

1

SPEECH FOR PHILADELPHIA: October 12, 2008

The wHITE HOUSE HAS THE WHOLE WORLD IN A FIT OF RAGE. That is supposed to make us safer? Instead of A LISTING OF ALL OUR problems AND SINCE I AM SPEAKING TO THE CHOIR I I would like to show Y OU INSTEAD, A LITTLE BIT OF how wonderful it was to walk across America, and how interesting Americans are in every town along the way. I enjoyed every day I was WALKING and I am enjoying the reliving of it as I go through my journals.

This morning I would like to take you on a week-end to a tiny town in Texas, to show what such a town is like. So sit back and relax and enjoy a trip that you would probably never take for yourself, but that will give you a picture of a different place and people that live there. I cannot resist, before I am finished, HOWEVER to try

and sell you on MY MISSION OF funding of elections at the state level.WHICH I BELIEVE CAN SAVE THE WORLD.

The name of the town IS Toyah, TEXAS. an old railroad town, where the ruins of a once-beautiful main street stand like a western movie set. Berta Begay offered shelter to me on THAT walk across the U.

S. for campaign finance reform.

As it IS Berta owns an extra house across the road that she keeps for visitors, usually affiliated with her church, and, though she had never met me, or even heard of me, she was glad to welcome me and let me stay in her little house. It was a little, yellow bungalow near the railroad tracks. The kitchen has linoleum floors creatively held down in strips with upholstery tacks to the wavy wooden floor. It is cooled only by the open doors and the overhead fans. The yard is dirt with a little grass, and everything about the house is well-ordered and clean. She said I would be welcome to stay there for as long as I need ED, if she could first have a chance to clean it and make sure the linens were fresh.

That would be my evening home for the next several days as I walked the final miles to the Pecos river, which would mark my completion of the Far West. Berta, was a beautiful Native American and Hispanic woman, who each evening brought us a beautiful basket of bread and A wonderful SUPPER CASEROLE and told me about her family. Her daughter, whose name is Misty Moon, was about to graduate from A LOCAL PUBLIC college as an agricultural scientist, and her son, whose name is Dearheart, is a medical assistant at a community hospital. Her husband, Steve, is an expert machinist at an auto parts deal in Peco. Berta is the postmistress of a nearby town. She is Rightfully very proud of her family, as they have come a long way in one generation thanks to their hard work in a land of opportunity.

There is a collection of lavender antique bottles in the little house. Berta collects them in the desert as her mother did before her. The pharmacy in Pecos, thirty MILES away, has a nice collection of them also, left over from the days when Berta's mother traded bottles for

4

medicine for the children—that's how far and how fast they have come.

Berta helped introduce me at Toyah's tinY city hall, which also serves as a chUrch for thE town. The two women clerks there invited me to speak the next evening. As I walked into town the next day at thE end of my ten miles, there were HAND-MADE pOsters up at The ga S station and THE general Store out on the highway, promoting my talk. Government moves fast in Toyah. Many townspeople brought food to the evening event. Berta broughT deliCious cold snacks made from prickly pear cactus paddles. I saved some for breakfast the next morning. If I ever doubt that I am a tough old nut, I can remember that I had cactus for breakfast in TOyah, Texas. IT is very tart and tasty, by the way.

In the baCk of the room IN WHICH I gave my talk, there were a few patient children trying to make sense of what We were saying. I am sure they were only there because theRe are not too many opportunities to hear speakers come through town and their parents thought it would be goOd for them. It made me remember,

5

When I was a child in Laconia, New Hampshire, I was that child in the back of the room, so I could empathize. In Laconia, visiting speakers came to town all in a summer crowd of speakers and entertainers called the chautauqua meeting. A big tent was erected on the Pearl Street Playgrounds, the largest open space in town. Speeches, entertainment, and pot luck dinners were planned for the whole week.

I went for two reasons. The fun reason was that there were dramas performed—like the villain foreclosing on a mortgage and putting the farmer's pure daughter in harm's way. I loved drama, and got myself a part in any play put on by the Women's Club, the Elks, or The Grange OF IACONIA. I had a scrapbook of movie star pictures that was considered the best in high school. So I was in the front row when the Chautauqua dramas were presented. I did not care for the way they portrayed rural people as rubes, and I once told them so afterwards. "Farmers don't talk that way in our town," I said. My uncle Charlie was a farmer so I knew. Adults went to hear the political speakers in order to learn something about the world outside of our little town of

6

Laconia. (I am talking before radio or talking pictures had been invented, you understand.) They certainly learned that the railroad monopolies were ruining the small farmer, for instance. The great progressive-populist movement had begun at such meetings in the early 1890s. And great, fist-waving speeches at these meetings kept people informed, interested and fired up.

My Mama believed that our family was too poor for any of us children to ever attend college. She decided that the Chautauqua would be a place where we could hear great lectures and get some education. She saved to buy us all three girls, tickets, and we indeed sat there and got educated alongside Mama. I remember how she would later describe the salient points of these speeches to her two friends, Lizzie and Delia.

The Chautauqua was an important place where you would meet candidates and ideas. The idea of spending a lot of money on a political campaign was unheard of. Of course, IN THESE DAYS THE internet has great

7

potential for getting information to people without cost, but there is no substitute for meeting someone in the flesh, shaking a hand, looking in an eye, hearing the timbre of a voice and seeing how a person does with other people and with hard questions. It is precisely the kind of interaction created in clean money election systems. and today we watched the great debate of our two presidential hopefuls, to see how tired 74 year old McCain compared with the suave, elegant thirty-year younger Obama beside him.

After my talk at the Toyah City Hall, which included a chat I made to show how political Influence flows from campaign contributions to public laws, there were heartfelt comments from the townspeople about how they could no longer defend their town and how it was suffering. ^{pause} At the end of the evening, Berta folded a letter into my hand. It was a long and beautifully written letter about her religious beliefs, which are remarkable, and about her town. The letter detailed how political corruption was literally dismantling her town, selling off the beautiful historic buildings for their bricks, and changing the rail service that had once been

the lifeblood of the town. Her letter concluded "God has a mission for all of us, through we often don't know the details, so therefore we trust. When you pray, please remember this little town." Well I do indeed remember in my prayers this community of kindness and reverence, and I remember also Berta and her family and her neighbors.

Berta loves her country and has worked hard to take advantage of the opportunities provides. But she cries for the poor people of her town. Under her backyard tree where we dined, she took my hands in hers and said that she understood my mission: "Everthing depends on cleaning up the system," she said.

The people need and deserve good leadership, but leaders cannot truly lead. If they are chained by bonds of obligation to special interests – especially when those interests run counter to the people's interests.

What Berta feels, and what so many people along the road feel, is political loneliness: they have no leaders they can believe in. They feel abandoned by those who have the skills, education and resources to lead. With all the progress we have gained during the modern era, let us not think that we are necessarily better off than the tribal village whose elders gather at the Council fire in an evening to discuss the needs of the village and its people. and to manage the common resources of the village to serve their needs. Where is our council fire?

Berta and a thousand people along any road you wander down will tell you correctly that the community needs a council fire, too. They do not have one. They do not have the power to manage their own affairs.

An old woman, obviously in very impoverished circumstances, pressed a can of government – issued food into my hands. She did not think I looked hungry, but she wanted to give me something to help me on my way to Washington, so that it would be her trek, too.

Many others did the same, telling me that I would speak for them when I got to Washington. I REFUSED ALL MONEY UNTIL ONE SINGLE MOTHER BURST INTO TEARS WHEN I REFUSED THE TWO ONE DOLLAR BILLS SHE EXTENDED TO ME. "I HAVE SAVED FROM MY TWO PART TIME JOBS TO GIVE YOU THIS AS MY PART OF Y;OUR WALK," SHE SAID. WE THOUGHT ABOUT THIS AND DECIDED FROM THEN ON I WOULD ACCEPT ANYTHING UNDER \$20.

Of all their troubles, the unkindest is their abandonment by a political system that has been captured by the wealthiest of the wealthy elite. That is what they perceive. There is no one for them To complain to who will listen, except THIS crazy old woman walking by.

So what must we do? I think we see it already, as public campaign financing Spreads state-by-state, pushing out the systems of corruption. It is hOw the progressive reform movement spread across the nation

11

at the beginning of the 20th Century. It is happening again at the beginning of the 21st. We must take encouragement from the fact that public financing passed in MAine, Arizona THROUGH CITIZEN'S INITIATIVE and NOW BY THE LEGISLATURE OF Connecticut. When the governor in that state landed in jail the Senate said, let's do it, and they will have clean elections in 2009. I hope we can all work to make it happen in every state and then in Congress before the end of this first decade of the 21st Century.

Then we can celebrate that great victory sometime around my 100th birthday. Here is how public financing works. Candidates collect a certain number of qualifying signatures and small contributions in their district.....going from house to house. Someone who has long been active in their community, or in the children's school, or their church will have an easy time of it, and they would not need to kneel down to a wealthy donor in order to run for office. You, too, can run for office, if that is your desire. Once the candidate receives the required level of community support, the state provides the candidate with sufficient funds to run

his or her campaign. The participating candidate in this voluntary system, must agree to neither raise nor spend any other money including that of his own. This neatly gets special interest contributors right out of the picture. Throughout America, we must sell the story of what good things are happening in these reformed states. We must be a new Chautauqua, rolling like the thunder of a needed rain through America's villages and cities, where the people thirst for a fair and just democracy. We must spread the gospel of public financing of elections, and also to give hope to the Berta Begays across our land who have nearly given up on the idea of democracy in America. This is an opportunity of the soul, by the soul, and for the soul, and all our deepest values are at stake. Never have we been in a position where we had more to gain or more to lose. . Our environment hangs in the balance.—scientists say we are now in what may be called the sixth major global extinction of species, and this one is man made and, more precisely, it is the product of political corruption. Our social justice values hang in the balance. Our idea of a strong middle class—which has been the rock undergirding of our democracy—hangs in

the balance. And so we had better all hang together, as Ben Franklin said, or we shall indeed hang seperately.

Thank you.