

Evolution of a candidate

Barack Obama's speech Tuesday in St. Paul, like much of his campaign, had an authoritative and historical ring to it. The candidate changed and survived in the six months since Iowa.

Analysis by G.R. ANDERSON JR.

For all the attention rightfully paid to Barack Obama's oratory skills since he first hit the national spotlight at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, the biggest applause line of his career is also likely his simplest.

"Tonight, I can stand before you and say that I will be the Democratic nominee for president of the United States," he said Tuesday night at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul before an ovation like a jet engine drowned out the last few words.

Thanks to a certain New York senator's concession to absolutely nothing earlier in the night, Obama required the bit of equivocation that came with the nod to the future. But the message was clear enough to everyone except the Clintons.

Tuesday's appearance had the feeling of a victory party, with Obama finally locking down the nomination with a rush of superdelegates. But relief hung in the air as well, and Obama seemed to reign in his bright smile, appearing almost somber. He no longer played the prodigy, a rising star, but rather a leader whose time had finally come.

"America, this is our moment. This is our time," Obama said toward the end of his



REUTERS/Eric Miller

Barack Obama at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul Tuesday night: He spoke with passion and authority.

speech, before warning. "The journey will be difficult. The road will be long."

The Xcel was filled to the rafters, and supporters stood the entire time. In fact, it was not just Obama's delivery and rhetoric that took on import, it was the reaction of the people in the house that delivered goose bumps. Throughout the campaign, Obama has often shown an uncanny ability to reach people, even touch people, something that can't be denied even if you're skeptical of the bouts of swooning that followed him on the hustings.

But the last six months have been anything but smooth and easy, and ever since his jaw-dropping speech in Des Moines the night he won the Iowa caucuses in January, The Natural has had to tweak and refine his image. First, there was the charge that he was not a man of substance. Then his message of "hope" and the "yes we can" movement became easily mocked.

continues on page 4

INSIDE



MINNPOST.WORLD

The many dangers of apocalyptic thinking
page 2

STEVE BERG

Cityscape: Central Corridor leaves mitigation issues and scar tissue.
page 3

DAVID BRAUER

The Daily Glean: NR considers extending ban on lead shot.
page 5

COMMUNITY VOICES

How 'pushy women' joined boys in the band.
page 6

MINNPOST.WORLD

The many dangers of apocalyptic thinking

By STEVE BERG

It's a terrible thing to say but undeniably true: There are at least two ways to look at Tuesday's horrifically routine bombing of Denmark's embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan.

One way is from the civilized perspective, which condemns this kind of act as terroristic murder. Six people died, all of them Pakistani, and 25 were wounded. That the target was Danish adds to the probable religious fervor behind the attack, coming 2 1/2 years after Danish newspapers published images of the Prophet Mohammad in editorial cartoons, a blasphemous act from the Islamist point of view.

The other way to look at the event is from the radical side, which elevates the suicide bomber to heroic and heavenly status and sees an attack against Denmark's embassy as justified revenge or even, perhaps, apocalyptic cleansing.

The point here isn't to swim in the murky waters of moral relativism, but to emphasize that apocalyptic views have been cyclical through human history and seem now to be rising again at a moment in which technology makes the possible consequences catastrophic. That's the topic British writer Ian McEwan tackles in "The Day of Judgment," an essay in the *Guardian Review*.

Other writers, too, have taken on "end of the world as we know it" subjects of late. Lawrence Wright offers a more hopeful view in his *New Yorker* piece, "The Rebellion Within: An Al Qaeda Mastermind Questions Terrorism."

And in *The New Republic*, Anne Applebaum demolishes Nicholson Baker's new book, "Human Smoke: The Beginnings of World War II, the End of Civilization."

The 'inventory of morality'

Let's begin with McEwan. He starts by recalling Susan Sontag's comments about the essence of photography. It shows the "vul-

nerability of human lives headed towards their own destruction," she said, meaning that no photo of us, no matter how full of life and glorious memory, can forestall our own death. Photography, she said, is the "inventory of mortality."

As for stepping back to view our larger collective demise, McEwan writes that throughout history people have "mesmerized themselves with stories which predict the state and manner of our wholesale destruction, often rendered meaningful by ideas of divine punishment and ultimate redemption; the end of life on earth, the end or last days, end time, the apocalypse."

He continues: "Many of these stories are highly specific accounts of the future and are devoutly believed. Contemporary apocalyptic movements, Christian or Islamic, some violent, some not, all appear to share fantasies of a violent end, and they affect our politics profoundly."

McEwan describes the apocalyptic political mind as despising other groups for worshipping false gods. It tends toward totalitarian, he says, meaning that ideas are intact, all-encompassing, founded in supernatural belief and immune to fresh data.

Over time, predictions of demise fail and new futures must be devised and old enemies replaced. Americans cannot be smug about these trends, he says, given their devotion to the Bible's book of Revelation, which, he notes, is similar in content to Islam's revivalist theology. These beliefs in end times are "a medieval engine driving our modern moral, geopolitical and military concerns," he says, and they wind themselves "around our politics and our political differences."

But Lawrence, in his *New Yorker* piece, examines a possible thaw within Al Qaeda. He quotes a shadowy jihadist philosopher, Dr. Fadl, who 20 years ago wrote texts used by Al Qaeda to indoctrinate recruits. One lengthy text preached that even the slightest misstep prevents a good Muslim's

salvation. Purity is the point. An infidel's prayers are invalid and "his blood is legal," Fadl had written. But now he renounces violence and urges other Muslim leaders to do likewise. "We are prohibited from committing aggression, even if the enemies of Islam do that," he wrote in a fax from his prison cell in Egypt," according to Lawrence.

Lawrence contends that Fadl's words confirm rumors that there's an anti-violence trend afoot among jihadists. "There is a form of obedience that is greater than the obedience accorded to any leader," Fadl wrote, "namely obedience to God and His Messenger."

The end times, of course, come in many forms: atomic fire, germs, environmental collapse. The *New York Review of Books* examines treatment options for global warming, for example. Freeman Dyson's review is of William Nordhaus' book, "A Question of Balance," and Ernesto Zedillo's "Looking Beyond Kyoto."

End of authentic information?

But there's another kind of apocalyptic danger, Anne Applebaum suggests in *The New Republic*. It is the end of authentic information. Her review is less about the so-called content of Baker's book "Human Smoke" than about the manner in which it was assembled. It is little more than snippets — pieces of random information from newspaper clippings and other sources thrown together in a way that "empowers" the reader to his own conclusion about whether World War II was worth fighting. It is, in other words, a lot like trying to concoct history via blogs and email traffic.

Applebaum admits that she decided to review the book only after a conversation with friends. "We arrived at the topic of Nicholson Baker not because we were talking about the war, but because we were talking about the contemporary cult of the non-expert, or rather the anti-expert: the bloggers who assume that the 'mainstream media'

is always wrong, the Wikipedia readers who think that a compilation of random anecdotes is always preferable to a learned study, and of course the college students who nowadays prefer to get their news in emails from friends because it is too bothersome to read the newspaper." Baker's book belongs to this cult, she says.

"'Human Smoke,' in other words, is not a conscientious pacifist tract," Applebaum continues. "It is not a clever contribution to today's debate on warfare and it does not add anything to what we know about World War II. It is a cheerful contribution to the movement against scholarship — a movement which has advanced so far, in fact, that I fully expect these observations, too, to be condemned as 'elitism.' As one who does contribute (it's pathetic, I know) to the mainstream media on a regular basis, I know that any author who expresses a sliver of doubt about the wisdom of amateurs risks bringing down a torrent of recrimination and insult upon his head. But if we have arrived at the point where a solemn and excited individual can cobble together anecdotes from old newspapers and Nazi diaries, and write them up in the completely contextless manner of blog posts, and suggest that he has composed a serious critique of America's decision to enter World War II, and then receive praise from respected reviewers in distinguished publications, then maybe it is time to say: Stop."

This appears to be a case of unintended consequence. By writing a bad book, the author has inspired the reviewer to address a more important and, arguably, apocalyptic subject: Can we in the information age survive on information alone, or do we need actual knowledge?

Steve Berg, a former Washington, D.C., bureau reporter, national correspondent and editorial writer for the Star Tribune, reports on urban design, transportation and national politics. He can be reached at sberg@minnpost.com.

CITYSCAPE

Central Corridor leaves mitigation issues and scar tissue



STEVE BERG

Motion denied. Case closed. That was the message

Peter Bell and the Metropolitan Council delivered last week to the University of Minnesota's fading hope that light rail trains might be rerouted through Dinkytown to avoid cutting through the heart of the U's main campus.

The case is not quite closed, however, and what started as an esoteric engineering dispute has left emotional scars on all sides.

When the line opens in 2014, Central Corridor trains seem destined to run as the Met Council wishes — at grade level along Washington Avenue Southeast, bisecting the busiest part of campus. Running trains on Washington is \$200 million cheaper than running them in a tunnel just below, and more cost-effective than running them on a northern alignment through Dinkytown, as the U preferred.

But trains on Washington carry problems of their own, which is why the U has insisted on negotiating a formal understanding with the Met Council and other governmental partners on mitigation costs. Who will pay? And how much?

Sensitive laboratory equipment must be protected from the rail line's magnetic fields and vibrations, says the U. The U hospital and clinics must not be cut off from auto traffic. Deliveries and refuse pickup must be maintained. Nearby neighborhoods must remain connected. And the new transit/pedestrian mall on which the trains will run must be an at-

tractive asset to the campus, not a wall that divides it in half.

It's possible for the Central Corridor project to absorb \$31 million of those costs, Bell said. But the U has a list of traffic mitigation projects costing more than \$50 million that the rail project, under its federal guidelines, cannot cover. Those include improving the intersection of East River Road and Franklin Avenue (\$5 million), connecting East River Road to Main Street Southeast (\$14.6 million), and building Granary Road (\$34 million) to skirt the north side of campus. Those projects will help form an auto loop around the main campus to make up for the loss of Washington Avenue as a through street. But it's not clear at this point how they will be paid for.

Mitigation remains pressing issue

Kathleen O'Brien, vice president for university services, said on Monday that the U continues to pursue a "dual track" approach, meaning that it hasn't formally given up its Dinkytown alternative, although the Board of Regents may decide to do so as early as Friday. "We'll know more next week," she said. It's unlikely that the university will seek court action to reroute the line, O'Brien said. More pressing now is the mitigation package.

The U's love-hate relationship with the Central Corridor is something worthy of an Oprah episode. Light rail will greatly enhance access to its Minneapolis campus with three stations — on the East and West Banks and near the new football stadium. In an age of rising en-

ergy prices and serious environmental concerns, the line brings the U squarely up to date, even working as an intra-campus shuttle across the Mississippi River. The U is expected to provide one-third of the line's 42,000 daily riders.

.....But as the line's single most important constituent, the U didn't get what it needed most — the tunnel. And it continues to question the validity of the federal formula that, first, caused the tunnel to be trimmed from the project and, as a fallback position, failed to favorably rate the Dinkytown alternative.

The formula is called the Cost-effective index, or CEI. Technically it's only one of a half-dozen criteria that "new start" transit projects are required to meet to qualify for federal matching money. The Bush administration, however, has used the CEI as a kind of pass-fail test to strip projects to their bare bones and to screen out projects that don't quite fit the formula. Therein may lie some of the U's resentment. By elevating the CEI's "cost per hour of travel time saved" above other benefits, the Bush administration has devalued the tunnel as an aesthetic amenity to the oldest part of the U's main campus, and, in the case of the Dinkytown alignment, has devalued a route that would take trains closer to a new bioscience campus not yet built.

When the CEI demanded a \$300 million cut in the project, the U felt it suffered most. Ramsey County, by contrast, with a direct financial stake in the project, got more of what it wanted.

From the standpoint of the Met Council and Peter Bell, a former regent who was not re-elected in 2007, the U's complaints come across as arrogant. The U's hiring of a Washington lobbying firm to aggressively question the CEI formula has damaged Minnesota's standing with the federal transit agency. "They've second-guessed everything," Bell said, "when actually the line is a huge amenity for the U."

A leafy transit/pedestrian mall done right will draw admiration nationwide and greatly benefit the campus, he predicted. "It looks impressive and the U should be proud of that," he said. As for the U's challenging the CEI, Bell said that adjusting the formula helps to distribute scarce federal dollars to more locations. That's a worthy public policy goal, he said.

Another way to look at the situation is that the demand for new transit lines far outstrips the supply of federal money available, and that Congress, in the next iteration of federal transportation law, due after 2009, should devote far more money to transit.

Central, for example, is competing with nine other projects in cities including Orlando and Boston for the same pot of federal money, and 200 more projects are waiting in the wings. The federal stake in the \$909 million Central project is roughly \$450 million. The other nine projects now in the preliminary engineering phase add up to more than \$15 billion in federal, state and local funds.

Want to add your voice?

If you're interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at salbright@minnpost.com.

Evolution of a candidate

continued from page 1

Next we saw the tempered and important speech on race in the early stages of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright debacle. Then there was the “religion and guns” gaffe, coupled with a speech he gave where he brushed at his shoulders, trying to show how he deals with criticism. Somehow he became an elitist, rather than the voice of change for the people.

But suffice to say that Obama and his speechwriters, advisers and handlers have learned from it all, and Obama’s delivery Tuesday night was more self-assured and correctly paced than ever. In short, Obama the Candidate has grown.

“He’s remarkably similar to the Barack Obama I met three years ago at the Hilton Hotel,” Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak said not long before Obama appeared Tuesday night. According to Obama’s own telling, Rybak said Obama should run for president when the two first met back then. Rybak was referring to Obama, the person, but what about Obama, the candidate? What have the last six months meant in that regard?

“He still has natural gifts, but clearly he’s brought it to a new level. He’s an even better speaker and a dramatically better debater,” Rybak said. “But he’s the same person. It’s that authenticity that makes him what he is.”

The campaign in Iowa

Back on Dec. 27 at the local high school in Marshalltown, Iowa, I saw Obama address about 300 supporters and fence-sitters in the school cafeteria. Truth be told, I was less than impressed. The best speech I saw during the week I chased candidates around for the caucuses belonged to John McCain, who was trailing even Rudy Giuliani and Fred Thompson in the polls. Something about McCain’s appearance earlier that day at the Mason City airport led me to believe that he would secure the Republican nomination.

Ironically, the “authenticity” in Obama that Rybak sees was nowhere to be found that day

in Marshalltown, and Obama seemed oddly plastic compared to the frank and informal McCain. Dave Nagle, the former chair of the Iowa Democratic Party and a former U.S. congressman from Waterloo, had told me that Obama was in trouble. Obama wasn’t “getting out from behind the ropes,” in Nagle’s parlance.

What he meant was Obama wasn’t getting out from behind the podium and grabbing hands. He was stiff, cordial and scripted. In Iowa, where sitting down and having a cup of coffee at the local diner means more than all the issues combined, this could have been fatal.

In Marshalltown, Obama came in through a back door of the cafeteria, read from a laminated speech for roughly 20 minutes, took three questions and was gone.

“I have experience rooted in the real lives of real people,” he said at the outset, perhaps trying too hard to be regular folk. He talked about “steel workers’ rights, civil rights and children’s rights” to little effect.

One applause line was when Obama spoke of “bitter partisanship.” “We don’t need more heat, we need more light,” he said to cheers. He spoke of “the meaning of change, the meaning of hope” but never defined those meanings. Clearly, the candidate was working out some things. Or maybe I caught him on a bad day. Most of the undecideds I spoke to after the speech were still undecided.

Watching his Iowa victory speech on television just a few days later, I wasn’t sure it was even the same guy I had seen in Marshalltown.

The Target Center visit

Iowa was his pivotal moment, a stunning victory for him in a state that is almost all white. And the Obama myth and stature -- already four years in the making -- grew as he racked up delegates. By the time he came to Target Center in February, he was the cliché that fit: A rock star.

That some 20,000 folks lined block after block for hours on a cold Saturday to see a political speech should have signaled to

the remaining doubters that something was going on. On that day, he came in with a swagger and humility that did not disappoint a surprisingly wide range of supporters.

“I don’t know if you guys are aware, but we’ve got a caucus on Tuesday,” he said to raucous applause, a wry posture not apparent in Iowa. He referred to “my cousin, Dick Cheney,” alluding to a report that the two actually shared some bloodline.

Obama was funny, and relaxed, and apparently keenly aware of the lack of substance charge. He spoke for an hour, and delved into detail about health care, the economy and especially Iraq, at one point referring to himself as commander in chief.

But he also offered the kinds of phrases that do, in fact, inspire and ring in the ears. “We will invest in you and you will invest back in America.” “Change doesn’t happen from the top; I cannot do it myself.” “This is not about tearing down, but about lifting up.”

He concluded with a flourish that he used often around that time, about how the change was going to come. “Block by block, precinct by precinct, city by city, and state by state.”

To call the Target Center speech uplifting -- as it certainly was -- would be to miss the point. It was also deep.

And Obama invoked two change agents of the past, John F. Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, of course. He was introduced by Jane Freeman, the widow of former Minnesota Gov. Orville Freeman, who also served as agriculture secretary under JFK. The former first lady invoked the long-ago days of Camelot, and said that Obama reminded her of those heady days.

Obama himself referenced JFK, and, more pointedly, MLK. “I am running because of what Dr. King called ‘the urgency of now.’”

In Marshalltown, Obama had said, “Hope has been the guiding force behind the most important change in this country.” He then went on to list examples like the Revolutionary War, the abolition

of slavery and the civil rights movement.

After the near kiss-of-death his former pastor, the Rev. Wright delivered, fomenting racial politics at a time when Obama could least afford it, the latter two references would not be spoken Tuesday night. And not a word about Dr. King either.

Clinton battle a boon

Let it be said that Tuesday’s appearance at Xcel was a triumph in every way. For starters, the notion that Obama would come to St. Paul, the site of the Republican National Convention some 90 days from now, was a stroke of genius on someone’s part. It had the effect of marking some kind of territory, and Republicans went batty at the notion.

The RNC committee put out a press release that offered this lame dig: “The Xcel Energy Center hasn’t hosted anyone who skates and flips as much as Senator Obama since the U.S. Figure Skating Championships were in town and the Minnesota Wild were eliminated from the hockey playoffs.” And Tuesday afternoon, Gov. Tim Pawlenty mumbled something at a press conference about Obama being the most liberal U.S. senator and his values being outside “the mainstream.”

Perhaps. But anyone who can draw a crowd that fills a hockey arena while thousands more are turned away at the door must be resonating with someone.

The scoreboard at the Xcel was tuned to MSNBC early in the evening, and the cable network aired a surprisingly flat speech from McCain, live from New Orleans. The McCain from Iowa was nowhere to be found.

By contrast, Obama’s speech was notable for its passion and authority -- even though it was every bit as scripted as McCain’s. “While John McCain can legitimately tout moments of independence from his party in the past,” Obama said, “such independence has not been the hallmark of his presidential campaign.”

Read the complete story at www.minnpost.com.

The Daily Glean: Nobama edition

DAVID BRAUER

[Note: don't freak! We're putting all the Obama stuff in our package about the St. Paul rally, so here's the rest of the local news you may have overlooked in the glare of the mega-media event.]

Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson won't face a full-scale legislative auditor investigation — on a technicality, methinks. Her alleged misdeeds — pressuring subordinates to file cases for publicity, not legal, reasons — didn't involve public purse, AP reports. Legislative Auditor Jim Nobles typically gets great press, but this shows the limits of the office; he's not the state's chief prosecutor. Nobles noted that no unethical actions resulted; in effect, the afflicted attorneys' ability to stand up to Swanson may have helped get her off the hook.

More Swanson: The daily editorial pages offer a split verdict. The PiPress repeatedly notes that Nobles' investigation was "narrow," and doesn't "end the conversation about how well the Attorney General's office is running." Still, "conflict in a hard-driving workplace is inevitable" and Swanson "knows the difference" between "conflict and misconduct." The Strib says "Minnesotans deserve better" and the findings "are not the exoneration that Swanson's office portrays them to be." The editorial dings her for managing a staff "who feel more comfortable talking to bloggers or reporters."

Yesterday, the story was

Priuses being in short supply; today, it's Ford Rangers. The PiPress's John Welbes reports that the St. Paul-made truck's sales were down 25 percent in May — because they couldn't make 'em fast enough. Surging demand for the small truck has reduced inventory, and the local plant — slated to be mothballed — might add Saturday shifts to its current five-day, 10-hour-a-day schedule. Is there a chance the plant could be saved? The union says Ford will fine-tune its restructuring plan this summer.

AP reports that MnDOT closed another bridge. The 67-year-old span, over the Mississippi River at Winona, has rusted and corroded gusset plates and will stay shuttered during peak driving season. A MnDOT official calls it "clearly a precautionary measure." The nearest open bridges are 25 and 35 miles away. "With gas prices, it's going to be tough," says one commuter, but it's "better than falling into the river." Minnesota Monitor's Chris Steller notes that Minnesota's new 150th birthday stamp features the bridge.

MPR's Sea Stachura says UC-Berkeley structural engineering expert has determined that heavy construction materials and pavement brought down the I-35W bridge. Professor Hassan Astaneh has been a favorite PiPress source, and he's affiliated with the National Transportation Safety Board.

Fascinating feature from City Pages' Jonathan Kaminsky on debt collectors' worst nightmare: a Minneapolis attorney who successfully sues the financial bounty hunters. Tough-talking, linebacker-like

lawyer Pete Barry is a terrific main character, but the story's surprising lure is a history of debt-collection regulation, including a not-very-flattering look at Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank, who comes off here as the collector's friend. Didja know? The debt collectors' trade group is headquartered in Edina.

File this one away: the Twin Cities Daily Planet's Rich Broderick says ex-Gov. Jesse Ventura is "all but certain" to run for U.S. Senate. Broderick, a St. Paul activist, former third-party endorsed candidate and longtime writer/journalist, cites sources close to the former gov.

A little mercury? Like lemon, say state officials, who "slightly" raised fish-consumption limits from Minnesota rivers and lakes, the PiPress's Dennis Lein notes. The state has once-a-week and once-a-month categories; now you can enjoy both in a given time period, a state health department researcher says. No mercury-loathing environmentalists are quoted. The state has also begun issuing advisories for PFOS, an ultra-persistent 3M chemical that's contaminated east-metro water supplies.

For you meat-eaters, the Strib goes nuts — front-page Metro — with news that Manny's Steakhouse is moving five blocks from the Hyatt Regency to the revamped Foshay Tower. Guess we know where Strib executives eat. The move to the downtown core happens in August, Rick Nelson reports.

Schoolkid's dream; parents' nightmare: The Strib's Norman Draper says Brooklyn Center whacked the last three days

of its school year for budgetary reasons. Although news to readers, Draper says the school board made the change April 14 and let parents know. The move saves \$120,000 in overtime; teachers are trained during their regular schedules instead of the summer. There will be some in-school daycare, and the state ed department signed off on the 171-day schedule.

Remember that SUV that crashed into a Stillwater river two months ago, killing two? Turns out the driver mistakenly stepped on the gas instead of the brake pedal, the PiPress's Mary Divine reports. Investigators say no alcohol or drugs were involved; the four natives of India had rented a car for a sightseeing trip. A Stillwater cop says it's "one of the saddest cases" he's ever seen.

The PiPress's Dave Hanners says the man accused of the May 4 rape near the U tried to commit suicide two days later. Edward Karls wound up in a mental-health unit before he was arrested for the crime; he was released from prison just six days before the crime. Now charged, Karls had bail set at \$150,000, though prosecutors are trying to get that eliminated.

Nort spews: Terrific lead from the PiPress's Phil Miller — "Barack Obama outdrew the Twins on Tuesday night, which figures. Obama held a rally. The Twins didn't." Minnesota lost 5-3 to Baltimore, falling a game and a half back of the White Sox. But the Lynx continued their WNBA rampage, moving to 5-0 after defeating Atlanta 85-81.

Read more election coverage and more of the Daily Glean at www.minnpost.com.

I loved the band. I marched two years, 1972 and 1973, and it changed my life. Now, making music is one of the most joyous and social things I do. It involves me in life in ways that would not be available to me if I had kept quiet.

COMMUNITY VOICES

How 'pushy women' joined boys in the band

By MARILEE JOHNSON

In 1971, I was 30 years old, working as a nurse at the University Hospitals and taking a class titled, "Life Styles of Educated American Women." One day, while studying in the library, a young woman I had never before seen burst into the room and demanded of me whether I thought it was fair that the University of Minnesota marching band was all male. I said, "No, of course it's not fair." We decided to form a group. In my naiveté, I thought all we needed to do was ask the band to let girls march and they would say, "OK."

I had no idea what I was getting into. I'd never been a joiner, but several life experiences prepared me for this role. I had been raised by parents

who assured me I could be anything I wanted, I had played a horn from fourth grade through high school and both my husband and my brother were marching-band alumni. If they were allowed, why wasn't I?

The group we formed was called "The Commission on the Status of Women Students," a small student group but actively supported by mentors in the academic community.

Integration took a year. Meetings were held with the band on one side of the room; the boys in the band grouped around their leader, protecting him from the "pushy women." The whole proceedings were moderated by a university official.

'Too strenuous ... not enough uniforms ...'

We were told women would destroy the fraternal spirit of the band and the band's marching style. It would be too strenuous for girls, we don't have enough uniforms, we already have a girls' marching band, girls might get pregnant on band trips and, finally, no girls want to be in the band. This last statement made me mad!

I stood that day and said to the assembled group that if they had no age limit, I would join their (insert your own adjective here) band. I had not played a horn for 12 years and didn't even own a horn at the time I made this little announcement.

Ultimately, the reason the band integrated had to do with

it being against the law to deny equal opportunity on the basis of race or sex in a tax-supported institution. That, plus the university promised to buy the band new uniforms.

I loved the band. I marched two years, 1972 and 1973, and it changed my life. Now, making music is one of the most joyous and social things I do. It involves me in life in ways that would not be available to me if I had kept quiet.

Marilee Johnson lives in Minneapolis' Prospect Park neighborhood and still plays the horn. This article is reprinted with permission from the Minnesota Women's Press, where it first appeared.

Want to add your voice?

If you're interested in joining the discussion by writing a Community Voices article, email Susan Albright at salbright@minnpost.com.

MinnPostⁱⁿPrint

MinnPost in Print includes highlights of MinnPost.com, a new daily providing high-quality journalism for people everywhere who care about Minnesota. MinnPost in Print can be printed by downloading a copy from a PDF

available at www.minnpost.com. We encourage readers to share copies of MinnPost in Print with colleagues and customers. Visit the website for audio, videos and more stories. We believe that high-quality journalism is not just a consumer

good; it's a community asset that contributes to the health of our democracy and the quality of our lives. Please consider making a donation to MinnPost, a nonprofit enterprise.

Joel Kramer, CEO and editor

Contact us: info@minnpost.com • Advertising: swaterman@minnpost.com • Membership/donations: members@minnpost.com