

Van Mobley: Inaugural diary: Inauguration Day

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It seemed like my head had just hit the pillow when the cell phone alarm started buzzing at 4:45 a.m. Eastern on Inauguration Day. I groaned as I rolled out of bed and thought to myself, "and this is how it is even if you don't drink much and get to bed around midnight."

Susan and I dressed quickly and then down the elevator we went. A quick stop at the Starbuck's on DuPont Circle (somebody told me it was the busiest one in the country, but I doubt it) and away we went toward the Capitol for the inauguration.

As we got closer and closer the number of people on the streets increased, as did the number of security personnel of various types. You have to wind around to get to the big show because periodically, for no apparent reason (the randomness is intentional) the security guys will have thrown a barricade, or a couple of dump trucks, or a bus across the street.

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Anyway, about a quarter of a mile before we made it to our entry point, a young fellow from Kansas in a nice suit showed up and started walking beside us. He wanted to talk so I listened. After a while I introduced myself and Susan and we kept on talking and walking. He had lots of speculation to relate, including why some people who were expected to get an appointment to something didn't get an appointment because they leaked something (albeit accidentally).

"That could never happen to me," I told him in my best deadpan voice, "because nobody ever tells me anything."

He thought that was pretty funny. And then he plucked a ticket out of his coat pocket and said to me, “where are you going to be?”

“Blue North Standing,” I said.

“Would you like a better ticket?” he asked as he extended a ticket in my direction. I looked at it and you know what – it was a considerably better ticket.

Then I took the ticket and showed it to Susan. She scrunched up her brow and then I turned to our new found friend and said, “Do you have another one of these tickets?”

“No, just one,” he said.

Susan and I looked at each other again and then I gave him back his ticket.

“There are too many people milling around for us to go off and get separated – but thanks for the offer,” I said.

He shrugged and wandered off just as we hit the lines at the security checkpoint.

The Swearing In Ceremony

We were there early, so we got through security fast. If you want to look for us we are standing right behind all the seats underneath the first tree on the right side of the Capitol Hill slope (if you are viewing the Mall from the Capitol). I forgot the Thiensville baseball cap I intended to wear at the ceremony (in fact I didn’t have a cap) and that bugged me because it was a bit cold and was spitting rain all morning. I could have used my hat. Within no time at all it was pretty densely packed there and from then (around 7:30 a.m.) until the inauguration ceremony there was not much moving going on.

The people around us were from Nevada, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Nebraska and Virginia. There was also a guy who was the speechwriter for a U.S. senator. Everybody was really nice, and they had lots of interesting stories to tell. By 8:30 a.m., I had trouble sending or receiving messages from my cell phone. It is hard to imagine the volume of data that was attempting to stream through the neighboring cell towers.

By around 10 a.m., the entertainment had begun and the Marine Band would play

something every now and then. There was a great deal of speculation concerning whether or not we were going to get soaked, but everybody stayed cheerful. Then the honchos started to filter in. The crowd started inching forward and getting denser. In fact, it was at this point that I saw some ner-do-wells to my left start attempting to push their way to the front. But there was a mother there with her two daughters who scolded them and all the people around gave up a little cheer when the ner-do-wells got their comeuppance. This little drama was much more entertaining than the honchos filing in but you had to be tall like me to see it. Susan couldn't see anything but the risers in the distance.

The pre-speech ceremony was nice. The people were unsettled by Schumer's speech. Not because of anything that he said but rather because they were puzzled that he talked so long. It seemed like a distraction. You can never go wrong when you keep it brief, Sen. Schumer.

As President Trump spoke, the people looked around at one another in approval.

"They are not going to change him," beamed a man to my left. "Not hardly," I laughed in reply.

And then it was over. It took us a while to file out and off the Capitol Hill area.

The failed effort to make it to the parade and a party

We had tickets to the parade and an invitation to a party being thrown by my friend Kevin Allis from Thunderbird Strategic, who has an office in a building on Pennsylvania Avenue. But our feet were hurting so badly that we decided to duck into a restaurant and have a bite to eat and a glass of wine first. Susan said, "If you drink one glass of wine at a time like now you feel better but if you drink two you will feel worse." She is a font of wisdom and I followed it.

Then we went out and got in line to get through security and onto Pennsylvania Avenue. As we were waiting, my cell phone reception was spotty. Sometimes I could send and receive messages, sometimes not. But I did get a call from David Ade from CBS 58. He asked me about the day and the speech and I said it was great. He asked me if I had seen any protesters and I said "nothing out of the ordinary." And then that was it for the interview. My Dad sent me a text and asked me if I had seen any protesters. "Nothing out of the ordinary," I replied back. "Ordinary," by the way is the customary harmless people standing around waving signs and chanting

slogans. At this security checkpoint it was some pro-life and pro-choice people yelling at one another with bullhorns while the people waiting to get through security watched. Harmless. They probably would have been there if Hillary had won instead of Donald.

Anyway, the line was long, and it moved really slowly. We waited and waited and waited and then it became clear that if we wanted to get to the “Freedom” Inaugural Ball early (which we wanted to do for reasons I will relate shortly) we were going to have to abandon our effort to get to the parade – which I had a strong suspicion had already passed my entry point. So we bailed on that endeavor and went back to the hotel.

The Inaugural Ball

Just as soon as we dressed for the ball we went downstairs and I hailed a cab. “The Washington Convention Center,” I said.

The traffic was terrible, but Susan and I were so tired we didn’t mind sitting in the cab. It took us awhile to get to the convention center and actually the cab never really made it. About three blocks away from the entrance the cabbie said, “You might as well just bail here and walk in.”

We did and once again it was the familiar trucks, barricades, buses, routine. But we were early and the lines were short. In fact, we were probably among the first people to make it to the event, which was smart because as soon as we got there we went over to the official photographer and had our picture taken in front of the logo. I can tell you that the lines in front of those photographers got really long as the night wore on, but not for us. We had taken care of business so now we were free to have a good time.

When you came in the door, they gave each attendee some drink tickets. Once you used them up, you had to buy your drinks with cash. Susan and I got two chardonnays apiece with our tickets and then bought one more round with cash. Very moderate. We also ate some of the cheese, crackers and pasta that were available. All in all, the food was pretty good.

The ball room was just one huge room with a stage in the middle. In front of the stage, there was carpet. But throughout most of the rest of the ballroom, it was polished concrete. Since Susan and I were there early we claimed a spot on the

carpet and held it for the entire evening.

While we were on our spot people we knew plus people we didn't know flowed past. For example, we took a picture with Sri, Lee and Pam (all of whom live in Ozaukee County) plus Congressman Glenn Grothman. Sri also had a picture taken of the Ozaukee County bunch with his camera, but the woman from wherever who we got to take it for us dropped the camera and broke it. "That is why I don't like to let other people take pictures with my camera," said Sri ruefully.

As the evening wore on the crowd got denser and denser. We ended up being surrounded by a bunch of people from New York and Indiana. I didn't plan on spending the ball with a bunch of people from Indiana and New York, mind you, but that is how it turned out. Kind of a stroke of luck, wouldn't you say? They were great people and we had a wonderful time.

Eventually Donald, Melania and their entourage joined us. President Trump spoke a few words and then the people on the stage danced to the band's rendition of the old Sinatra hit "My Way." Susan and I would have danced, too, but the truth is there were so many people (over 25,000 I heard) in that ballroom that we couldn't even move. But it was still a blast.

As soon as the President left, we bolted for the door. , Along the way we ran into Char from Eau Claire and she rode back with us to the hotel room. Char and Susan and I all agreed it was a wonderful evening.

The Flight Home

We got up early next morning and strolled down the street to the White House and bought some souvenirs. Next we met a couple from New York in a coffee shop and compared notes on the election and the inaugural. After we talked I gave him a card, he gave me a card, and we went our separate ways.

Our way led us back to the hotel and into a cab headed for Dulles by 10 a.m. Once we got through security and near our gate, we sat down. Next to us was a middle-aged woman.

We struck up a conversation. After a time I asked her where she was going. She said she was a Secret Service agent from California and had been in town for the Inauguration. In fact, she said she had been on top of the Capitol during the event.

"We saw you guys up there," cried Susan.

The lady replied, "You saw some of my team, but you didn't see me. I can assure you of that."

I leaned forward confidentially and asked, "What would have happened if some bad person had drawn a gun and started shooting people out on the mall?"

"They wouldn't," she said, "but if they did they would be dead."

After she went off to catch her flight my wife asked, "Do you think she was really a Secret Service agent?"

"I wouldn't want to test her," I replied. And I wouldn't. It was a great Inauguration and Trump will make a fine president. Our future is bright. Let us make America great again!

— Mobley is the Thiensville Village president and was an early Trump supporter in the presidential race. He is attending inaugural festivities this week and is writing about the experience for WisOpinion.com.