the "Boiler-room" of the Di Lido Hotel where Sanford's office was located.

"We spent up to 20 hours a day there," she admitted a little wearily. "But anyone who knows Terry Sanford the man knows that all our effort was worth it."

"Nobody but us knows just how close we really came to winning. If the voting had just gone to a second ballot . . .

"And if Sanford ever runs again, we'll all be right there."

Hannah's duties with the Sanford campaign—officially she was responsible for coordinating the N.C. delegates who worked lobbying among the delegates of other states in an effort to get second ballot Sanford votes—kept her away from most of the convention hustle, but she still saw plenty of what politics is really like.

For instance, she got a close look at the infamous work of the political boss.

"Yes, I learned that political bosses can swing votes, but I also saw that political bosses can be beaten. Look at Mayor Daley. He controls a lot of votes, but not so many that he can't eventually be stopped. It works both ways. I'm learning things like that." She also learned that sometimes politics makes people do things that they probably would rather not do—but have to.

"The women got a pretty raw deal down there," Hannah said slowly. "The women got sacrificed to make McGovern look more acceptable to middle America."

"McGovern can't afford to appear too liberal if he really wants to win, and one

way to tone down his image is to tone down the party platform. As a result, the women's issues like abortion and day-care facilities were pretty carefully scuttled. Even if McGovern personally supported those issues, he had to try and modify the platform. So the women were sacrificed."

It has been a long campaign for Becky Hannah, starting in near obscurity early last fall, and building daily ever since. But now that the convention is over, she claims that she is going back to just being a student and will leave the politics to others for a few years.

"I spent so much time working for Sanford this year that if I hope to ever get in grad school or law school then I had better get back to studying."

But the political fires still burn near the surface in Becky Hannah, and it's quite possible that she will succumb again to the electoral fervor along about the middle of October and once again start knocking on doors and passing out leaflets.

"I really learned a lot down there in Miami—it made me a better Democrat. And now I guess I am a McGovern supporter. He really is a good man—even if I am a little upset with him."


Pulling on her bush-jacket, she stood to leave, a once and probably future political hustler. But she still doesn't look the part. Only the half-finished cigarette gives any hint of those smoke-filled rooms.

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