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Part II: 6550 words
No photos

**THE HOUR THE NIGHT STOOD STILL:
Don't Label Denver!
A city of infinite paradox**

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Part I

“Listen now ...” The low hushed exhortation of the Senator from Illinois held Thursday night’s audience captive at Invesco Field in Denver on his quest to the Presidency as the Democratic Party’s nominee ... Barack Obama spoke to the delegates, the nation, the world. He voiced for me what I had invested a week in Denver doing – listening.

Woe the person who facilely dismisses Denver with any easy description, category or pigeon-hole – the journey into the minds, souls, dreams, biases, joys and fears of its citizens mirrored a long-held opinion that Denver is many towns making up a city of independent thinkers and renegade spirits. Denver has already set an example by a demonstration of voting the best person for the job, “ ... the right man, at the right time.” Been there, done that.

It is history, not widely known, but Denver voted in its first Latino mayor, Federico Peña, for two terms (1983-1991) and its first African-American mayor, Wellington E. Webb, also two terms (1991-2003), while Denver in 1991 also re-elected another black candidate, Norman S. Early, District Attorney, both vying with six white candidates. Webb, formerly the city auditor, laughingly described himself as “the first mayor of this city with a mustache,” taking on with wit the obvious achievement of first black mayor of the predominantly white city. The political rhetoric of this past week must seem like covering old territory, possibly the “duh-factor” to many in Mile-High City.

The Democratic National Convention of these official four days was the carousel on which we all rode the outside pony - up and down - observing the city of Denver full circle and united. A paradox of opposite opinions and goals ultimately, possibly begrudgingly, open to negotiation and agreement.

At just before 8:00 p.m. of the Thursday night acceptance speech, I settled in at the Capitol Hill Bar, the popular martini lounge in the lobby of the Sheraton that housed the California and New York delegations. Elbowing in at the oval bar, just one empty stool, all the tables were filled, inside and out, I staked my place in front of multiple TV screens that were holding everyone’s attention as the DNC proceedings were unfolding.

Fingers tapped, bodies swayed to Stevie Wonder and Sheryl Crow, all agreeing, man, those Democrats are cool.

The upscale lounge has enormous glass windows three-quarters around the bar that give full view of the 16th Street Mall that has been cheek-to-jowl humanity since Sunday, the bustling main entrance to the hotel and harried valet attendants and the outside tables for ostracized smokers on the Mall. The other side of the lounge looks directly into the lobby and another entrance. A perfect spot for people watching and being watched. Flanked by New Yorkers (some with their Invesco invites in pockets – couldn't hack the lines), security personnel and political wonks, the atmosphere was totally concentrated on the screens.

The people streaming past on the Mall peered in at us peering out, and Convention volunteers laden with souvenirs checked out the kiosk and cart sellers, Starbucks across the way was still full, the shuttles were packed, dogs being walked, singles people checking out other singles, wandering visitors with their fanny packs and backpacks and funny hats studying posted maps and schedules, downtown professionals getting off work scurrying to home or date. A bedraggled Falun Gong protester with still a handful of undistributed leaflets collapses on a bench, a busker valiantly tries to fill his hat before the day disappears strums out "Changes" Out of nowhere, caught in silhouette before us, a spritely band of 25 woodland fairies led by a Puck lightly prance across our view – waving, merry, ethereal, as off to an enchanted forest none of us can envision. Who WERE they?

It's now almost 8:15 – conversation ceases, the hard-core smokers come in from the cold, the Mall quiets down, the lobby thins out, the cell phone activity in the bar stops, everything is winding down. The world has gone slow motion.

Barack Obama takes the podium to begin his 42-minute acceptance speech. The bar and the lobby explode in applause, but outside the Mall is now deserted: the protester, visitor, busker, shopper, worker, dogwalker and single, are nowhere to be seen. The shuttles are riderless, the benches deserted, Starbucks' outside tables emptied. The two entrances to the hotel have no activity and the valet parking circle is quiet; the ubiquitous door openers in pale blue smocks with the ever-present Windex bottles are nowhere, the lobby is empty of movement.

The world has come to a standstill. The lounge contains faces transfixed on screens and out in the lobby a silent line has developed, backs to us, facing the enormous lobby TV monitor. Security people, police, doorpersons, front-desk people, valet parkers, hotel greeters, Convention volunteers - all abandoning their respective roles to stand at attention to the voice that pleads, "listen now" – and the chef in his whites and imperial toque, late by a couple of minutes, scurries from the Bravo Ristorante and elbows his way into the line to stand tall and unmoving with the others.

Only the life-size equine statue of Ludovico de Luigi that dominates the lobby is turned away from the monitor.

We in the lounge and the line in the lobby are held voluntary captives while the city of Denver has come to a halt – someone playing Simon Says or a magic wand has been passed over the 16th Street Mall or a paralyzing mist has been sprayed over downtown Denver for the hour – where did the band of sprites GO?

How did hundreds of people disappear in less than ten minutes – the shuttles are passing our windows – empty - as if an alien ship swooped down - Klaatu barada nikto! - and scooped up all human beings transporting us to a place far away. And in truth, each of us there was transported to a history-making moment where life and individual pursuits are suspended and nothing is as important as – listening.

The whooping, hollering, applause, and the occasional sound of caught breath emanated from both lobby and lounge – but no one moved from their seat, their square foot of space, until the Senator repeated the call to “keep the American promise ... without wavering ...”

And then, it was over.

We were transported back where BlackBerrys lit up, and smokers scurried outside, the bartenders moved with lightning speed to quench dry throats and fill our celebratory mood, the waiters and handlers began to work the room, business cards were being dealt and singles seeking singles had found their way in. Slowly the lobby began to fill and taxis arrived, police and security people scattered to near and far, and out in the Mall – people were once again milling, shuttles were filled and within 15 minutes you could not believe that for an hour Denver had been encapsulated within the American dream and promise, caught one and all, the jaded and optimistic, the pessimist and the believer. And ... on the other side of the Mall – headed opposite to before - the merry band of Puck appeared, coming back from where they had been and going to where they must go ...

Part II

On the Saturday before the Convention, people were gathering and huddling in social caucuses. Odds were being slammed down on the tables as to security, protesters, would we see a replay of '68, content of The Speech, would the Hillary-disgruntled make waves, who were the military encamped at Johnson and Wales, and would it rain at Invesco Field. Just weaned off the Olympics and ready to invest time in learning about a vibrant debate taking place in this country, Denver engaged. Then, there were the many who could care less about the DNC, secure in their viewpoints, supporters of Senator McCain or independents, who did not share in any dream or investment of the historic worth of the events about to play out. And yet others who could not be bothered by politics ... settled into a bench, a habitu  of Capitol Hill Park bench growled, “They’re all bastards and evil, what have they done for me?”

Listening, recording and documenting the people for the week, a window on greater Denver was thrown open with a candor I feel privileged to have experienced (a fellow writer tells me that “a dutch door” would be a more apt metaphor.)

Into the mix came the delegates straggling in, I sought out a retired American Government professor from Northern California, Jerry E. Straughan who might offer some scholarly viewpoints to inform my mission. A scrappy contrarian who is passionate about politics and is a vocal Hillary supporter, his first statement set for me the greatest truth all Americans are facing, “We are in an era of peril.” Todd Gitlin’s January 5, 2008 article echoes that thought, “... America strains to be reborn from the

brink of calamity.” And Sunday at the Live from Main Street event under the tent, moderator, Laura Flanders, mentioned “the crisis bringing people to Denver.”

Seated under the equine nostrils of the de Luigi back in the lobby of the Sheraton, Prof. Straughan, whose great wit and charm are captivating, weaves his metaphors to explain the phenomena we are facing and – I listen -. “We are breaking a lot of ice ... I look at the social movement, like the physical thing that happens to a large iceberg erosion into the sea – breaking off in the north – floating gradually and how it moves – slowly as it gets erosion into the sea that surrounds it, like the social movement, it’s slow ...”

He impishly shared his fantasy of Senator Obama offering Hillary the V.P. role and what if she had stepped aside and said, “Bill, you take it.” – what would that might be like. I came across several unusual fantasies from people – a businessman in Cherry Creek, who considers himself an independent, but leans to Republican rhetoric, thought that McCain should enlist Hillary for V.P. and that he’d vote for that ticket. In Park Hill, out on a ladies’ night with her girlfriends and under the throb of a D.J., I was told “Obama should’ve had Richardson as V.P. because no one wanted a Mexican President, so everyone would keep Obama safe and secure, ... Obama-insurance. “

Conversations with delegates finished, I headed out into downtown Denver noting the strong presence of uniformed police, riot-prepared swat team bands roaming in bands of 10-12, plainclothes security with microphones part of facial features, police on horseback, mountain bike, motorcycle, painted-out window vans, regular Denver white police patrol cars pulled up on curbs and scores of “Road Closed” barriers sitting at corners ready to be thrown across intersections in a flash. One delegate confided he had a couple of conversations with Denver police with sub-machine guns, and when inquiring why there were so many of them was told, “There are some scenarios that led us to do this.”

The drone of helicopters became so commonplace during the week we didn’t hear them anymore.

Out at Johnson and Wales University off Quebec Street, some 300 (other estimates put it as high as 800) Colorado National Guard was encamped from Sunday on. A visit to the campus was met by two polite uniformed Guardsmen who immediately produced the Public Affairs Office contact in response to my inquiries. According to Capt. Robert Bell, the Guard was there to back up any requests for help from the civil authorities and that had meant medical and transportation assistance at that point in time.

The conversations – “...listen now.”

My journey began in the historically predominant African-American Park Hill community that spans parts of north and northeast Denver; also known as a transition neighborhood – as families of all cultures live next to each other.

Mr. A’s – a huge outside banner proclaims it “the friendliest bar in town” where owner-operators, Joe King and Terrie Baker, pillars in the African-American community, who run it as if it were their home – regulars are happy there, grown men call Terrie

“Mama” and listen up when she tells them to shape up. Gracious, educated and always put together beautifully, she and Joe, who commands the entertainment from his post and watches over ever-present domino games and access to the smoking patio, bringing authority and down-home folksy-ness, were generous with their time and thoughts. It was a good place to begin the dialogue.

The questions were the same wherever I went:

“Has the nomination of Obama changed your outlook on the character and intentions of the American people as a whole?”

“Would you have believed in 2006 that America was ready to vote in an African-American President?”

“What do you know about Barack Obama? Read his books? Know his viewpoints on constitutional law? Read his half-sister’s interviews? Know he was President of Law Review at Harvard?”

“What would you want Obama as President to address as number one priority?”

“If you could talk to Obama – what message would you give him?”

“IF you are voting for him, are you voting because he is man of color, or for the man he is and by his merits having earned this honor?” “IF you are not voting for him, are you not because he is a man of color, or because as a man he doesn’t fit your ideology or political expectations or party loyalties?”

“What kind of First Lady do you think Michelle might be?”

“How will Obama play to the international sector, impact on our foreign affairs and diplomatic ties? How will the USA be viewed with his Presidency?”

“Are you concerned with his safety and security?”

“Do you have anyone on the line, been deployed, in Iraq or Afghanistan?”

“Do you consider this DNC with this nomination a historic event?”

“Would you have preferred to see Hillary take the nomination? Should Obama have offered her V.P.?” “Thoughts on Joe Biden?”

“Has your personal outlook changed about the United States?”

Joe began with stating he wouldn’t have believed in 2006 that Obama could have taken the nomination; it is a viewpoint that to a person, in this community, is repeated. He stated, “A whole lot of people are hurting ... number one concern was the economy ... Obama not going to change it overnight – have to ride it out ... how to change it? ... anyway he can ... more jobs ... I don’t know what will work, but I know what’s not working ... small businesses going down last two years ... small bars hit hard, very hard, bartenders and waitresses live on their tips ... has nephew in Iraq, second tour ... once over there a different outlook with their life on the line”

A native of East Texas, he can “remember those marches down in Alabama and Dr. King who paid a price for this ... and really it’s still going on.”

Terrie’s main interest is in “education being the priority ... everything else stems from that ...key to the economy, jobs, world respect and global recognition ... Obama will play well internationally.” She makes a strong point, “I’m not voting because he’s a man of color –but because he’s smart and the right person at this point in time. ... a lot

are voting, knowing nothing about him, yes – because he’s a black man – voting race... same as a white voting because white – same race card ... same thing – both racist voting, however understandable under the circumstances. Difference in education in the community; same dynamics as in any other cultural or racial environment: more education, the more inquiry and research for an informed vote.”

Back downtown, other African-American comments hit me: the delegate from San Jose I ran into in the ladies room at the Sheraton ...”the journey is almost complete.” And the Kansas City, Missouri transplant convenience store clerk, Wayne Walker, bright and articulate, always upbeat and beginning stand-up comedy, his message to Obama: “Keep an open mind.” The handsome, tall volunteer from Oakland who had scrimped for a year to fund this trip so “I could make a difference and say I was here and did something at this historic event.”

I stopped in Park Hill at Spinelli’s, a great Italian boutique grocery store, and encountered two bright women, part of the transitioning culture investing their homes and families, finishing their gelati sitting on the bench – Hillary supporters but now going with the flow – and one interestingly, brought up the “Bradley effect” – will white voters who say they are for Obama, vote race at the voting booth.

Mario, a Denver native Latino, who works for the Park services was happy that “by hosting the DNC, Denver will now be visible nationally and internationally ... thought of a first-class city able to compete with other cities ... “ He opined that not always have the Latinos and African-Americans seen eye-to-eye on issues nor been interested in each other’s cultural battles, but “Latinos are happy to see Obama make it ... he’s a smart man ... and any minority that’s successful helps other minorities ...” He could date his bloodline back to mid-1700s in Colorado’s San Luis Valley.

On my travels to the heart of the hard-working Latino neighborhood off Morrison Road, of small one-story cottage houses, way south of downtown, the two older men, Luis and Octavo, both veterans of “Nam”, thought of McCain as “un buen hombre” and because of his heroism, were voting for him. The nephew of Luis mirrored this, “Man, I’ve got a son over there in Iraq ... Bush is covering his ass ... so will McCain ...”

Marta, who cleans downtown high-rises at night, wants to see a change in the economy, “We need our dollar to buy more, I can’t feed my family on \$8.00/hr.” – she’s voting for Obama. While in LoDo, the cool center of downtown, at a café/bar, a young french-cuffed American-Latino tells me he’s voting Republican because “Obama is going to raise taxes.”

There are extraordinary people offering viewpoints for the delegates; like the city, varied, diverse and highly individualistic. Manifest Hope Gallery, part of the Andenken Gallery, in a space of 10,000 sq. ft. on Larimer Street, drew together “a showcase of artists ... amplifying the grassroots movement surrounding the Obama campaign ... the central themes of Hope, Change, Progress, Unity and Patriotism.” An amazing collection for our visitors to wander through – some of America’s finest contemporary painters and sculptors. Elizabeth Neufeld who is devoted to ensuring housing options for the lower-income groups, disabled and elderly for the City of Aurora, speaks of the field trip put together to showcase this commitment to social issues. Linda Henik, a solo owner business woman from Lakewood, Floral Blessings & Gifts, spent weeks crafting the exquisite bookmarks of pressed and dried flora of Colorado, her specialty, – red,

white and blue – hydrangea, delphinium, verbena and silver lace, to commemorate the DNC. Victoria Hopper and Jamie McGurk of SeaChange Communications who invested all their talent and connections into presenting the STARZ Green Room, a forum of ideas, panels, lectures for debate and exploration. And then, Betty, a widow, who traveled from the Napa Valley to volunteer the week and give a message of world peace in the name of her grandchildren.

Out at Tent City set up at City of Cuernavaca Park just off I-25 – a peaceful collection of anti-war protestors and other humane agencies, Amnesty International, Vets-4-Vets, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Chicano Veterans, and Sarah Gill of the American Friends Service Committee who maintained an animated dialogue with passers-by about how they would spend the \$720 million a day the Iraq war costs. The Quaker organization exhibit of the uninhabited shoes that represent the dead in Iraq stung and shocked. The protestors' placards read: "No war on Arabs"; "Peace is patriotic"; "War is not a family value"; "Alto!"; and one of dozens RIP gravestone replicas – one: Staff Sgt. Christopher E. Cutchall. These, too, were voices in Denver.

A single-Mom with two daughters bartending in a downtown hotel who had been told not to speak to the press, shared at the end of the week that Hillary was her candidate and it was Hillary's DNC speech that inspired her. This young woman was in remission from leukemia, the stress from her job with the increased traffic due to DNC was overload, she didn't want to get up and come to work. "I told myself if Hillary could lose and stand up in front of all those people in her pain and disappointment and do her job ... I can too. So I came to work and am keeping her in mind as I get through the night ..."

Stopping in at an East Colfax bar on Capitol Hill, a game of political trivia was afoot – twenty-something year-olds were hunched at the bar – the question on the table was: "Who is Nader's V.P. running mate?" No one knew, but someone did know that Sean Penn was at D.U. at the Nader debate. One of them said, "We need a third Party ... I'm not an ass or an elephant ..."

I headed out to southeast Aurora to a well-known bar and restaurant intending to catch Bill Clinton's speech on one of their 5 TV screens in the lounge. Aware this was reputed Republican territory, it was going to be an important balance. Barely making it in time – I scurried up the steps – encountered a tall, elderly gentleman, dapper in wool slacks, silk weave jacket, summer loafers, coming out of the place – asked if the TVs were on and whether they were tuned to the DNC, he replied, "I don't know ... and I am sick of that Convention ... who cares."

The TVs were on – all tuned to sports and customers glued to their seats and screens. I ventured the idea of one being turned on to the Convention, which spun a few heads around. The bartender thought for a moment and hesitantly said, "Guess so ... down here" pointing to end of bar – "Bring a stool." – Not there to pick a fight – I hauled one down and perched at the end of the bar, ordered a drink and had to help them find a station suggesting, "How about CNN ... ?" – "What station?" – uh ...

Finally found Clinton speaking, but there was no sound – none of the TVs were audible– it's OK for sports, but, hey Paid for the drink, left a generous tip, waited a few minutes and quietly suggested some sound – it got turned up enough so that if you had submarine sonic hearing probes, you just might hear it.

At this point, I gave up on the speech – reruns, it would have to be. Concentrating on the nearest bar patrons, I pulled out my notepad and recorder, not so deftly flipped up my press credentials - that usually elicits questions. It worked and so began a dialogue. Why McCain supporters? Because the most important issue for them are “taxes, and “Obama would raise taxes.” That’s it.

I learned my immediate companion was a newly married businessman of about 34, owned a condo downtown he leased out, large house in suburban Aurora – concerned primarily about taxes being raised not social issues. He stated, “I am disgusted re Obama and the DNC and ... McCain.” Had not read Obama’s books, did not know his stand on constitutional law, possibility of Supreme Court appointments not considered, and so it went. Meantime, the waitress and bartender are vocal about McCain, but not engaging, – just “ Go McCain - yeah McCain – McCain’ll take it ...” at intervals.

Consulting the bartender on exotic martinis, an older man, a Vietnam vet, retired on his medical book royalties and a charming regular in the place, talked of Mark Twain and Shakespeare, particularly the Act I of The Merchant of Venice and other things, “of cabbages and kings,” but not of the speech glaring out across the bar or related subject; the other patrons ignored my screen and the games played on while Clinton played to an empty audience, maybe for the first time.

One lovely woman came over after an hour and asked, “Are you Russian?” As she worked downtown as a State employee I got good insights on what had been happening with the Capitol Hill Park protesters. She and her friend were Democrats but let me know they were the rare exception. I left and headed back west.

As a side note, the following week on Senator McCain’s acceptance speech evening, I returned to this bar. Two of the TVs were on the Convention, with sound, and there were very few patrons. I sat down from two older men, who amused themselves by counting the cherries the bartender had pyramided in my manhattan ... and a long conversation ensued from the one, who was Kansas City bred, one of fourteen kids, Irish Catholic, farmers that amassed huge acreage, but worked the soil. Earned every dollar by his toil, sweat and personal ingenuity. A portrait of mid-western work ethic and confidence. Degree in farm engineering and specializes in markets and economies. He was a man that were I his daughter, I’d feel very protected and proud, someone who’d man the front door with a shotgun if required to do so.

This all-American success story proceeded to tell me, “The American dollar is strong and respected in Europe; the economy is good, we have more manufacturing jobs, out-sourcing is not taking away jobs ... “ Did I not know about the value of in-sourcing? And that ethanol legislation was the beginning of the difference in profit margins? He continued, “...and we have low employment, below 4 percent ... ” He shrugged his shoulders to any mention of the real estate crisis and foreclosure figures as being significant, further, “Obama knows nothing and the press are all liberal and uninformed and biased... and Ma’am, you’d have to be stupid to vote for him to lead this country.” Each of the young people in his family, some 47 cousins, all were ROTC in high school. No, he hadn’t read Obama’s books, no, he didn’t know his stand on constitutional law, “What’s to understand? So, he taught at U. of Chicago, doesn’t mean he knows constitutional law ...” and he had not read nor listened to the keynote 2004

speech, or the “race speech” of 2008. He had just seen the first segment of Obama’s interview with Bill O’Reilly, “finally”, as if convinced Obama had been avoiding O’Reilly, and begrudgingly he admitted “It went OK, it was interesting.”

I left and headed west once again.

This morning’s radio report, “Unemployment has hit an official 6.1 percent ...” , while it is widely accepted, it is more like 8.5 percent unofficially, “ ... and three-quarters of a million homes went into foreclosure in 2007.”

“Listen now ...”

Thursday at Invesco held additional meaning for a few. Anne, still grieving from the death of her father, Dr. Rodney Smith, long-time Pueblo resident and respected pediatrician and polymath, told of her friend who called and asked to borrow her deceased father’s wheelchair for his 86-year old mother who had a ticket to Invesco to hear Obama’s speech. “My father will be there after all ... if he were here he’d be thrilled with Obama’s nomination and what it means ... there was a reason I kept that chair... after.” So, Dr. Smith’s spirit was part of Thursday’s celebration and one heart was a little lighter.

Arriving at Elway’s in Cherry Creek, the “Beverly Hills” of Denver, I snagged the one free stool at the bar, relaxed to enjoy Jennifer Lang, the pianist, vocalist and composer, it’s worth the trip to hear her “River of Truth.” Launched into conversation with the only person at the end of the bar I had inadvertently hemmed in, a good – looking businessman, sales manager, of about 45 who considered himself an independent and would consider a third Party, declared “I vote for the person, even voted for Ross Perot.” His main concern centered on taxes and the economy. “Obama is a left-wing Democrat – a liberal.”, there was that capital L word. He hadn’t read any of Obama’s books, no idea of stand on constitutional law, hadn’t considered the importance of presidential Supreme Court justice appointments, doesn’t watch Charlie Rose, not aware that Progressives had replaced the more left or activist or “Green” tag on the term Democrat or liberal –. What did he know of Obama? Was he impressed by his heading up Harvard’s Law Review and what that meant; it just hadn’t registered. No one on the line in Iraq or Afghanistan. In the end, he promised to skim *Audacity of Hope* ... and he just might. It was time to talk of other things.

Down the bar was an Italian-American firefighter from Queens – I mentioned my interview with Wendy Wanderman, fundraiser and delegate from California, who was Executive Producer of *Into the Fire*, a much-praised 90-min. documentary that The History Channel aired on the life and challenges of a firefighter – I had his interest enough for him to pull from out of his shirt, a small gold fireman’s hat on a chain. He had not seen the film, but would find it. He had been up in the mountains, not in Denver for the Convention nor was it on his radar.

“Listen now ...”

Three days into the Convention, time to check in at *Mr. A’s*, I returned to a captivating set of interviews.

Jose Lugo, a forklift driver, born in Mexico, raised in East L.A. “I grew up in the barrio, life pretty bad ... learned how to survive the neighborhood ... I was a *cholo* – a hoodlum ... a friend helped me come to Denver to start over – Denver was easy then.” He remembers, “They killed Kennedy, they killed Bobby.” And like so many, his concerns are the economy, jobs and taxes. He’s an Obama supporter, “he’s going to do good for country.”

Betty, Diane and Fanny out on girls’ night together were vocal and in concert about the importance of “jobs – get off welfare and work... support the kids – food on the table ... drop food prices ... what I’m saying is ... everybody wants to work, get off welfare programs.” The economy was number one issue and they agreed, “Obama is one strong man.” Not one would have believed in 2006 “this day could happen.”

Bartender Debra Banks, a mother of two, 25 yrs. in Denver, originally from Mississippi, could not have thought Obama could be nominated and it has changed her outlook on the character and make-up of the United States. She is hopeful for the future of her children.

Allen Burrell, Chairman of Local Union 766 United Auto Workers is concentrating on the young and retired, getting them informed and out to vote. “Denver is a close race, strictly Republican, some 60% overall.” Louisiana bred of Creole, black and a grandmother from Spain – Allen represents the true nature of the melting pot of this country, a handsome man, he criticizes sharply the present administration for “having treated those people like a third-world country” in the Katrina crisis. “Colorado is a great state and treated those people well.”

Working at the Receiving Department at Lockheed, Allen is proud of his children having gone to college and they are doing well. However, as a country “we’ve been going backwards instead of forwards.” The main issues for Obama should be health insurance for everyone and jobs. Allen is emphatic, “I’m not looking at Obama as a black man, just a smart guy and changes ... I’m looking for changes for my grandson.” The Republicans are playing the scare card that “Obama will raise taxes.” It should be about “the American people, not taxes.”

Allen agrees with much of the community that the older Southern white Democrats “aren’t ready for a black person, I’m serious about that .. they’re set in their own ways, I’m from the South, I know the South.” He had a nephew in Iraq, back safely and retired, Allen says of the conflict, “we just can’t pull out, get them stable ... those people have been fighting for 500 years – with rocks.” He invokes Martin Luther King’s dictum here, “whatever you do, make the best of it.”

“Listen now ...”

In a neighborhood near the old University of Colorado Hospital site, a retired State employee, otherwise very intelligent and curious, earnestly believes that Obama was a set-up by radical Islam and that “if he became President he would put only Muslims in cabinet posts and bring the country down ... that Obama was a planted Islam puppet.” How does one respond to that extreme fear and prejudice?

Joyce, a strong, attractive, independent African-American nurse with grown daughters, both LPNs, and grandchildren uses the metaphor of “CHECK!” ... not

'checkmate'." when asking her response to Obama's nomination; but in 2006 she would not have been convinced he could prevail. She's excited about Obama because "he's the right man, he's smart, he can handle whatever will come his way ... "Joyce counters any objection that he is too young or too unseasoned, by going through the accepted gospel in the community of African-Americans maturing earlier out of self-preservation and survival instincts not common to two-parent nurturing family situations more usual of other cultures; a theory new to me, but making some sense. "The six-year old who prepares his own breakfast, fixes his school lunch, dresses himself and gets himself to school" any child growing up with that self-responsibility is older than his peer group and by that, Joyce includes Obama in the equation of a disjointed family where it was required of him. She concurs that the same logic applies to any race where children are under the same pressures and disadvantages.

Education is a priority and she insists on the respect for having her own mind and standing by her priorities for her and her family.

"Listen now ..."

Back on East Colfax and Capitol Hill wanting to hunt down an Alabama-reared bartender, who goes by the moniker, "Bamboo", an intuitively smart man, he straddles the easy conservative cant, idolizes Rush Limbaugh, and is amused by the "capital L" liberals, I found him late in the afternoon holding court as he has for 15 years, with many of the regulars already in place, and asked if he intended to flip the bar's only TV on to the Convention; the answer was "Nooo - who's going to watch it?"

That began the ritual jousting of political views; voting for McCain, "because he has experience." However, he would have "voted for Hillary if she had been nominee, saw her on The O'Reilly Factor."

His main objection to Obama was he "has no experience." No, he hadn't read any of Obama's books, didn't know his stand on constitutional law, had not read the recent July 21 *New Yorker* article by Ryan Lizza or interviews with Obama's half-sister. His main source of information – local papers and some on-line news links and talk-radio. Bamboo didn't plan on watching Obama's acceptance speech and had not heard or read his 2004 keynote address or "the race speech" given at Constitution Center.

I despaired that the mood even on Capitol Hill seemed to align with the recent experience in Aurora and Cherry Creek. It seemed judgments were made on candidates with no independent inquiry or research – illogical decision-making - and that Denver doesn't mesh with the Denver that had elected Latino and African-American mayors beginning 25 years ago. Part of the paradox of the city under the gaze of the Rockies: Republicans dominate Denver, yet history documents an independence at the polls; will that prevail this year? As Mack Morgan, an astute man, informed me, "Denver is a very conservative state and African-Americans make up only 8% of the population of Denver and 4% of the state of Colorado." (Recent census puts core Denver at 11 ½ - 13%.)

Back at *Mr. A's*, Terrie had lined up a few interviews with exceptional women who, as everyone else, were generous with their time and comments.

Linda Zanders, Denver native, finishing her last 1 ½ years of law school at D.U. has a son on the lines, a second deployment to Iraq, "he's in satellites and computers

but they're always at risk in war zone ... I'd say to Obama get them to work out their own problems, our presence is a threat ... not sure our Western concept of democracy is a solution for them ..."

Linda is "certainly proud" of the nation for the unity it took to get Obama to the nomination and that the DNC is in Denver. She, unlike most interviewed, is not worried about Obama's safety, "... the threat is there, but I believe in the unity of people for change, that jobs, the economy and moving ahead will overcome, unify ... can change a few." Linda is putting herself in a position to make changes with her commitment to law.

Melinda Morgan, Alabama born, 20 years plus in Denver, a nurse in geriatric care, joins the camp that wouldn't have taken bets in 2006 of this happening; was hoping for Hillary as V.P., but Biden is acceptable. She thinks, "... race relations ... we are a tighter nation ... a lot of mixed families, I think we accept it .. what is a 'minority' today: Most important issues are the economy, jobs, "... we can go help everybody else, what about us? ... think a lot of people who voted for Bush are really sorry. Many of my patients were Republican and are not anymore, ready to vote Democratic ticket."

Melinda doesn't have anyone in Iraq, and although the war is not a family issue ... "get us out gradually of the war." She doesn't agree that older Southern white Democrats won't vote for Obama as "I go back all the time and see the changes. It is time for change and we're going to get that change." Being faced daily with people with medical needs, she is for a national health insurance plan.

Danielle Brown, a 27 year-old, born Wyoming, 18 years in Denver, "a military brat", and a stint with the U.S. Army herself, getting discharged in 2001 just three months after 9/11 and just missing her unit being shipped out to Iraq three months after that, brings the youngest and freshest viewpoint that everyone here can celebrate. She had cousins in Iraq who came home safely, more are there now.

Danielle's personal view is that in her peer group, "it is now a different society, different times, not a racial issue, it's about being a smart man, it's about the person." She states her friends are a mixed set of Republicans and Democrats, African-Americans and Caucasians, "All around the board, they're pretty much voting for the right person; if not voting for Obama, it would be about policy differences, not because he's black ... if he's best one to run the country, they'll vote for him." Yes, she's concerned for his safety, "... it can get scary."

Her priority for Obama is the economy; "the American dollar used to mean something in foreign countries ... work on the economy." Danielle wanted Hillary as V. P., "for selfish reasons, black and a woman; but thinks Obama made best choice for himself." When asked if her age group votes out of informed thought and decision, she answered, "It's a split, probably 50-50; some vote on feelings and what friends, boyfriend, family say; the others are informed, research, read, ask questions." She has her Obama lawn poster firmly dug in and has a good collection of campaign buttons.

Danielle's message to the Senator is, "Good luck – I'm rooting for you, go Obama!" In response to a statement that it is sad Obama's mother is not here to see her son's victory and his majesty in this moment, Danielle is quick to respond, "She's here."

"Listen now ..."

Whereas here at *Mr. A's*, people are willing to express their opinions, I asked my local Post Office clerk, of Scandinavian-Wisconsin family history, a native northeast Coloradan from a tiny town of less than 200 pop., how do the Democrats and Republicans in his neighborhood here in Denver communicate about politics, and exchange ideas and information? He said it was simple, "We don't talk about it."

Someone who does want to talk about it is a marvelously articulate and well-informed man in the community, Mack Morgan, a 59 year-old native of Raleigh, N.C. who engages in a conversation with his full brain and heart. Many years in Denver, he is with the administration and operations of one of the state's largest breweries and previously was 21 years in the U. S. Air Force.

Mack states that "my heart swells at the events unfolding, I thought I'd never see this day in America", he is watching every minute of the news, "It had to take a conglomeration of Americans willing to say we have got beyond the stereotypes of the 'angry black man' and the 'bad black woman' – that we're all Americans – I understand that we still have segments of that population, but it's a minority now."

Having a bi-racial son from a former marriage to a Philippine native, "I understand Obama – intrigued that they focus so much on his African-American side, obviously that's what side he chose to walk that walk." Mack states the Senator has been "very cautious" how he's made that walk. "It's hard for Caucasians to give the full credit that he has earned, he had to do something that phenomenal to draw the young people, the educated people and even the very wealthy into his camp."

He's impressed by Senator "Ted" Kennedy's endorsement, "a superb individual, after all he and his family have gone through... when he puts his hands on him – *I have to believe.*"

Regarding the March 2008 "race speech", *A More Perfect Union*, given in Philadelphia, "one of the great speeches – no other politician could have addressed the subject of race other than Obama, and he could not have done so, if he was not running for President ..."

As to the battleground states in the South, that region "...it took over the Republican conservative faction ... commanded it ... it's now the young kids coming about that are willing to take a serious look." Mack states the older white Southern Democrat will not vote for Obama, they're very rigid and the mind-set still "is an educated black person is 'upppity'".

He was at the base, a 19-year-old airman, when McCain returned from Hanoi and has respect for the man, but "McCain is unable to move into today's world – to change – the world moves. They still stand."

That paradox of Denver exists in the information Mack puts on the table; "Denver had a huge Ku Klux Klan following, the state of Colorado is very conservative, yet Wellington Webb was elected, and re-elected, Denver mayor by whites, very limited black people in his administration."

Never a backer of Hillary because "... of her not wanting to accept the caucuses and running a piss-poor campaign almost up to the last", and most important in his eyes, her reaction to the Monica Lewinsky scandal vis-à-vis her husband "put her out of touch with reality ... she didn't react as most women faced with those facts would have ... power and ambition were foremost ... more important than 'her man.' ... it's about value system ... I live in a real world ...". Picking Hillary as VP "would have been a sign of weakness" for Obama.

Having fought a personal battle to be accepted and understood for who he is, in a 21-year marriage to a Caucasian, when he couldn't "be himself", while full well "knowing who I am" but isolated in an upstate New York community, the only black person in an all-white church, "having to be more like them." Learning to finally say that they have to learn to know him. Therefore, Obama "is unique, he understands both sides - he commands - he's 'the melting pot' staring right there in front of you."

Mack had a brother-in-law in the first Iraq war, so he would counsel Obama, "Bring those kids home ... you can't win if you don't have the support of our nation." He states, "We can't legislate democracy there, we need to build their structure from their point of view."

On the security issue for Obama, "I believe the powers-that-be will do everything to protect him; they know it would destroy this country." According to Mack, "Obama has same level of security as President Bush ... it's hard on him."

With full heart, Mack Morgan believes he will vote for the future, not the past. His vote for Obama is " ... not because he's black but the right man at the right time." However, it is up to us to elect a Congress that's willing "to work for the American people."

His gift to me is this message to take around Denver on these interviews, and future encounters, to every nook and cranny: "Look beyond the past, look to the future."

By Friday it was time to end the undeniable Obama 'love fest' and get to work to the serious business of getting him in the right house on Pennsylvania Avenue. The city emptied, we dismounted the carousel, taking as mantra, "listen now", to our conversations for the next 68 days.

My last interview in north Denver was with the bright, witty, strong, African-American woman of-a-certain-age nurse, who after the recorder was shut off, our good-byes and thanks sealed with a heart-felt hug, then, like schoolgirls do when they've a conspiratorial secret to share, grabbed my hand. She quickly said, "Thank you, for not assuming I was ignorant." It took my breath away. All I could muster was my hands thrown up in the air and "Why would you think I'd ever think that?!" tumbled out to her retreating back.

The rest of afternoon and evening I gnawed on that "good-bye" - is it that truly nothing really *had* changed and stereotypes were still in place? - or the opposite - the remark was belly-exposing vulnerability of friendship of what her life had experienced and she was sharing it person to person - and things had *very much* changed? I will keep listening ...

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