



Jeff visits Washington for Obama Inauguration

Dad
 Here's a couple of pictures of the Capitol on Inauguration Day. This is about as close as we could get, still about a block away. There ere almost 2 million people behind us though. Our best view was to watch the Jumbo-tron just to our left. That showed close ups of everyone as they made their way through the Capitol to the front portico. Jeff

My Trip to Washington DC for the Inauguration of Barack Obama, the 44th President

I left San Diego on the Saturday before the Inauguration, flying to Philadelphia, with 2 plane changes. In Chicago, I had to run to catch my flight to Philly, and I was the last one to board the plane. Evidently, while I just managed to make the connection, my large suitcase wasn't as fortunate. When I finally got to the City of Brotherly love, I waited in vain for my luggage, filled out the appropriate forms, grabbed my backpack and rental car, and headed off to my cousin's house in Silver Spring, Md., right on the border of Washington, DC., and very near Frederick, Md.,(a city with a special history for some of the Riel family.) Fortunately, I had kept my jacket and sweatshirt separate from my luggage, so when I encountered the sub-freezing temperatures in Philadelphia (lots of snow on the ground), my 2-hour drive through Delaware, right around Baltimore and into the Greater DC area, I still had warm outer garments. (When I had left San Diego, we had 70 degree balmy January weather.) Throughout my week long stay on the East Coast, I never encountered precipitation, but the temperature never went above 30 degrees either. I arrived at my first cousin Dan's house at 10 PM and was thrilled to find him and his wife, Rosanne, still up and anxious to chat. This is the family that welcomed (tolerated?) Jessica for 3 months, when she interned for Senator Feinstein several years ago. We spent a couple of hours catching up. Dan is a VP of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, and works in Bethesda, right next door to Silver Spring. Rosanne is a long time reporter for the Voice of America, and has an office right next to the Mall in DC. They were, like most locals, very proud to be hosting the 2-3 million visitors descending on Washington for the historic Inaugural events, but willing to watch from the safety and comfort of their warm living room. I was assigned a fold out bed in their son's room, and plotted how to recover my suitcase the next day. Since I had purchased a ticket to the California Bash, a fancy ball at the Smithsonian Air and Space

Museum on Sunday evening, I really needed my hanging bag with my suit, shirts, good shoes and toiletries. So after a morning full of phone calls to US Air, I finally found out they were shipping my bag to Reagan National Airport on the 4:30 PM flight from Philadelphia. I was intent on meeting the plane and recovering my precious belongings, which incidentally included some new gloves and thermal undershirts, a real necessity in the frigid cold of the inaugural week. Fortunately, too, my cousin had extra sets of gloves, sweatshirts, and wool caps, which he insisted I use. No argument from me. However, Sunday morning brought an unexpected piece of good news. My congressman's office called and informed me that the Inauguration tickets I had requested some weeks before had become available. The only catch was that I had to come to the House office building on Monday morning and pick them up. I found out later that I was to join tens of thousands given that same task by their congress person. But, first things first. I had to appear in person on Sunday at the Hyatt Capitol Hill to collect my tickets for the California Bash. I ran into some of my San Diego friends at the hotel, and met a lot of fellow Californians getting their tickets. We also received a commemorative poster of the event. I made a trip on the Metro (best and cleanest subway system I've ever been on, better even than Paris' excellent Metro system,) Back to Silver Spring for lunch, and then hopped on the train again for a trip out to the airport for my luggage. One of the best things I did in preparation for my trip was to buy a week long Metro pass (only \$39.) which was mailed to me several weeks before I left. I never had to wait in a ticket line, or purchase a fare, the entire 5 days I was there, a great time saver. Just about the time I was heading to the Metro Station, some 750,000 people were lining the reflecting pond in front of the Lincoln Memorial to hear a grand concert to honor the future president (continued on page 2)

The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

February, 2162

and his family. They were in the front row to hear Bruce Springsteen, Bono, Beyonce, James Taylor, John Legend, Stevie Wonder, Cheryl Crow and many others. The concert was broadcast live on HBO, and Carol recorded it for us to view on my return. About the time I was grabbing my suitcase from the baggage claim, the concert was ending. My return subway ride went right by the Mall entrances to the Metro system. My train car went from being half empty on a Sunday afternoon, to a jam-packed sardine can. Needless to say, everyone was very excited about seeing the concert and the Obamas, but I got much closer to a few hundred concert goers than I would have liked. The Sunday crowd was just a portent of things to come. I finally had my suit, my clean clothes, and a shower, and dressed for the ball. Once more on the Metro, I made my way to my favorite of the Smithsonian Museums, where the Wright Brothers plane hangs with Apollo spacecraft and Boeing 747's, and entered the California Bash. I met up with a half dozen friends from San Diego and we schmoozed with many of the politicians and California notables, such as Senator Barbara Boxer, Controller John Garamendi, Sec. of State Debra Bowen, and Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary fame. There were 3 bands, many food and drink stations, lots of hors d'oeuvres, and all the exhibits were open. We were interviewed by a San Diego 6 News reporter, and I understand that I made a brief appearance on Sunday's Late Evening Newscast. A great time was had by all. Monday was Martin Luther King's birthday, and Obama declared it a national day of service. Rosanne said that if I wanted to, her cousin ran an emergency shelter for homeless teens in DC, and they were painting and doing some general clean-up and construction. I had to pass, because I had to go to the Congressional office building to pick up my 4 Silver tickets to the Inaugural Ceremonies the next day. Since my cousins were now excited to be joining me the next morning on the Mall, there were no objections to my heading to the Metro once again for a trip to the Capitol. In one of the great missed opportunities of all time, you may have caught Obama that day holding a paint roller, and he and Michelle getting a tour of an emergency shelter for homeless teens. Yes, THE SERVICE PROJECT THE OBAMAS PICKED THAT DAY WAS THE SAME SHELTER RUN BY ROSANNE'S COUSIN. I had missed a golden opportunity to spend an hour and a half with Barack and Michelle Obama. Who knows, I might have been the one to hand him a paint roller. Instead, I was waiting in a blocks-long line wrapped around the Congressman's office building to pick up my Silver Tickets. It took about 2 hours, but I got my tickets. I then made my way to Union Station to meet friends for lunch. We ended up at a cozy, warm bar/restaurant just off Pennsylvania Ave. Great Lunch and good fun, and then back to the train and Silver Springs. The next morning we left the house at 6 AM and the trains were already filled with thousands of like-minded folks making their way to the Mall for the Swearing-in Ceremony and Inaugural Parade.

Part 2: Inauguration Day, Tuesday, broke clear, but very cold. Highs were going to be in the low 20's at best. So as I was now accustomed to doing, I dressed in layers. Compression running pants under my jeans, thermal long sleeve t-shirt, under another long sleeve shirt, under a fleece vest, heavy sweatshirt and parka. Wool cap on the thinning scalp and ski gloves completed the ensemble. In hindsight, I should have used a scarf, because my face was never covered, and the wind found every exposed piece of skin. But it wasn't raining, sleeting or snowing, so it could have been worse. We walked out of the house at 6 AM and were ready to board a train at 6:30, though the first one to come by was full already. Backpacks were not allowed, but we packed water, energy bars and trail mix in our pockets. I took my camera bag and 2 lenses, but only used the telephoto. We boarded the second train, although it was also crammed with riders, most of who were bundled up just as we were. Many had Obama hats and wool caps, scarves and buttons. The vendors did a brisk business this week. By 7 AM we were off the Metro and attempting to get across the Mall to our designated entrance, right by the Botanical House at 3rd Street. There were 20,000 waiting at the same spot as we were, so close and yet, so far. After almost an hour of waiting for the gates to open, with the entire Mall and much of Pennsylvania Avenue secured with fencing and gates, someone announce that this gate was only for

parade watchers, not Inaugural spectators. Our hearts sank, until someone directed all ticket holders to a vehicular tunnel that went under the Mall. It was closed to all but emergency vehicles and pedestrians. So, like the Jews leaving Egypt, we joined a few thousand walkers through the tunnel to our destination on the West side of the Mall: the Promised Land. It still wasn't 9 AM, so our chances looked good to get in and situated before the ceremony started at 11:30 AM. Then we saw the line. The Silver Ticket line was over a mile long already. We kept walking and walking, for blocks, from 1st St all the way to 7th, winding around several large government buildings, under the railway, and back again. Finally we got in line and realized that with security screening, there was no way we'd be through the line before 11:30 AM. We contemplated joining the multitudes at the base of the Washington Monument where, even though it's more than a mile from the Capitol, large Jumbotron TVs were set up and one could watch the swearing in on TV. In the cold. Undaunted, we decided to stay in line and take our chances. Pray for a miracle. There were literally thousands of people behind us in line, most with the same fading hopes as we had of getting into our assigned area. Then Moses appeared. (He wasn't really Moses, just some kid with an official badge.) He said "follow me" and we did. About 1000 people got out of line, and in blind faith followed our Moses to a gate right at 3rd Street near the entrance for Silver Ticket holders. We did the cattle chute routine, with several thousand people inching forward until getting through the gate, and then it all opened up like the Red Sea. There must have been 50 security stations, most with no waiting at all, they just checked our stuff and padded us down, and let us in. They didn't even check our Silver Tickets. Anyone could have gotten in this way, though I don't think one would have wasted time waiting in line without a ticket, no? So now we were near a Jumbotron, right at 3rd St., 3 blocks from the Capitol. While we could see the people on the Capitol steps, it was only on the Jumbotron that any details could be discerned. Since it was still an hour before the ceremony (Choirs and youth orchestras were playing now on the Jumbotron), I wandered about, and checked out the lay of the land. I did a cursory inspection of the Andy Gumps, and was amazed to find that they were already seriously in need of emptying, and it was only 10 AM. I happened to notice that at one point in the middle of the 3rd St. fencing, they were allowing groups to cross to a closer Silver ticket area. I ran back and got my cousins, and we joined the next group to pass through the fence to the better spots. We made our way along the frozen pond in front of the Capitol, and made it to a piece of high ground almost at 1st Street, one block from the dais. Introductions were being made and important people were making their way to seats near the podium. Even though we were relatively close, the Jumbotron to our immediate left was still the best way to view the proceedings. Even with my telephoto lens, details of who was speaking or singing were difficult to make out. We were behind some 150,000 people sitting on chairs or bleachers, but there were more than 1 1/2 million folks behind us. When the Obamas were sighted coming in, there were wild ovations and cheering. When Obama took the oath of office, tears streamed down thousands of faces. Lot's Of amens all around. It was a singular moment in time, and I sensed that for the thousands of people around us, of all races and colors, many young, and many older, many residents of DC, and many more visiting from points afar, felt as I did, that we have come a long way in our 200+ years of nationhood. That we were witnessing something historic and unbelievable, emotional and breathtaking. When Aretha Franklin sang My Country 'Tis of Thee there wasn't a dry eye in the crowd. Sweet Land of Liberty seemed so appropriate on this day. The ceremony ended, and the great migration began, though it took much less time to exit than it did to enter the Mall grounds. We made our way south toward the Capital and House office buildings. My cousins decided that 7 hours in the cold was enough, and they were willing to battle the thousands boarding the trains. I got in a queue to enter Congressman Bob Filner's office building, where he was hosting a San Diego get together for any that wanted to join him. Since I had time to kill first, I attended a similar gathering at the office of Jesse Jackson Jr, (continued on page 3)

The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

February, 2009

Congressman of Illinois. Since I was born in Chicago I felt some fellowship with the folks in that office, and no one cared that I shared some food and hot tea with the crowd. In fact, I managed to grab a chair in the hallway, catch up with my emails, make a couple of calls, and generally WARM UP. Since all the House office buildings are connected underground, it was easy, and warm, to make it to Caucus Room where the Filner event was going to take place. I took lots of pictures of Congressman Filner with members of our San Diego group, ate some very good catered sandwiches, some hot cocoa, and a large portion of a vegetable tray. By the time I made it back to Silver Spring, the group was exhausted, yet exhilarated by the days events. We decided a bit of soup and bread was sufficient, and we all looked forward to hitting the sack early. How thousands of people, the Obamas included, have the energy to dress up and make it to one or more of the dozens of Inaugural Balls if you have limo service and don't have the weight of advancing years. Personally, I slept like a baby Tuesday night. Wednesday AM, a group of us met at the White House to take a group picture out in front. We took lots of pictures with our large HOPE Banner, the O in hope being the Obama logo we are now so familiar with. I've included this picture with my story. Right after we were done taking our pictures, the Park Police started moving us away from the road and 50 yards the other side of a small chain divider. We anticipated a motorcade and weren't wrong. Now I, and several others went a few yards to the North, and I snapped a couple pictures of the long Presidential Caravan going by right in front of us. The other members of the group took their HOPE sign and walked about 100 yards to the South. When they displayed their banner to the passing motorcade, Obama saw the sign and waved to the group. I had made my second tactical blunder in 3 days. The motorcade incidentally, was ferrying the First Family and their entourage (and large security detail) from the morning's prayer breakfast back to the White House where President Obama had a very busy first day. You probably read about it. I had plans with about 20 others to visit the National Archives at 2 PM. So I went to the Newseum, a magnificent new museum right on Pennsylvania Ave. where the history of the news business is displayed in many creative ways. From the 6th floor deck, there is a magnificent view of the Capitol, and it was from this vantage point that many of the news channels did their broadcasting the previous few days. I took lots of pictures at this museum, and had a very good lunch in the food court with friends. One of the highlights of the museum is a large display of the 100 years of Pulitzer Prize winning photographs, many of which we are very familiar with. They have graced the covers of Life magazine and most other journals of note for the better part of the 20th Century. The museum also features the front pages of 80 US and many foreign newspapers every day, and I took many shots of the headlines, which on this day was all about the Inauguration an its historic significance. I spent much less time at the National Archives, but it's always amazing to see the original Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, all in one place. It's an awe inspiring place, actually. Again, another long day, and I was intent to buy a nice dinner in Silver Spring for my generous hosts, so I did. Nothing fancy, but a great soup/sandwich place very similar to Pan era Bakery here. I then joined some San Diego friends at a North side Washington bar where a friend, Charlie Imes was playing guitar with some local musicians. It was a great way to end my Inaugural stay, and I was happy to share my experiences with many of my friends from home. I spent some time afterwards on the phone with Jessica, plotting my way out of DC the next morning. I was flying stand-by, so nothing was assured, but she found a noon flight out of Reagan National that seemed to have a lot of seats, and few pass riders. The next morning, I packed and said my thanks to Cousin Dan and Rosanne and took the train to the Airport. I checked my bag through to San Diego, confident that I would be on one plane or another that day. When I made it to the gate, they gave me the not so great news that EVERY flight out of DC was over sold, and there were many pass riders, most with higher seniority than me. After again consulting with my travel agent (Jessica), it was decided my

best bet was to take Amtrak to Newark, NJ, and stay overnight with Jessie and Miguel. There were several promising flights with seats in the AM to San Diego. So, again without my luggage I did just that. Carol picked up my suitcase on Thursday night in San Diego, and I took Jessica and Miguel to a very nice Italian Dinner in Bayonne. But only after watching Miguel lead two vigorous Karate classes, the latter one with Jessica as one of the students, at his Dojo. Very impressive workout, even for the spectators. The next morning, Jessica took me to the Newark Airport where I did indeed catch the first flight to San Diego, and was happily reunited with my family, even Buster the wonder dog who missed me mightily. As did Carol, my skinny little wife. There's no place like home.



One is our group holding the Hope banner in front of the White House, (I'm in the back row right in the middle), the other is Newspaper Headlines from the Newseum on Pennsylvania Ave.



Thanks, Jeff, for this great report on your once in a lifetime experience at the inauguration of President Obama. Although we normally do not devote so much space to RFNL issues, we believe that the historical significance of that event deserves special attention above and beyond the family oriented items we usually report on.

The Riel Family Newsletter

Catch the News

February, 2009

Curtis visits Baghdad



Hi Dad,
Here is a letter and picture from Curtis.
Let's all keep him and his buddies in our prayers.
love, Birdy

Baghdad is crazy. The base is basically built where Saddam had several of his palaces, which is really interesting. He diverted water from the populace of Baghdad to make these massive lakes and then had concrete islands built so he could build his mansions on them. Some of them are really pretty. I have some pics but I have to wait till I am back in Tal Afar to send them. The training is interesting to me. We are spending the first couple days learning how cellular phones work and how the overall cellular network architecture is built. It is really neat. We are going to do more on that tomorrow, and then we break out our equipment and start using it. Basically because there is not much of a Counterintelligence mission here, they are having us train on a Signal Intelligence mission having to do with cell phones and stuff. It is a neat opportunity to do something very different then I would normally have a chance to do. I really miss you guys, I can't wait to see you again.

As interesting as Baghdad is I can't wait to get back to Tal Afar. On my helicopter flight down here we had a missile lock on us so we had to do all kinds of juking around and they fired off the flares. But in the end everything was ok. We were flying in a Chinook and those can move really fast when they need too. Lauren and I have agreed that flying in helicopters really just doesn't agree with me and after Iraq I don't think I will ever care to fly in one again.

