

## International Corner

# A Ticket to History and Hope

Debbie Hanneman

I was lucky to get a ticket to the U.S. presidential inauguration ceremonies held in Washington, DC on January 20, 2009. I knew that it would be an historical event to attend, but I had no concept of the enormous hope that existed for the masses of other people who would also be there. I met people from many different places in the U.S. and even a large number of people from several different countries who had come to Washington, DC just as I had to be a part of the inauguration — it was amazing to be a part of this hugely optimistic crowd of humanity! I'll just briefly summarize a few of the experiences that I had in DC that highlight the historical significance and the hope that the President Obama's and Vice President Biden's inauguration held for me.

Monday, January 19th, was Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. I had arrived from Montana over the weekend, so early in the day, I decided to go to the Smithsonian National History Museum to help myself view this inauguration within the framework our nation's history. I was there in time to hear a man deliver Martin Luther King's speech, "I Have A Dream." At the conclusion of the speech, he asked the audience to hold hands and sing "We Shall Overcome." I held the hand of one white person and the hand of a young African-American girl from Detroit, Michigan. When we came to the line in the song, "we shall overcome someday," the young girl's father looked at me and said, "I believe that is today."

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day was also a time that the Presidential Inaugural Committee designated for the American people to recommit to service for our country. There were many service projects just in DC that day, and I opted to go to RFK Stadium and pack boxes for our overseas troops. I arrived at the stadium midafternoon. By this time, so many volunteers had worked there already (Over 12,000 volunteers participated in this project.) that the day's goal of packing 75,000 boxes had been exceeded. Subsequently I was put to work writing notes that then would accompany each box to our troops.



While visiting Washington, DC and as part of a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day service project, Debbie Hanneman writes notes to accompany packages being sent to U.S. overseas troops.

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from our gate to the inauguration ceremony. It took us some time and much walking, but we eventually arrived at our gate. We easily got into our ticketed area, along with many other people. I had thought about what reaction I would have to being packed into an area with a multitude of people and had decided that I probably would not like it. But, to my surprise, it was a great experience. Through the many hours that we waited for the inaugural ceremonies to begin, we talked to many different people, we sang songs, we took photographs (people took photographs of us), we cheered, we waved flags — there was truly amazing elation and hope among us. The ceremonies began and a hush fell over the crowd. I don't know what others were feeling, but for me it was a time I'll always remember. And then the ceremonies were over. We slowly made our way to Mollie's office where we had been heading that morning. We spent the rest of the afternoon getting warm and eating leftovers from the morning breakfast festivities. We also ran up to the roof of the building to watch the Presidential cavalcade go by on its way to meet the rest of the inauguration parade. I knew that I was watching history as the cavalcade went by.

My remaining time in D.C. was spent in the Smithsonian Institution museums — primarily the National History Museum — and walking through the many memorials on the National Mall. It was the only way I could think of to try to put what I had just witnessed and experienced into the context of our country's history.

**Tuesday, January 20, 2009.** Inauguration day began at about 3:30 am for me. I took a quick ride on the DC Metro with my traveling companions — Leslie Thomas and Ann Kuntzweiler from Boulder, Montana. Our original plan was to go to a downtown DC office — where the regional Obama campaign organizer for Montana, Mollie Binotto, now works — to have coffee and breakfast. That was a big mistake. By 4:30 am, the DC streets were full of people and many streets and Metro stops were closed. Unfortunately, we were on the opposite side of the National Mall

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