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Then it was on to Medford, Oregon, a rugged, beautiful portion of the state. A mere thirty miles north of California and situated in the mild Rogue Valley, Medford had beautiful weather in October.

I had a completely new team. Suzie Trees was the press advance, and Matt Crow was my site advance, another handsome young stud. Even with the compressed time schedule, we had a cohesive and happy group. Our local contact was Hugh Jennings, a Reagan delegate since 1968. Widely known and respected in the area, he was the Reagan–Bush chairman for Medford, and another goldmine of local knowledge and support.

Our event was an airport rally, so we started with the best possible backdrop: Air Force One, which would pull up directly behind the speaker's platform. While Matt Crow worked with Hugh to move the grandstands and build the

platforms, I rehearsed two high school bands with help from the WHCA lead.

My plan was to replace the usual recording WHCA provided with the town's two high school bands playing "Ruffles and Flourishes" and "Hail to the Chief," the traditional introduction to the president. The student musicians were overjoyed at the prospect of being an official part of the president's visit. I owe kudos to WHCA for allowing this departure from the standard practice. Mere bureaucrats would have said, "No way."

With grudging approval from the airport, we mounted a hundred-foot pole with a cross piece at the top on the west side of the viewing area. We had a lumberjack champion who would climb the pole with nothing more than spikes and a leather strap, and then, at the conclusion of "God Bless the USA," unfurl the giant American flag. Crowd pleasers all.

The big disappointment came the day before the event. The head of the local Democratic Party threatened the high schools with a lawsuit charging that the schools were using city property—the band instruments, uniforms, and school buses—for a political event. He suggested the school administrators would probably lose their jobs.

One after the other, the school officials caved; they called me to withdraw their approval. There would be no high school bands. I was heartbroken for the kids. I called WHCA to prepare them for the recordings after all.

I went to bed quite depressed about human nature, but just after midnight, I got a call from a high-school parent. She told me that all the parents were outraged to have their children jilted after so much practice and excitement. Together they had

resolved to bring the children themselves in a private caravan of cars, with practice instruments from home, and handmade uniforms. Her intensity brought a tear to my eye. I told her we would save places in the grandstand for the kids.

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The Oregon sun shone on Ronald Reagan. Air Force One made a magnificent sight as it taxied into position. The students played the warm-up songs all dressed in matching T-shirts labeled, "NOT the Medford High School Band." Somehow they had produced them overnight.

The president waved from the door of the plane, then greeted some dignitaries behind the platform. The on-stage emcee called for silence, then one "not" high school band performed an excellent "Ruffles and Flourishes." The WHCA announcer intoned, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States." The president came on stage to a tumultuous welcome while the other "not" high school band played "Hail to the Chief." I smiled with tight emotions.

President Reagan spoke movingly, then stood open-mouthed while the lumberjack scampered up the pole and the American flag flew in the afternoon light. Hugh Jennings gave me a bear hug and said, "You sure have made it easier for me here in Medford."

I had the chief of police in his dress blues and two young Girl Scout champion cookie salesmen in uniform waiting behind the stage for a photo with the president. The photo was on the schedule. But on departure, Reagan just rushed right past

me without looking. He waved goodbye to the rally throng from the door of Air Force One and disappeared inside.

I grabbed Jim Kuhn's arm as he passed. "Jim," I said urgently, "I had a photo op."

"Yeah, the last stop had *twenty-five* locals lined up for a photo op. It's out of control. No more photo ops."

"Jim, I have never abused a photo op. I only have two."

"Who?"

"The chief of police and two Girl Scouts who sold the most cookies."

"Oh god. Okay, wait here." Kuhn went up into the plane and quickly returned, gesturing. "Bring them into the plane."

My lucky guests were going to get a much more coveted remembrance: a photo with the president in his private quarters aboard Air Force One. The little girls posed on each side of him with their favorite box of Girl Scout cookies.

"Now, can I buy these?" Reagan inquired like he was requesting a great favor. They looked at each other like they might faint and nodded. The president patted his pockets. When he looked up at me, I got the message. He rarely carried cash. I quickly passed him two tens. "Here, this adds to your record," he said, handing each girl a ten-dollar bill.

The little girls climbed down the steps from Air Force One hand-in-hand with the chief of police waving the money. They were swarmed by a gaggle of Girl Scouts and parents from their troop.

A near miss.

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