

Evergreen HS Band and Colorguard Blog

Tuesday, January 27, 2009

Day 14: Random thoughts

Posted: 5:51 PM 2 comments

Romance of the Open Road

Ahh...the romance of the open road. (Cue in the strings) The soft pastel sunrises, snow, scenic vistas, rolling corn fields, spectacular sunsets, moonlight, and exploding meteors! Doesn't that sound lovely? But don't forget the 16 hour days of travelling, filled with truck stops, rest room areas, and fast food stops. Orange-Mango Rockstar, coffee, and travel food sustained us. Every challenge we encountered became fodder for the blog.

We travelled 2,816 miles in 4 ½ days to meet up with the kids in Hanover Maryland. On our trip home we headed further south hoping to avoid the negative temperatures and for some much needed new scenery. We drove 3,034 miles in 5 ½ days. So, we drove a total of 5,850 miles in 10 days! We narrowly missed pass closures, accidents, a forty car pileup, and incapacitating fog, ice, and snow storms. Penny, our Penske truck, with the help of Travis our mechanic, did a great job. She held precious cargo, so we drove her slow and steady and stopped when conditions became too risky.

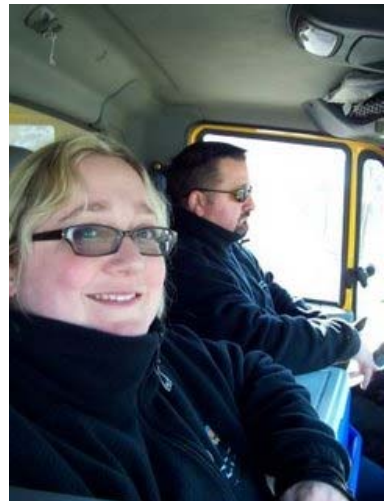
Wyoming

On Day 12, I commented to Charlie that this trip had felt too easy, like the other shoe was about to drop. He glared at me like he wanted to slap a big piece of duct tape over my mouth. Twenty minutes later we crossed the Wyoming border and hit a wall of snow. It was dark and our lights lit up the densely falling snow like a halo. We couldn't see the road, so we used the road side reflectors as our guide. We saw cars and semis around us driving and sliding off the road into corn pastures. Charlie took the first exit off the freeway that we could find using the reflector method and stopped for the night. Fortunately we found a hotel. By morning the plows had cleared the roads and laid gravel and de-icer.

Truck Driving Culture

It has been fascinating to experience the long haul truck driver culture. Poets go to the high desert to find themselves because let's face it, there is nothing else there. The same goes for long distance truck drivers. I once had a truck driver tell me that drivers are a little off because they look through bug guts all day! They live a solitary existence and when they gather at truck stops it is time to share road conditions and tell stories! But, be careful. Don't discuss politics unless you are knowledgeable, because these guys listen to talk radio all day. Women truck drivers are a rarity. I only saw two on our two week adventure. Last night I met a female driver from Alabama and it was hard to tell who was more delighted to meet the other. She wore a baseball cap, camouflage jacket, jeans, and boots.

She looked like she had been out hunting. The male drivers I met were extremely polite. They even held the bathroom doors open for me. Which I admit is a touch out of my comfort zone! I enjoyed stopping at the truck stops and exploring their bewildering array of merchandise. Different regions catered to different tastes and audiences. For example, biscuits were everywhere in West Virginia. The McDonald's were empty and everyone



was lined up outside the Tudor's Biscuit World.

Pioneers

I come from pioneer stock, which is a nice way to say that I come from a long line of tough female battleaxes. I tried to imagine what their journey across the country had entailed. What would they think of their descendent cruising along on an asphalt freeway in a giant yellow Penske truck, listening to music, drinking energy drinks, and talking on her pink cell phone? Not to mention writing about her adventure every night and sharing it with those back home. It was amazing to drive through the areas where they had traveled by wagon and oxen.

Day 6

The Washington DC tour filled me with hope. Sunday was my favorite day of the tour. I was exposed to the best qualities of the human spirit. We started the day at Arlington Cemetery and I was overwhelmed by the sacrifice so many have made for our freedom and democracy. When we started pulling out of the Arlington Cemetery a black SUV suddenly blocked the road. A man in a tan trench coat stepped out with his left hand pressed against his ear, listening to the chatter in his ear piece. He looked like something out of a movie except his trench coat belt was pulled loose and dragging on the asphalt behind him. So, the rumor we heard was true. President Elect Obama was going to visit the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier! The kids poured out of their buses and in slow motion a huge overweight black guard starting running towards the kids to get them back on the sidewalk. We all exited the bus like a group of 5 year olds going to Disney Land. I stood there excitedly waving as the convoy of police on motorcycles, limos, and SUV's passed by.

Next stop, the Smithsonian. I spent the afternoon examining scientific innovation and masterpieces of art. We even went up in the Old Post Office tower to look out over the city. We watched the crowd of people gather to watch the free concert at the Lincoln Memorial. I made the mistake of asking a lonely park ranger about invasive plant species, so I got held up for a while and received a free plant book. We made our way to the concert through people that were smiling, singing along, and dancing. DC was a huge celebration. For a few days, we were all friends and hope filled the air.

We ended the evening at a dinner theater. It was a Duke Ellington review. I loved it. It was pure kitschy cheese and the performers knew it. Ron shook his head at the choreography, but that was part of the fun. I laughed until I cried during a couple numbers and the performers flashed me a knowing grin. It was a perfect day.

Man of Mystery?

I have a theory about our bus driver Sean Sutton, if that is even his real name. Charlie claims that I have been watching too much Burn Notice and The Unit, but I think he was our assigned man of mystery. He's a beautiful muscular black man that moves like he was in Special Forces. His cover story included that he used to own his own body guard business and that he protected celebrities. But here's my proof, he kept answering calls from 'his wife' all morning and didn't even look surprised when the agent suddenly blocked our way at the Arlington Cemetery. Even if I'm wrong, which I probably am, we had a body guard to help keep us safe.

Returning Penny

Well, we just got back from dropping off Penny, our beloved Penske truck, at the Penske dealer. While we were turning in the truck they went on the website and laughed about the metal palm tree picture. They tricked me out with Penske mints, pens, and a flashlight in a special case. Thank you Jesse!

Thank you

Thank you for travelling with me on my journey. Your calls, texts, and emails meant a great deal to me. When the truck froze up, instead of getting upset, I was busy writing to you, while Charlie was outside kicking the tires and vividly expressing his frustration. If you would like to see more of our trip I have posted our pictures on my facebook account.

Happy Trails to You!

Laura Heldreth

Monday, January 26, 2009

Day 13: Arctic Blast part 2

Posted: **5:48 AM 0 comments**

Today we pushed slow and steady through snow and ice. Cars and semis have been slipping off the road all over the place. On the east bound lane of I-80 we saw a jackknifed semi and three accidents behind because people ~~w~~leaving enough space. These two pictures should sum up our day.

We will miss the 4 pm arrival time today due the road conditions and visibility issues. Last night we stayed in Tremonton, Utah.

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth



Saturday, January 24, 2009

Day 12: Gratitude

Posted: **11:51 PM 2 comments**



I've spent seven days in a Penske truck with my husband and a GPS unit that sounds like a mildly irritated British woman. The dashboard looks like a convenience store and a rogue dill pickle slipped into the ice chest and has added its special flavor to the exteriors of our mango orange Rockstar energy drinks and bottles of water. My calves and ankles are swollen from all the sitting and salty food. And I feel grateful. I was able to talk a security guard into letting me into the Washington National Cathedral after it had closed Wednesday night. It is the fifth largest cathedral in the world and President Obama had visited earlier in the day. I took a moment to look up at the flying buttresses cast in shadow and to utter a sincere thank you. Evergreen Marching Band and Colorguard has changed my life.

My fellow booster moms' have taught me to provide my own acceptance, love, respect and not desire anyone else's approval. This concept has set me free. I've also learned how to cook for 250 people in a parking lot in the pouring rain. And most recently I have learned how to drive a Penske truck named Penny. EMB has become an extension of my family.

So here it is day 12 of my journey and what have I learned?

1. Beating a truck's transmission with a hammer can fix it.
2. How to drive a Penske truck in a straight line and not pass other vehicles.
3. Diesel is tinted green and it really stinks up your hands and clothes.
4. I gathered the courage to face my fear of crowds and tight spaces on parade day. As a result I was able to ride the St. Louis Arch tram and stay calm.
5. My husband and I are a good fit even in a Penske truck.

6. A new understanding of the USA!

(Courte

7. Our group has excellent taste in road trip snacks!

Here is a small sample of our conversation after we climbed back into the truck after our Oasis visit, and we drove into the golden tangerine sunset.

"Who would ever want to turn the heater on high?" Charlie snidely remarked.

"Me. I'm freezing!" I exclaimed rubbing my hands together.

"It's just way too hot," he adds.

"I need to warm up," I demand as I place my ice cold hand on his face to make my point.

He looks unimpressed and firmly sets the heater dial to the middle between the blue and red stripes. I look at him and reach over and turn the dial well into the red stripe. He glares at me.

10 minutes later when I am warmed up, I exclaim, "I'm too hot!"

And he glares back at me with his favorite 'I told you so' expression. And I grin back in satisfaction.

We plan on arriving at the school on Monday at 4 pm, if the weather cooperates with us. I hope to see you all there.

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth

P.S. I'm babysitting a lost green and pink stuffed hippo with a green and gold collar. Please let me know if you are missing her! Thanks.

Day 12: Mexico?

Posted: 10:31 PM 0 comments



We pulled into the Oasis today...in Colby, Kansas! If you look carefully you can see the steel cables holding up these metal palm trees.

We travelled 711 miles today and reached Cheyenne, Wyoming. The weather is snowy and 3 degrees. I might get to put chains on Penny tomorrow!

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth

Friday, January 23, 2009

Day 11: St. Louis

Posted: 8:47 PM 4 comments



This morning as we were pulling out of Lexington, Kentucky I closed my eyes. When I opened them it was three hours later and we were in Louisville. We arrived in St. Louis at 2:30 and explored the St. Louis Gateway to the West Arch. It was amazing! We rode the tiny tram up to the top to look out over St. Louis. Then, we got back in the Penske and started heading towards Kansas City. When we stopped at a rest area we encountered a new device that pours water and soap over your hands and then dries them, so you don't have to move. What will they think of next? The weigh station pointed out that one of our front headlights just went out, so we will be stopping by the Kansas City Penske shop tomorrow. We travelled 578 miles today. We are spending the night in Independence, Missouri. It is 11 degrees and snowing. We are excited to get home.

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth

P.S. Steve Howard, thank you for granting my wish by sending me a copy of Appalachian Spring!

Posts from Colleen Earls' Facebook site

Posted: **9:40 AM 0 comments**

Copies of Colleen's facebook posts are now available on this blog.

- [Tuesday \(1/20\)](#) | [Monday \(1/19\)](#) | [Sunday \(1/18\)](#)

Thursday, January 22, 2009

The GPS Unit Turned Against Us!

Posted: **8:18 PM 1 comments**

There's no place like home! (click.) There's no place like home! (click.) There's no place like home! (click.)

There is no place like home. Tonight we stopped in Lexington, Kentucky; Home of the Kentucky Derby. We drove through the Appalachian Mountains and they reminded me of an episode of Bob Ross' The Joy of Painting. I imagined his afro bouncing around him as he dabbed his bristle brush in a mix of pink and brown and dashed it against the surface of the canvas to highlight the tips of the deciduous forest. I wished that I could listen to Appalachian Spring by Aaron Copeland but bluegrass was a suitable substitute. Today was sunny and warm—a balmy 47 degrees!

Our new pathway contrasts strongly with the I-80 East corridor that supports the transportation industry. Every stop today was a new adventure. I was introduced to Tudor's Biscuit World with their 30 varieties of biscuit sandwiches. They were named after sports teams and celebrities like Mr. T. When I asked if the secret to their biscuits was cream or butter, the checker drawled, "Dahlin, butter ain't touched these here biscuits!" I was firmly put in my place. And they were chewy and delicious.

We passed up Hillbilly Hot Dogs because I was feeling a touch queasy from all the curvy roads, but later we decided to try out Smokey Valley Truck Stop recommended by Guy Fieri on Food Network. Do not program the address listed on the Food Network website unless you want to visit the tiny fading town of Olive Hill. When we asked a tired looking couple for directions this is what they had to say:

"Go down to the end of the street and take a left, and then take another left, and then take a right at the speedway," the lady drawled while puffing on her cigarette that filled the Penske cab with smoke.

Her husband shook his head emphatically in disagreement and said, "No, go to the red blinking light and then take another left."

"Oh yeah, go past the BP and take a left," she added with a smile and flicked her cigarette.

When we finally figured out which left and right to take, we found the Smokey Valley Truck Stop right beside the freeway where we had started our detour! Smokey Valley Truck Stop is not a truck stop, but if you want to experience a Kentucky diner this is the place. I ordered the turkey dinner with dressing, fried whole potatoes, pickled beets, turnip greens, fresh baked biscuits without a touch of butter all for \$6.25. And people in the area swarm to this culinary hot spot.

Tomorrow we are visiting The St. Louis Gateway Arch.

Reporting in from the open road,
Laura Heldreth

Road trip!

Posted: **6:08 AM 1 comments**

This morning we are leaving Edinburg, Virginia for the outskirts of St. Louis, Missouri. From there we will head to Denver, Colorado and Ogden, Utah. The first portion of our journey felt like a migration to Washington DC. Now, we have decided to slow our pace to 9 hours of driving per day. We will be stopping at points of interest. If you have any suggestions please text or email us your ideas.



Laura Heldreth

Wednesday, January 21, 2009

Evergreen band returns from D.C.

Posted: **2:48 PM 1 comments**

Members of the Evergreen High School marching band got a well-earned, warm welcome home by family and friends at the Portland airport today.

Arriving on three separate flights, they emerged from the deep freeze of Washington, D.C. , and the profound history of Tuesday's presidential inaugural parade for Barack Obama. "It was just an amazing experience. I wish I'd get to do it all over again," said Kaylyn Wellington, 16, a sophomore student and colorguard member.

Even with the cold? "Even with the cold," she said.

Read the full article BY HOWARD BUCK, COLUMBIAN STAFF WRITER

View the KGW news video also on 1/21

Parade Day

Posted: **12:36 PM 1 comments**

Seeing President Obama and his wife smile, wave, and give a big 'thumbs up' to our band put a spring in our step and made the hours of freezing bodies worth it and then some. Turning the corner and seeing The White House lit up in all its glory was a thrill we all will remember for the rest of our lives! I'm so proud of our students—they are a class-act.

Steve Kuske

Brrr...It's Parade Day!

Posted: **12:32 PM 0 comments**

This morning Charlie and I woke up at 3:15 am to get ready for our 4 am chaperone bus departure to the Inaugural Parade. We grabbed a bagged breakfast the hotel had kindly prepared for us. It consisted of a packaged blueberry muffin, a fruit cup, and orange juice. We used our Click and Park Inaugural Bus Pass to park on 13th and K Street, which was a mere five blocks from the parade route. Then at 5 am we joined the massive group waiting to go through the security check point. The excited crowd chatted, did the wave, and sang Lean On Me and other songs together. Three hours later the check point opened and the crowd started to line the parade route.

The weather was clear, cold, and windy. Even with two pairs of thick socks my feet ached with the cold. The crowd happily chatted with each other. I met people from all over the world. Metal gate barricades blocked the entire parade route. Police officers and soldiers stood four feet apart on the road carefully surveying the crowd.

After waiting for 10 ½ hours, the parade started passing our location at 3:30 pm. Excitement rippled through the crowd once President Obama was announced, finally fifty minutes later his motorcade drove by. After Vice President Biden strolled past confidently smiling and waving, the people sitting in the stands dispersed.

The police allowed our group of 30 frozen chaperones to sit on the bleachers! We cheered so loudly for other groups that a New Hampshire band dad came over and took our picture while cheering. He even asked me to turn around so he could photograph the logo on the back of my jacket. We enjoyed watching all the other groups, but we were eagerly awaiting our kids. And when we first glimpsed them we stood up and screamed, "Evergreen!" in unison. I watched the kids recognize our cheering and stand the tiniest hint taller. I found myself happily laughing for them. Laughing until I cried. They were about to march past President Obama!

Laura Heldreth

It's a p-a-r-t-y

Posted: **9:37 AM 0 comments**

We all gathered at "Big Al's" to watch our kids in this historic event. We listened to speeches by our new President and talked excitedly amongst ourselves about the honor and the feeling of pride that we all shared. We answered questions from news sources and other patrons who had no idea why this group of yellow and green clad crazy people would gather to watch an inaugural parade. We worried about the cold and even chanced a few phone calls to chaperones to see how everyone was fairing. We harassed the managers at Big Al's to keep switching between channels so that we could get the best picture and sound. For 5 and half hours we waited on the edge of our seats in anticipation of seeing "our band" some of us afraid to even go to the restroom.

Finally around 3:30 they appeared on the big screen. We yelled and cheered and cried with joy. Thirty seconds later, in a flash, it was over. We all shook hands, hugged and congratulated each other on the success of this day and we acknowledged the intelligence of placing the band ahead of the 100 horse group that followed them. We left fulfilled and satisfied that our kids, our school and community had left their mark in history. Thank you to Adele for arranging the party and to the management of Big Al's for putting up with us. Thanks to the community and school district for their support, to the directors for their vision in the fulfillment of a dream that started many years ago and the parents for their hard work and perseverance, mostly thank you to our kids. As you have read throughout this blog, we are so very PROUD.

(anonymous)

[Read the Columbian article about the party](#) or [Watch a video about the party](#)

Tuesday, January 20, 2009

A new day...

Posted: **9:58 PM 7 comments**

This morning the chaperones did not ride with the students to the Pentagon, the security screening and first stop for the band. Only Mr. Kuske and Mr. O were allowed to accompany them. So, instead, we left our hotel at 4:00 am, and headed to DC to stake out an area along the parade route to watch the band as they marched by.

We arrived at the security entry at 5:00 am and stood in line...for three hours! Everyone had to be checked and go through a security "pat down" before we could enter. We finally got all of us through the check point, and found a location along the parade route we could stay at and wait. The predicted snow never happened, so roads were clear.

It was also cold. Cold, cold, COLD! We all thought we were thoroughly prepared for the low temperature, but everyone in this group will tell you, we were not (27 degrees, with a wind chill factor in the teens). We had hats and scarves, long johns and turtle neck sweaters, hoodies, wool ware, and blankets. Oh, and those hot hands that are shaken and placed inside gloves. It wasn't enough, and so we persevered. Some of us would take a break and go inside a building just to get warm. Tried to find something to eat, but it seemed difficult to find.

We stayed in that spot all day. Sometimes the sun would break through the clouds and we would close our eyes and raise our chins up, just to feel some warmth on our faces. The wind would kick up, and we would just do a collective gasp, some choice words to describe how we felt at that moment, and some adjusting of blankets and scarves.

When President Elect Obama was being sworn in, the audio of the event was piped in throughout Pennsylvania Ave, so we not only were able to hear this, but his speech as well. The parade will be just a couple of hours away.

More cold, more shivers, more descriptions of just how cold we were.

Finally at 2:30 the parade began, and we let out a collective sigh. But...it didn't really begin. It was delayed for an hour, and I think we all became two degrees colder (I loved the group hugs). After what felt like hours, the parade finally made it to us. President Obama was driven past us, and the crowd went wild! Then Vice President Biden and his wife *walked* by us, and the crowd went just as wild (guess Obama got out of his car just past where we were standing, go figure,...).

Once the two passed us, an interesting thing happened: most of the crowd left. It appeared that the *only* reason they had arrived so early was to see the President and VP. That felt weird for us. But we took advantage of that, and sat in the stands that were cleared. Oh the joy of sitting! We sat for about an hour, then got ready for our band to march by.

When the band started marching, it was daylight. By the time they reached us, it was dark. But it was an emotional sight: for the past year, this is what we all worked for, and here they were, marching in the parade in all their glory. We screamed ourselves hoarse as they marched by (I started losing my voice) and took as many pictures as we could.

Then in 36 seconds, they were gone. It was surreal. But we were stoked, and hugged, and laughed, and yelled "they did it!"

Then, at 6:15 pm, we hobbled to our bus for the ride to the hotel, enjoying the warmth and catching a few zzzzs.

The kids arrived to the hotel 5 minutes after we did (amazing...) and we went to dinner. The buzz in the air, the stories they shared, and yes, they were very cold, but never let it get in the way, was a night to remember.

Now, the kids are all in their rooms, but I doubt they're sleeping. We leave tomorrow morning to head back home. The stories they will be able to share, the memories they have built, and the chance to experience it with them, will be something I'll never forget.

Sheryl

Post by Colleen Earls (on her Facebook blog)

Posted: **8:36 AM 0 comments**

Part 3 (Tuesday):

For all my dear readers, I am sorry that I haven't posted pictures from D-Day - Inauguration Day - sooner. But, I think that once you read my account of the day and the day that followed you will understand why sleep was a higher priority for me.

So January 20th started very early. After a lights out of 11:30 p.m. the night before, the chaperones rolled out of bed around 3:00 am on Tuesday morning in order to grab a quick bite to eat and leave the hotel by 4:00 am. After navigating multiple security checkpoints, our coach pulled into it's assigned parking spot and we quickly unloaded and got into the already burgeoning line at the security checkpoint.

Words cannot describe how cold it was. I didn't have a thermometer but word on the street was that the high of the day (so well into the afternoon) was 5 degrees with the wind chill factor. And let me tell you, that Atlantic wind was a constant, bone-chilling presence. But these are things we tolerate for our kids, right?

So we stood in the security line for about 3.5 hours, shuffling from foot to foot, jogging in place, huddling in groups to try and get some warmth. Finally at about 8:30 am we made it through security -- having to unzip and open up my two coats (yes, I wore two coats over two sweaters) for security in this freezing cold was absolutely painful. After getting through security, we rushed to the parade route to try and find a good viewing spot.

In the chaos of security and rushing to the parade route to stake our territory, the group became somewhat separated and I ended up with 2 other moms out of the total 30 parents -- Kathy Hanley and Becky Anderson (how funny that I have a cousin with the same name!). We got a great spot, though, right in the front along

the security barrier. And so now we begin our second waiting game.

Finally at about 11:00 am the motorcade from the White House to the Capitol building came through. I could clearly see (in separate cars) Cheney, Bush, Biden, his wife Jill, Obama, and his wife Michelle and their daughters Malia and Sasha. Wow! What a rush! And the crowd went wild.

About 45 minutes later the speakers lining the parade began broadcasting the events happening just down Pennsylvania Avenue on the steps of the Capitol building. I teared up at Aretha Franklin's soulful rendition of My Country 'Tis of Thee. The crowd let out raucous, collective cheers as first Biden and then Obama were sworn in. My heart swelled - the moment we have all been waiting for is finally here. This incredible man is now officially our 44th President.

I knew from our trip prepping and folks around us, that it is customary for the new President and the outgoing President to have lunch together. Then the outgoing President flies off in his helicopter and the new President makes his way down the parade route to the White House where he will observe the parade. So imagine our surprise when we see Bush's helicopter take off from the Capitol building not more than 15 minutes after the end of the ceremonies. I guess he did not have a lot of wisdom to impart to his successor!

As the helicopter soared overhead, the crowd began singing: "Nah nah nah nah, nah nah nah nah, hey hey hey, good bye!" How funny!

And now our third wait began.

The parade was scheduled to start at 2:30 p.m. We waited and waited. Finally word began spreading among the crowd that Senator Kennedy had a seizure and Senator Byrd collapsed at the luncheon and so the parade was delayed. We waited some more.

Let me just stick in a little reminder about how cold it still was at this point. My legs are numb. My nose and cheeks are numb. Wrapping my hood about my mouth and nose resulted in my glasses continually fogging up. I have not used a restroom since I woke up at 3:15 am - and I can't get out of my spot to use one of the infamous port-a-potties because if I do I will never be able to get back through the crowd to my prime real estate. And aside from one now frozen granola bar, I haven't had anything to eat or drink since breakfast at the hotel at about 3:45 am.

Finally at about 3:45 we get word that the motorcade has left the Capitol building. Around 4:00 pm the motorcade makes it to our block. While the Obamas had been walking the route prior, unfortunately they jumped back in the car about half a block before our spot. Still I can clearly see him and his oldest daughter, Malia, in the limo. Biden, on the other hand, walked the entire route with his wife, Jill, and I anxiously shouted "Joe! Over here!" as he passed to get his attention and snap some photos. Don't laugh - it worked!

As soon as our new President and Vice-President passed, the entire crowd dissipated. I have never seen so many people disappear so quickly. All that was left as evidence of their presence was a massive amount of trash all over the sidewalks and bleachers.

But what a relief! Knowing that the kids are at the end of the parade, I know that I can use the bathroom and get a bite to eat and still get my spot back. So Kathy and I make a beeline for the port-a-potties (cold!!!!) and then duck in a bar (the only "restaurant" there) and order a couple of burgers (\$12!) and cups of hot chocolate to go. We get our burgers and return to our spots to quickly wolf them down before the cold claims them.

Finally at about 6:00 pm -- in the dark and cold -- we see our kids making their way down the street. My heart is bursting with pride, my eyes tear up, I am shouting for Evergreen. I am so proud that both my kids have this unique opportunity and memory. What an incredible story they will be able to tell their children and grandchildren!

As soon as the band passes we rush back to our waiting, warm bus. I stumble through the aisle and collapse into the seat -- shivering, numb, and exhausted. My nose and cheeks tingle painfully with the sudden warmth of the bus. I am asleep before the bus even makes it out of the city through the traffic.

We return to the hotel to change clothes, meet the kids and load back onto the buses to go get dinner at a nearby restaurant. When we return to the hotel at 9:30 pm there is a frenzy of loading instruments and uniforms onto the truck, packing bags and cleaning rooms. We finally get to bed around midnight only to wake up again at 4:15 am to leave for our morning flight.

So now you see why I have been sleeping and not posting here. I think I could sleep for a full week! But

without further ado, here are my photos (on her facebook album <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2015596&l=e05da&id=1141111786>) from our big day. Enjoy!

Monday, January 19, 2009

Posted: **9:24 PM 1 comments**

Funny, an extra hour of sleep, and yet the kids were down in the lobby and eating breakfast the same time as the day before; they were really excited for today, to see and experience the sites of our Nation's capital. We headed off to the National Archives. Some of these students are in a Government and Politics class at Evergreen, and they were most eager to see the documents referred to in class: Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights and Articles of Incorporation. Our bus played "National Archives trivial pursuit" on the trip into DC, and it really pumped them up (like, which former president served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court after his presidency?)

While waiting in line, it began to snow. Nothing stuck, but it immediately launched us into stories of the Arctic blast at home.

After the Archives, it was on to the Old Post office for lunch. That took FOREVER for many of us, but was "way cool" once we got in.

Then it was to the Lincoln Memorial. Although it was closed and blocked off (due to setting up activity for tomorrow!!) we were still in awe of the sheer size of the building. We could see Lincoln if we stood right in the middle of the walk way. AND, when we turned around we could see the Washington Memorial.

Since we couldn't see Lincoln up close, we could spend extra time looking at all the other displays. The Vietnam Memorial was stunning. One family member had left their info on their loved one killed in Vietnam by the wall where his name is engraved, so all that walked by could know more about him.

The area is really getting packed now, lots of people, lots of reporters, and LOTS of vendors. You could buy everything from Obama buttons, to Obama t-shirts to Obama calendars. I saw lanyards, posters, hand warmers, stickers; a vendor on each corner. The speakers and large screen TV were replaying yesterday's events, and the officials were madly getting things ready for tomorrow.

We gathered at the Potomac River (which was frozen over) to get on to the buses, and headed off to dinner at the Medieval Times Tournament. What a riot. The Black and White knight won, but it should have been the Red and Yellow (just an editorial there, some would say the Green Knight should have won).

There were announcements part way through the jousting, and there was special one for EHS:

"I, Don Phillipe El Magnifico, Dei Gratia, as is my right, bestow upon Good Prince Danny and Vaillant Prince Ron and their Merry Mob of Musical Marchers. They soon will embark on a Glorious Quest Against the Evil Wizard Kuske. We know all will remain righteous and true, except the Clarinets who everyone knows tend to side with Evil."

Yeah, we liked that one a lot!

Back to the hotel, where the kids grabbed their uniforms, their instruments and headed outside in what felt like sub zero temperature to practice one last time. They are so on!!

Tomorrow kids leave pretty early. They are in the 6th section (out of six), second in line, right in front of 100 horses. **I CANT WAIT.**

Sheryl

ps: William Taft

The Kids Are Ready

Posted: **7:16 PM 5 comments**

It is the night before the national spotlight shines down on Evergreen Marching Band and Colorguard. The black, white, and gold band uniforms are hanging in the closets. The shimmering green colorguard flags are pressed. And the kids are ready.

The weather forecast is predicting two inches of snow tonight. This evening as they practiced under the hotel parking lot lights I watched their warm breath puff out of the instruments. The brass instruments gleamed under the lights. And the colorguard flags flowed effortlessly in the breeze. The chaperones gathered around the kids in small clumps and watched with smiles plastered on their faces as they sipped warmed beverages

and murmured to each other.

Excited anticipation. That sums up the vibe here tonight at the Arundel Mills Marriot in Hanover, Maryland.

Please tune in tomorrow and cheer for our kids. I will be standing on the parade route with twenty nine other band parents cheering my heart out. I've already placed the Kleenex in my pocket. I'm ready.

Laura Heldreth



Post by Colleen Earls (on her Facebook blog)

Posted: **8:42 AM 0 comments**

Part 2 (Monday):

And so we come to our second full day in our nation's capitol. As exhausted as I was yesterday, I was really touched that Jordan and her two friends, Amanda and Jessica, asked me to be the fourth in their group (have to have four to a group!). So I have had a ton of fun exploring the city with my girls.

After a great night's sleep, I awoke fresh and ready for new adventures today! We started at the National Archives in the morning where - among other things - they have on display originals of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They also have on loan from the UK right now the Magna Carta, so seeing that was a special treat! We had an hour and a half for lunch and knowing that the White House was an 8 block walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, we decided to high-tail it down there. So we did and then had only 15 minutes left to grab lunch to go and meet the buses. Crazy!

Our next stop was the Lincoln Memorial, which unfortunately was still closed to the public after the concert there yesterday. You could walk up to the bottom area at the reflection pond, but workers were still taking down scaffolding and you couldn't go in. So we had to peek at Abe from a distance around guards and workers. We then visited the nearby Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, which was a very moving experience. I am so glad that my Uncle Ode's name isn't on there and that I have him in my life today.

After an exhausting day of walking/running around the city, we ended with some fun at Medieval Times where we cheered on our knight. The kids had a blast. Now, they are off to prepare their uniforms and have a quick practice before the parade tomorrow. (photos at <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2015399&l=ddf70&id=1141111786>)

Watch for more pictures tomorrow!

Sunday, January 18, 2009

A day of excitement and surprises

Posted: **10:09 PM 0 comments**

Today came way to fast for me, but not for the students of the Evergreen High School Marching Band and ColorGuard! I went downstairs, to the lobby of the hotel this morning to find it packed with black jacketed kids all excited about today's adventures. After finding the coffee, I got on the bus with everyone else and we were off.

First stop was the Arlington National Cemetery. We got there pretty early, was only a couple of buses parked before us. We clamored out of the buses, and had an hour to do our best to see all that we could. It was amazing, and huge. When we got to the tomb of the Unknowns, it got very quiet. I think the students were absorbing the significance, and many just stared at it. We hurried through other tombs, graves, monuments and story boards. Incredible.

Then it was back onto the buses and headed out. But before we got too far, the buses pulled over to the side of the road, and we could hear something over their radios about the Presidential Motorcade. Looking ahead

there must have been at least 15 police vehicles coming towards us, lights flashing. Then three limos followed by more flashing lights. Later we learned it was President Elect Obama, going to visit the cemetery. We were all going nuts, and took pictures.

Finally, we were back in the bus, and off to the Smithsonian. When we debarked, I learned two things: The Smithsonian is not one campus with all the buildings connected by walkways or hallways. They are different museums on different streets in DC. AND, admission is Free. So, we could come and go all we wanted, as long as we were back on time. So, the kids all scattered to go to their first choice of places. Just like at Arlington, there wasn't enough time to visit everything.

Around 2:00, we exited out of one building, only to see crowds of people heading towards the Lincoln Memorial. We got brave enough to ask someone what was going on, and she shared that Obama was going to give a speech sometime in the next 2 1/2 hours, and that it will also be a concert. Amazed at our luck for being in the right place at the right time, we fell in line with the crowd.

We only got as far as the Washington Monument, however. Once we reached that structure, we looked towards the Lincoln Memorial, and saw that just about every piece of land was covered with people. It was staggering: people just crammed on the grass and walkways all the way from one landmark to the other. AND, people kept arriving! Fortunately there were gi-normous screens and speakers strategically placed along the way, so we could watch, and listen. It was truly amazing! Soon it was time to get back onto the buses. Trying to head back was like trying to swim upstream (I can only imagine what it will be like on Tuesday). We did not get to hear President Elect Obama speak, but it didn't matter: That was two "almost sightings" of our next president in one day!

Finally, it was off to dinner at Toby's, and a show of Duke Ellington's music, put to a play. Really great performances.

We got back to the hotel, and lights out at 11:00.

Me too. Goodnight!

Sheryl

An amazing day!

Posted: **8:44 PM 0 comments**

I wish I could eloquently describe our amazing day to you, but I am exhausted and ready for bed. We toured the Arlington Cemetery and cried. And then we watched in amazement as President Elect Barack Obama's motorcade drove past us. We spent the afternoon exploring the Smithsonian. Then, we partook in the celebration at the We are One Inaugural concert. We wrapped up the night at Toby's Dinner Theater. Today I explored democracy, scientific discovery, fine art, and hope.

Good night,

Laura Heldreth

Post by Colleen Earls (on her Facebook blog)

Posted: **8:37 AM 0 comments**

Part 1 (Sunday):

What an incredible trip this is! The positive energy and shared sense of boundless joy and optimism among the visitors here make for a completely unique experience. The hope and optimism is as palpable as the heartbeat of a battered nation that on November 4 saw our country suddenly and vibrantly resuscitated as we deliberately chose Frost's road not followed. To be here, to bear witness to history, as we take our first exuberant steps down that road is a privilege and an honor, something I will never forget. My only regret is that everyone can't be here to be part of this important moment in our nation's history.

From <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2015322&l=b7c6d&id=1141111786>

Saturday, January 17, 2009

From Portland to Baltimore

Posted: **10:06 PM 1 comments**

This morning 166 of us arrived at the Portland Airport for our various flights. Our flight was the fourth one, and the only one to go through San Fransisco (the others went through Chicago). Our only real snafu was a delay in leaving San Fransisco. The flight was more than full (7 people too many) and too heavy (too much fuel). So it

took over an hour to get all that taken care of. In the mean time, our kids kept themselves entertained. I saw several students (and one band director) having a go on Jayson Talalotu's eukalele, kids playing cards, sharing iPods, and just stretching out on the floor to take a nap.

Once we were all finally on the plane, it was a 5 hour flight to Washington Dulles. Two movies, one round of snacks and two helpings of beverages later, we landed at approx 10:00 pm. Mr O called chaperones from each of the other flights, and they were all at the hotel. Even Charlie and Laura were at the hotel (Yay!!). So, before we could get on the bus for our final leg, we had one stop to make; collect Principal Mark Ross! He was easy to spot, he was wearing a white Evergreen sweatshirt!

In the buses we went, and took the 30 minutes ride to the hotel. We arrived approx 11:15 pm, to find all the bags and instruments unloaded and pizza waiting. It was then a quick dinner, directions for the next day, and then off to bed.

Tomorrow starts at 7:00 am. Think it's time for some zzzzzz's.

Day 5: 2,815 miles of pure romance...NOT!

Posted: **9:51 PM 2 comments**

We arrived tonight and I went and stood in the hotel lobby. I just stood there and took in all the happy noise of the kids and chaperones. I stood there like a tree. I stood there until a concerned mom hugged me and offered me help upstairs. Apparently standing in a lobby makes one appear a little nuts. And yes, I fully admit I'm crazy. I just took at 2,815 mile Penske ride labeled a romantic vacation with my husband. Frickin bugnuts! That's me. This is one idea that I should have crossed off the ol' idea list. The situations my husband gets me into! The situations I get myself into. I knew I should say no, but somehow I just found the idea irresistible. And it wasn't just for the stories. It was to pay forward some serious mojo that I received from my band parents when I was the nerdiest teenager ever to walk the Earth. My band parents sheltered, guided, and laughed with me at a pivotal time in my life. I remember them with such affection. They would yell at me at the back of the bus stirring up trouble and offer me cookies while I sat up in the front seat, supposedly in trouble. So, for them and for all of you I went through driving lessons, truck stops with troubling smells, and an evening with Travis pounding on the icy transmission. I still love my husband. And I have the picture to prove it. Just ask Jill!

Laura

Friday, January 16, 2009

Day 4: Cold Coffee

Posted: **11:22 PM 2 comments**

I have developed a strange affection for 24 foot Penske trucks with lift gates over the past several years. In fact as I'm sitting here typing this, I keep looking out the hotel window at the ol' gal to make sure that she is still there. She is carrying precious cargo. Travis, our hero and Penske mechanic, saved us a great deal of trouble today. Last night, he warned us about the perils of cold weather on diesel engines and the need to keep them running. And the proof of that was on the side of the road today. We saw at least ten semi's being towed and more being worked on by frustrated road mechanics. So, our Penske or Penny as we prefer to call her is locked up tight and left running with a full tank of diesel mixed with a cold weather additive so she doesn't freeze up in this -7 degree weather.

This morning we drove into Lincoln, Nebraska to have a Penske mechanic repair the transmission connection. John softly drawled about transmissions through his well manicured beard while I watched him draw more attention to his thick oil stained hands by awkwardly trying to hide them. He warned us about the dangers of ice building up on a Penske truck in below zero weather and he was satisfied that Travis had broken the ice off of the transmission by repeatedly hitting it with a hammer last night. Then, he kindly sent us on our way with a can of spray to help prevent moisture build up on the transmission.

Today the vast skyline began folding in on itself and green trees began to reappear before night fall. The two inches of powder that fell last night was efficiently pushed to the side of the road and de-icer was applied so heavily that it splashed up onto our windshield and mirrors. The digital thermometer attached to the side mirror crept lower and lower the further east we traveled. And Charlie gave me the greatest compliment a driving teacher can give their new student; he slept for several hours this afternoon as I drove. When we stopped at a Starbucks's in Davenport, Iowa for a quick recharge I took a moment to enjoy how the snow squeaked under my shoes. And I laughed when I realized that my Americano was cold by the time I got it back in the truck. Today, we pulled several water bottles out of the back of the truck and they turned into solid ice right before our eyes. It only took a moment!

We travelled 745 miles today and we are spending the night in Elkhart, Indiana. There is a Starbucks in walking

distance from where we are staying. Tomorrow we drive to Washington, DC! I am excited to see everyone. Please remember to bring a warm jacket and gloves. It's really cold here.

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth

Count down to DC

Posted: 8:35 PM 2 comments

"I'm so excited that I get to experience this trip with my best friends!!"

Ashlee Green, Senior, Bass Clarinet

When the students gathered in the band room after school today, it was to get a final debriefing of the do's and don'ts of the trip. But first, they were treated with a send off from Mayor Royce Pollard. In his traditional story telling manner, Mayor Pollard shared some of his stories, but spent most of the time praising the students of "the best band in the State of Washington!" He gave everyone a Vancouver USA pin, which the students thought were "totally awesome!"

Back to the do's and don'ts: do stay in groups of 4; don't give your chaperone a bad time (my personal favorite); do bring your picture ID; don't joke with the secret service; do dress warmly; don't call Mr. Kuske on his cell phone just to say hi. Stuff like that.

Finally, the band was presented with small brown bags full of yummy treats, compliments of Ms. Lockwood's Leadership class, which was a huge hit!!

So, now it's final packing time, to bed early, and we start on our trip bright and early tomorrow!

Day 3: Travis saves the day!

Posted: 12:25 AM 2 comments

I am writing today's entry on a spare piece of paper under the Penske dome light at 11:40 pm, here in **Kearney, Nebraska** time, while we wait for the Penske repairman. Today the trip became real. The freeway appeared endless, the high desert landscape monotonous, with the Penske cab shrinking by the minute as Charlie and I bickered. Yes, I volunteered for this, well actually my husband Charlie volunteered me. But here I am, a lucky idiot.

We travelled 674 miles today and I spent most of the day behind the wheel. The weather was clear and cold. The roads were clear. A perfect day for my Penske truck driving lessons to begin. For those of you who don't know Charlie, he has been driving semi for 16 years and has the uncanny awareness of the placement of his truck in the world. I trip over my shoelaces and he can park his semi 3 inches away from any object he chooses. He has won numerous awards, including a lifetime achievement award at work this fall at the age of 36. And he's been a trainer at SYSCO Food Services for two years, but I am his wife.

We both have a tendency to assume that our skill sets overlap more than they do. So, this is a small sample of our conversation today as I am trying to pass a semi truck for the first time.

"When do I pull back in front of it?" I ask.

"When it feels right," he states like a Jedi master.

"What does that mean?" I ask looking at the side mirror trying to gauge my distance.

"Three truck lengths in front of him."

I squint at the mirror trying to figure out what that means. "What does that look like?"

"You are fine, go ahead!" he demands.

So, I veer the Penske back into the slow lane and glower at him.

Well, Travis, our hero and our mechanic just coaxed Penny, our Penske truck into shifting back into gear. It took him a good 45 minutes of chasing down all of his theories to find the problem. All I have to say about Travis is that when it is 6 degrees out and the wind is blowing the falling snow horizontal, he is the man you want to come riding in on his big white truck, loaded to the gills with equipment, to rescue you out of the Applebee's parking lot. Travis shared some great advice with us tonight about getting the Penske through this cold front that is blowing through. I would like to think that he crossed our path tonight to spare us future Penny trouble. Travis, you are an honorary Evergreen Band and Colorguard Booster

member.

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth

P.S. I would like to make a special shout out to the Evergreen High School secretaries and staff! Thank you for the thoughtful voice message today.

Thursday, January 15, 2009

Last Practice before DC

Posted: **9:32 PM 0 comments**

"The realization that we are going to the inaugural parade really hit us today..."

- Sandra Beauchaine, Senior, Trumpet

Today the students still had marching band practice, but without instruments (since those are on their way to DC already in the Penske Truck with Charlie and Laura). This afternoon was spent tightening up the lines, working on turning corners, standing straight and keeping time. The guard had extra flags and not only did they practice their marching routine, but sang loud and clear "Washington My Home."

When practice ended, there was a vibe of excitement that rippled through the group, knowing that they leave in just two days. They are ready!



[Larger View](#) | [More Photos](#)

Day two: Freezing Fog

Posted: **5:52 AM 4 comments**

This morning we woke up to a world suspended in a fine glaze of ice. The La Grande air was crisp, clear, and cold! We filled up the fuel tanks on the Penske and then headed east. We drove several miles and then descended into a blanket of freezing fog. The sunrise poured pink and tangerine light through the fog and every crystalline blade of grass and scrubby sage brush glowed. And while I was gushing about the sunrise, Charlie was carefully navigating the slippery freeway. We drove out of the freezing fog at 4 this evening and were transported into a vast snowy valley surrounded by hills with a light stubble of sage brush.

We travelled 549 miles today. And we surpassed our goal of reaching Ogden, Utah tonight. We are spending the night in Evanston, Wyoming. Tomorrow we hope to reach Lincoln, Nebraska.

Charlie and I have really been enjoying the treats and goodies that our fellow boosters gave us. We haven't seen a single Starbucks since we left La Grande, so all the goodies and energy drinks have come in handy. Thank you all!

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth

Wednesday, January 14, 2009

Day One: Our Romantic Evening

Posted: **6:45 AM 5 comments**

When Charlie first mentioned to me that he thought that driving to Washington DC together in a Penske truck filled with band equipment was romantic I had my doubts. Serious doubts. But last night after we passed through the fog in Vancouver, the moon emerged and we drove through the

Columbia Gorge lit up by moon light. In all my planning for snow and ice in the gorge I hadn't prepared myself for a beautiful night and clear roads. Charlie and I chatted about the send off and how thrilled we were at the community support for the band. We estimated that over 400 people showed up for the parade and speakers. We drank energy drinks, nibbled on the snacks provided by our fellow boosters, and enjoyed the evening.

When we reached Pendleton we discussed stopping for the night, but decided that we wanted to make it up the hill to La Grande, OR. We drove in silence with the Penske going 35 miles an hour, huffing and puffing her way up the hill due to her full load in back. When we reached the top of Cabbage hill and the Penske started picking up speed I saw what appeared to be a falling star and smiled. Then I realized that it appeared to be coming straight for us and then it exploded in mid air like an old cameras flash bulb. Charlie and I gasped in unison and exclaimed, "Cool!"

Yes, we both saw a meteor explode! What an amazing thing to see! A once in a lifetime event. Could anything top that?

Why yes, we are going to see our kids march in the Inaugural Parade. So I have a week to savor the beauty of a small meteorite exploding in front of me before it is topped by watching our kids march in front of our new President. And please, if anyone sees Mr. Kuske, tell him that the rumors about the Penske truck being hit by a meteor have been largely exaggerated.

Reporting in from the open road,

Laura Heldreth

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

The truck is loaded

Posted: 8:03 PM 0 comments

The send-off event today at **Haagen Park** was a great way to say thank you to the community for supporting the band. Photos of the event are to the right.

Afterward, the students loaded a large truck with instruments, uniforms and suitcases to be driven to DC by Laura & Charlie; band booster parents extraordinaire! We wish you a save journey.

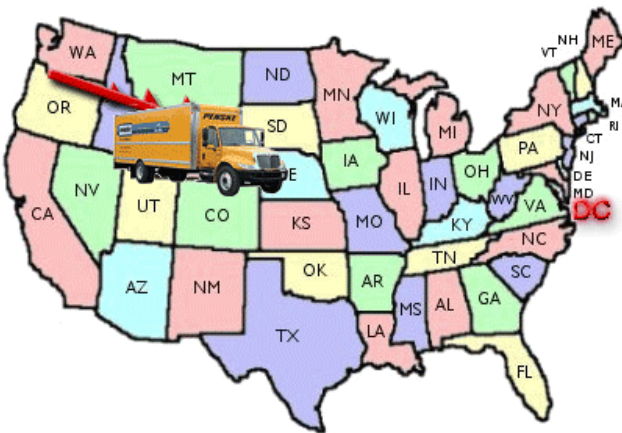
View an article in the Columbian on this event at

<http://columbian.com/article/20090114/NEWS02/701149942/0/FRONTPAGE>

Monday, January 12, 2009

Welcome to our blog. We...

Posted: 9:00 AM



Welcome to the Evergreen HS Marching Band and Colorguard blog

We are almost on our way to Washington DC to march in the Inaugural Parade on January 20th, 2009.

There is a send-off event on 1/13 at **Haagen Park** followed by the truck loading & pizza for the students.

Charlie and Laura will be heading off in the Penske truck to arrive in DC on the 17th. Watch this blog for news of their adventures on the way. They would love some calls during their 15-hour-a-day driving sessions; 503-709-2072 / 709-1943.

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