



# West Valley VIEW

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## Witnesses to history *West Valley residents attend presidential inauguration, balls*

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**PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA AND FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA** wave to a crowd during the Commander In Chief Inaugural Ball in Washington, D.C., Jan. 20. in this photo taken by Goodyear resident George Burson. See Page 8 for more photos taken by West Valley residents of inauguration events.

Jan. 20, 2009, will be written in history books as the day a black man became the president of the United States.

But for four West Valley residents, the date will be remembered more intimately.

Jacqueline Sandoval will remember the day as an emotional day in her political career.

George Burson and David Samora will be reminded of the hope and excitement they felt while experiencing the inauguration through the eyes of children.

Dudley Butts will recall how the civil right's movement came around full circle with Barack Obama's presidency.

### **Political aspirations**

Sandoval, 23, of Litchfield Park, is studying political science at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale.

An internship during the Pennsylvania primaries led her to a staff position on Barack Obama's campaign as a college field organizer in Miami.

She joined the inaugural festivities in Washington, D.C., to witness her candidate become the 44th president.

Because of her staff-level status, Sandoval received "purple and blue tickets," to the inauguration. She was supposed to be close to the action but an unexpected "miscommunication" factor caused her to witness the swearing in ceremony from a convenience store.

"There was some miscommunication between whoever was in charge of the gates to allow people in," she said. "We had tickets to the ceremony, but we didn't get in."

Because she and her friend Luciana Salinas couldn't get through the security gates at the Mall fast enough to hear Obama's speech, Sandoval decided to take the Metro back to where she was staying.

"We saw a convenience store with a small group of people gathered around a television set watching it," she said.

Like millions of Americans across the country, Sandoval watched Obama's speech on TV, despite being in the heart of our nation's capital.

"The entire speech, watching it, was pretty emotional for me," she said. "It was such a long, long campaign and to finally be over and to be real, to watch him give that speech ... our country can't go backward, we must go forward. To see him, there aren't words."

During Sandoval's week-long stay in the capital, the mood and atmosphere was bipartisan, she said.

"This city, for that moment, it was all about him," she said. "If there was resistance, at least for [Jan. 20] and the time being, people are going to give him a chance. Everyone just wanted to be there to witness history, for that reason alone."

### **Children are our future**

Burson, 57, and Samora, 50, both of Goodyear, traveled to the East Coast together to witness the inauguration.

They stayed with Samora's family members, who live in Fredericksburg, Va.

Samora's 10-year-old niece, Gianna Justice Samora-Nixon, was chosen as the stand-in for Obama's 7-year-old daughter, Sasha Obama.

"Her father [Yeoman Kenneth Nixon] is in the military and on the Navy's inaugural committee," explained Samora. "She was lucky enough and blessed to stand in for Sasha. They had her next to the motorcade vehicle; she walked to the platform and stood where the daughters would be, by the podium where [Sasha's] father would be sworn in."

Gianna filled in for Sasha the day before the inauguration to help officials rehearse the following day's schedule. She ran through rehearsal several times so that camera crews and security personnel could time and practice their parts for the historical event.

Experiencing the inaugural festivities through the eyes of Samora's young relatives continued when Burson and Samora went with the children to the Kids' Inaugural Concert Jan. 19.

"We were 12 rows behind the Obamas," Burson said. "He really talked to what we need to do. He talked to the kids about volunteering, that they're the future."

"They stressed to the children and the youths how important it is to be a part of what's happening," Samora said. "I could see the looks on their faces. They were so proud to be there."

### **Full circle**

Butts, superintendent of the Agua Fria Union High School District, traveled with his son to Washington.

He, too, had some setbacks trying to get access to the inaugural address.

While he waited in line near the Third Street Tunnel entrance to make his way to his ticketed section, crowds became too large and unruly, he said.

"We were in a section that got over-crowded and it got bogged down. We moved about 10 feet in one hour," he said. "We didn't get to our section before it was closed off."

Instead, he tried to make his way to the Mall area, but access to it also closed before he could enter.

"We were on the outside looking in, but we were amongst hundreds of thousands of people and were able to feel the energy," he said.

In the '70s, Butts was stationed close to the D.C. area as a member of the Army.

Being in Washington for Obama's inauguration was a "huge" moment for Butts, who said he remembers when the Mason-Dixon Line was a very real part of America.

"It's huge in my life, in terms of its importance. I think all of us who are baby boomers, who have watched the growth of the civil rights movement, who have watched it change during our lifetime, to watch an African American become a president sends a huge message as far as how far we've come as a nation.

"The Mason-Dixon Line was real in the early 1970s. There was a distinct segregation in my lifetime and just a few miles away, a black man is being sworn in as president."

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