

Kid journalists ask the questions and get answers

By TERI BANAS



Jay Blumenfeld, of Scarsdale, N.Y., spent one week covering the Republican Presidential Convention for the Children's Express. He was among 25 reporters and editors from the New York and Detroit area. (Staff photo by Louise Okrutsky)

By Thursday of convention week, reporters covering the selection of Ronald Reagan's running mate were beginning to look frazzled, tired and — bored.

So, it wasn't too surprising to see them turn to each other for copy and story ideas. After all, anyone who was anyone in the national media was there from Walter Cronkite to cartoonist Gary Trudeau.

As "stretching" or some of those pieces may seem, in this case, the following story is perfectly justified, honestly. Especially, when you consider these reporters are 9-, 10- and 11-year-olds.

On the final night of convention week 25 reporters and editors from the Children's Express, "The News Service Written by Children" for children, were scrambling around Joe Louis Arena to get their final interviews together by 10:30 p.m.

It had been a long week. Many came from New York on buses donated to their organization, just so they could report back to their peers on what a presidential convention is all about.

They took on such heavyweights as Detroit Mayor Coleman Young, VP nominee George Bush and broadcaster Dan Rather. They also explored some of the platform issues, including ERA.

"MAYBE THE reason everybody's talking about the ERA is that they don't know enough about Iran and energy to talk about them. Anybody can talk about ERA," stated one of the paper's lead articles in a "special" on the convention last week.

Wearing extensive press credentials, these youngsters in their matching yellow T-shirts and slacks, eased in and out of the massive crowds Thursday night with a sense of purpose, distributing their four-page tabloid.

Their presence by then was as accepted as that of the most recognizable network reporter or daily columnist.

"These kids are tough," said one arena security guard. "Ever seen 'em interviewed?"

"They picked Kemp as Reagan's running mate, based on an interview with his kids."

"We're looking for all sorts of stories," said Heather Shipley, 11.

"The convention has been very interesting. We've interviewed Eleanor Anderson, Kemp, Coleman Young."

"I think Kemp was the most interesting," added fellow reporter Reggie Beasley, 12. "He gave us full answers where Dole backed down."

A real non-sense reporter, Reggie, who attends Miami School in Detroit, had this observation of the convention activity:

"IT'S KIND of wierd when you see people running around in elephant hats. To me, that doesn't give a very good impression."

But he would not comment on the Reagan-Bush ticket.

"I can't give out opinions. Reporters don't do that," Reggie said.

Jay Blumenfeld, 14, an assistant editor from New York, explained their paper is an advocate of "children's

rights" and concentrates heavily on stories that interest children.

"This week's convention has really been insane for me. I've met Dan Rather and Reagan and it's great 'cause they treat us like real reporters."

"We asked Reagan a couple of questions at a reception and I don't think he was on guard for us. On the Iran question, he answered it but really didn't give us an answer. That happens a lot. They just give you a lot of junk."

Jay said that the minimum age for a reporter is 9 years old. When one becomes 14, he or she can become an assistant editor. Once you've gained that status, you're not allowed to ask questions.

Why?
"Because when you're nine, a kid, you know how to ask direct questions — sometimes questions people are afraid to touch. And it leaves politicians off-guard."

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Handwriting Revelations

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