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IMPRESSIONS OF THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

by Pam David

It's been a long way to Atlanta...and not just in miles! From demonstrating outside the DNC in 1984 to the March on Washington...and now inside the 1988 Democratic National Convention...42 open lesbian and gay Jackson delegates/alternates and committee members representing the tens of thousands of lesbians and gay men who voted for Jesse Jackson...who voted for a political agenda of peace and justice, of civil rights, of lesbian and gay rights.

Lines, lines and more lines—to register, to eat, to get into meetings, for the shuttle bus to the Omni, to go through security, to get credentialed. Waiting in 100 degree heat, tempers getting short, confusion reigns...but keeping our eyes on the prize.

The Lesbian/Gay Caucus...being asked to endorse Dukakis the Sunday before the convention opened, countering with a resolution to pressure the DNC and the candidate on gay civil rights/AIDS/open and equal participation in the Democratic Party...winning the Dukakis supporters over, slowly and painfully moving from confrontation to common ground, a process still ongoing.

In the Omni Monday for the opening of the Convention...a cross between a sports arena and a Hollywood production, the podium jutting out halfway across the floor, the California delegation relegated to the bleachers.

Visibility, or the lack of it. Thousands of delegates, even more media, more blacks and Latinos than ever before, equal numbers of men and women...but where are the dykes and faggots? We may be everywhere, but how will the world know? Grassroots know-how coming to the rescue...hand-lettered signs "Lesbians/Gays for Jackson," "Lesbian/Gay Voters." We pass out hundreds of Silence=Death stickers—they're on the podium, on Dukakis delegates, on Jackson supporters—every night.

Tuesday night, the platform battles begin. How can anyone be against No First Use of nuclear weapons? Alan Cranston, a solid anti-nuclear vote in the Senate, speaks against No First Use, disappointing many supporters, being booed...Jackson delegates chant, "vote your conscience" and the Dukakis delegates, held in line by their delegation whips, can't look us in the eye. They know they're voting the wrong way; a few cross over, but the final tally is predictable.

Palestinian rights, Middle East peace...a historic debate on the floor of the DNC. Polls showed most delegates supported Palestinian self-determination, mutual recognition, but the minority plank was withdrawn before a vote (part of the Dukakis/Jackson compromise in which nine minority planks became part of the Platform).

Thanks to Jackson, open lesbians and gays finally get on the podium Tuesday evening, though not on prime time. Speaking for the test ban treaty, Jackson delegate Karen Clark's first words are "As a lesbian..." And later, Keith Gann, also a Jackson delegate speaking eloquently on the AIDS plank, said, "I am your brother, your son, your lover, and a person with AIDS." On the floor, we hold the Rainbow flag aloft, stretching out a hand-sewn banner of a pink triangle on a black cloth, proud and determined.

Later the same evening, Jesse brings us to our feet and brings tears to our eyes...the eloquence and dignity of his children...the tribute to, the presence of Rosa Parks...the quilt. "Gays and lesbians, you are right in your fight



JACKSON DELEGATES PAM DAVID, BARBARA CAMERON AND PAT NORMAN SHARE A MOMENT WITH THEIR CANDIDATE.

(Rink Foto)

against discrimination and for a cure for AIDS, but you cannot win alone..." I jump out of my seat, waving my Lesbians/Gays for Jackson sign. The "L" and "G" words have been spoken, we have been recognized, included in spite of attempts to keep us invisible. Jackson has kept the door open for us, for others who have been marginalized. We will not forget!

Walking to the Omni on Wednesday, we passed two dykes in the street. In a big southern drawl, they say, "We saw you on TV last night (holding a Lesbians/Gays for Jackson sign). You did good!" We felt good that our attempts to be visible meant something to someone beside ourselves.

The week goes on, victories mingle with disappointment and frustration. We've come such a long way to get here. We can see the top of the hill, but the summit is still out of reach. We hope for a miracle—how can anyone not think Jackson should be President after hearing him speak Tuesday night? But the numbers aren't yet with us, and the vote goes to Dukakis...the blue Dukakis posters replace the

red Jackson signs.

In the last meeting of the Lesbian/Gay Caucus, we are again asked to endorse Dukakis. The Jackson delegates are divided; none of us want Bush in the White House, but Dukakis/Bentsen isn't easy to get excited about. For so many months, the comparison has been between a progressive and a liberal. Even Dukakis delegates agree Jackson is better on our issues. But now, the contest shifts to Dukakis versus Bush. It's a transition we have to go through...all the Jackson supporters...all of us. We can't stop organizing in our communities, in the Rainbow Coalition, but we can't stand four more years of Reagan surrogates in the White House. Most of us know we'll vote for Dukakis come November, but our criticisms are real and must be heard.

Thursday evening...the acceptance speech...mention of AIDS, but our presence, our struggle—and those of many others—not acknowledged, yet a lot to agree with: on Central America; South Africa; infant mortality; plant closures—still striving to find the common ground.

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