

The Adventures of Carolyn McHugh "The Traveling Apprentice" Spotlight on Fantasy World Entertainment

The Traveling Apprentice project is about learning what goes on behind the scenes at local businesses. When I started it I anticipated I might find myself in some interesting situations: I just never fantasized a gig at the White House.

Yet, there I was. . . on a beautiful, sunny Fourth of July, on the lawn of the White House, along with secret service, hundreds of volunteers, catering staff, musicians, the First Dog, Beau, and a gazillion splashes of red, white, and blue. The occasion? The 2nd Annual Salute to the Military, where the President treated 1200 military heroes and their families to an all American picnic, games, music, and the best seats in the city to view the spectacular Washington DC fireworks. I was there with Brooks Grady, co-owner of Fantasy World Entertainment, to deliver four portable basketball hoops as part of the evening's entertainment.

Setting up the pre-assembled hoops was the simple part: the challenge was getting through the D.C. labyrinth and White House security. D.C. was obstacle course: streets teemed with holiday tourists and jaywalkers and we were turned away at every critical intersection by unsympathetic D.C. police.

Just clearing White House security took nearly an hour.

At the first security point we were told to park the truck, open the hood and the back, leave the cab doors open, and step away from the vehicle. We waited in the blistering sun. An imposing looking guard set a canine through its paces to sniff out the truck. We waited again.

Two other men appeared. One searched through the back of the truck and ran mirrors under the chassis while the other examined under the hood, the cab of the truck, and through our personal belongings. Then he performed a task for which I'll never willingly volunteer to apprentice- -he inserted the key in the ignition. And turned it. How is it, I later mused, that a couple managed to crash a state house dinner but Brooks and I, who had been previously vetted, were still challenged at not one, not two, but three separate security checkpoints? Was the comely Mrs. SaLahi able to breeze through security because she arrived in a bewitching, head turning red sari that clearly offered few places to hide a weapon- -while Brooks and I were attracting such intense scrutiny because of our fetching white 16 foot box truck?

The day was fascinating but I was relieved Brooks chose to return that evening with a different helper to retrieve the hoops, to fight their way out of D.C. through throngs of fire-works observers and arrive home well after midnight. It was business-as-usual for him, though, because Fantasy World is a full service amusement rental company that travels from Maine to Florida providing fun, entertainment, and fantasies to organizations such as the White House, colleges and universities, the Naval Academy, and to people as notable as Donald Trump or as ordinary as you and me. It wasn't business as usual for me: it was a fantasy day.

So, dear reader, what's your fantasy?



Look for next month's issue to find out about Carolyn's next assignment.