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Watching history

Summary: Years from now, will you remember where you were when you watched the historic inauguration of the nation's 44th president? Seven University of Minnesota, Morris students likely will never forget.

(January 27, 2009)-Years from now, will you remember where you were when you watched the historic inauguration of the nation's 44th president? Seven University of Minnesota, Morris students likely will never forget.

Morris campus students Patrick Chester, Mike McBride, Rene Maes (already in D.C. on an internship), Kathy Julik-Heine, Colin Sandoe, Talia Earle and Josh Preston have returned from Washington, D.C., where they stood among the millions on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol to witness the inauguration of President Barack Obama.

Departing for Washington, D.C., with only one ticket to attend the inaugural ceremony, the students were able to secure additional tickets with the assistance of Representative Collin Peterson. Arriving at the entrance to the mall at 4:45 a.m., and waiting subsequent hours in the bitter cold, they found spots among the crowd, right behind the reflecting pool of the capitol.

"There is something overwhelmingly empowering about being in a crowd of two and a half million people, all watching as great American history takes place," shared Julik-Heine.

"To describe the Inauguration of the President Obama is to describe several experiences: being present at a succession of incredibly historic events and interacting with inspired individuals from across the world," said Chester, who is Morris Campus Student Association president. "The speech itself was inspiring, but it was made even more so by the massive upwelling of emotion that I observed around me. People from all over the country had come to see Obama be inaugurated as the first African American president and many people cried as he spoke."

But, as Julik-Heine said, "We're getting ahead of the story."

The group left Morris late January 15 and arrived in Washington, D.C., following a 25-hour journey. They stayed with friends who lived about 10 blocks from the national mall on Pennsylvania Avenue. Following a tour of the city on Saturday, they "checked out the MSNBC station reporting live on the mall and ate dinner at Union Station," said Julik-Heine. President-elect Obama was scheduled to arrive at Union Station from Illinois Saturday night, and the students welcomed him to the city as his motorcade passed them on their way to Union Station.

"Because we were a ways down, there weren't many others and when the president-elect's vehicle passed by, he looked out the window and waved at us," said Julik-Heine. "So exciting, We were all very pumped that we got to officially welcome the president-elect into the city."

On Sunday they toured the capitol and attended the "We are the One" concert.

Even in Washington, D.C.—in true Morris student style—Monday was a day for civic engagement for Sandoe, Chester and Julik-Heine.

“[We did] our part in Obama's "Day of Service" in south Washington. Our project was assembling and distributing green energy packs (light bulbs, weather stripping and reusable shopping bags) for people in the surrounding area. Many spoke and it was during this event that we had the honor of meeting Obama's Secretary of Energy, Dr. Steven Choo,” said Julik-Heine.

And the magical experience continued. “While warming up in one of the museums lining the mall Monday afternoon, Colin [Sandoe] found an envelope containing two tickets to President Obama's Home States Inaugural Ball,” said Julik-Heine. “After many failed attempts to find the proper owner of the tickets—asking the Obama Transition Committee, Capitol Police, museum guards, and our staffer connection in the house of representatives—Mike (McBride) and I decided we HAD to go.” Thanks to “a few recommendations from a gracious stranger in Macy's and a couple of credit card swipes later,” both had put together 'black tie'-appropriate outfits for the inaugural ball.

Among Earle's memories of the experience are “[fulfilling a] personal dream of mine. I met my favorite political commentator, Keith Olbermann. Seeing Senator Kennedy on the screen was the first of many tears for me,” shared Earle. “Finally, the President and Vice President-Elect became President Obama and Vice President Biden. At the end of the service, I, along with two million others, sang the National Anthem...and wept.”

“I am so grateful I had an opportunity to go [to the inauguration] and see the jubilation that it caused. It is even more inspiring when you consider that we are in the midst of economic turmoil and many of the people who were watching may have lost their jobs or their homes,” added Chester. “I want to remember the feelings I felt there forever.”

Experiences for Morris campus students such as this one are often supported by [UMM Catalyst](#) and also Coca-Cola Student Initiative travel funds.

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