

Mrs. Hall Goes to Washington

Local teacher attends Presidential Inauguration

By Micah Groves

□ *Editor*

Moving. Uplifting. Amazing. These are the first words that come to mind when Hugo fifth-grade teacher Renee Hall thinks about her trip to Washington D.C. for President Barack Obama's recent inauguration.

Hall, who is in her 33rd year of teaching, and second at Hugo Intermediate School, attended the Jan. 20, Presidential Inauguration with her husband, Jesse.

"My husband and my birthdays are on Jan. 18, and 19, so we usually try to do something," Hall said. "So he said 'let's go to the inauguration.' Well, I had thought about it back in November and so we thought it would be something fun to go to. We just decided that we couldn't miss this event."

Hall and her husband were both born in the 1950s, so the fight for civil rights was something with which they were extremely familiar.

"We lived through segregation, segregated schools, separate water fountains and the whole bit," Hall said. "So we never thought we would see this day. This is just something that you really didn't think was possible. You didn't think we had evolved as far as the hope of Martin Luther King. That is what really drove us to want to go."

Hall said the significance of the event actually hit her prior to the inauguration.

"We went to a special event at the Smithsonian on the Monday before the inauguration," she said. "The event was in honor of Martin Luther King. At the very end of the program we all joined hands and sang 'We Shall Overcome.' While this was going on, I looked around at all the people — young, old, black, white — with tears in their eyes singing that song. There was a feeling of overpowering love and unity there among all the people."

Inauguration day started out quite early for Hall and her husband.

"We started out at 4:30 in the morning on the day of the inauguration," she said. "Most people started out at 3 a.m. We finally got to the mall at 9:30. The crowds were amazing."

Unable to get very close because of the crowds, Hall and her husband watched the inauguration on a large monitor. Hall said she found Pres. Obama's speech very moving and uplifting.

"We lived through a generation where we had to walk around with downcast eyes," Hall said. "In the old days, my great-grandparents, who were slaves, would be killed just for looking a white person in the eyes. To be able to lift your eyes as Obama lifted his hand to take the oath, he lifted the hopes of a lot of people."

"Young people now know that with hard work and sacrifice, the American Dream is possible," she said.

Hall believes Obama's accomplishments will inspire young people to perhaps change their ideas of what a role model is.

"I certainly never thought that I would live to see a black man become President of the United States," she said. "So the expectations have been raised. And a lot of kids are looking up to this man because he has achieved something that we did not think he would be able to achieve. He raised the hopes of many Americans and showed us that the things that are promised in the Constitution are meant for all of us. This gives our young people something to hope for."

Hall said the entire experience gave her a new faith in the American people.

"Black people alone make up a small percentage of people in this country," she said. "So we are not the ones that put Obama in office. So just to know that the world is changing from the way it was and it is evolving into that great nation that it was always meant to be. We are living up to those ideals that the forefathers had in mind."

"The whole event was truly inspiring," Hall said. "It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and I will never forget it. I will be able to tell my grandson when he is studying, that I was there and I witnessed this event."

