

## **“Echoes of the Heart”**

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**The meaning of Obama’s win.** In the afterglow of *election 2008*, there were no losers; only a nation of winners and an international community of admirers. This was America at our best. We campaign hard, we go to the polls and vote, and then we move on.

We Americans have a tremendous capacity for imagination. In *election 2008*, more than ever, we dared to imagine a post-racial America, an America with a new resolve to be redeemed of our awful sin of slavery.

The reality of slavery in America has forever stained the spirit of our nation. It has kept us from realizing the highest ideals of our *Constitution* and from faithfully living out the most holy of our *sacred writings*. But now, although glimpses of racism still exist, we wake up this morning a little more evolved and a whole lot more redeemed.

As the spirit moves over our planet, God is on the move; and the high hope of our American spirit reminds us once again that *the night cannot forever hold back the dawn*.

**Out of the darkness.** In surfing the Internet on November 5<sup>th</sup>, the day after the election, I was struck by an article written by *Peggy Wallace Kennedy*.

Peggy Wallace’s father was former Alabama Governor, *George Wallace*, the ardent segregationist of the 50’s and 60’s, a man who for years symbolized the ugliness of racism in America. It was Governors like him and others who stood defiantly in support of a culture of segregation, repression, violence and blatant denial of human rights.

Her article spoke about how she had been to the cemetery to visit the graves of her deceased parents—both, actually, former Governors of Alabama. An admirer of her parents had run up to her with lofty words about her parents.

And the article pointed out how the woman had probably not noticed the *Barack Obama* sticker on her bumper. And then Peggy Wallace explained:

*Four years ago, the young Illinois senator who spoke at the Democratic National Convention mesmerized me. I hoped even then that he would one day be my president.*

She went on to point out how, in her father’s later years, a transformation had taken place in his spirit ... to where she wondered ... if he were alive today, would he have marked an X in the box next to Obama’s name? He well might have, she mused.

*Out of the darkness*, hope rises up and a unifying spirit fills the morning air. The world needs a strong America—an America with informed, enlightened leadership; and that means leadership that *gets it*. To *get it*, America has to listen and be humble; and we have to care with a compassionate spirit.

We live in a global world, a world that is everyday shrinking and increasingly interdependent; a world where excessive nationalism and impulses of empire have no place; a world, too, where the winds of religious fanaticism must be calmed and eradicated—be they Islamic extremism or the narrow and exclusivist Christian-right here in America.

**Embracing a complicated and diverse world.** An America with a President Obama will *get this*. And why would this be? Because look at Barack Obama.

He's half black; he's half white. As a child, he lived in Indonesia for four years—the most populous Islamic country on the planet. While he was never a Muslim himself, he has relatives who are.

It's in this vein of inclusiveness that Obama's election is so significant.

President-elect Obama has a sister, Maya Soetoro-Ng (same mother, different father). She's a 36-year old teacher (lives in Hawaii) who describes herself as *half white, half Asian ...a hybrid*. She is Buddhist, married to a Chinese Canadian, the mother of a two-year old, and a woman who is so routinely identified as a Latina that she learned Spanish.

Our new President-elect has a grandmother living in a hut on the shores of Lake Victoria in Kenya and any number of relatives native to that African nation as well. In other words, he has an innate sensitivity to diversity that will help him lead us in ways that are almost unimaginable.

We've got two wars to untangle amidst the ongoing menace of Al Qaeda and the Taliban. There are 1.1 billion Muslims on this earth and we've got to find ways of working with them to permanently eradicate these violent elements. The path before us must emphasize diplomacy. Moreover, it must emphasize an empowering of regional governments in pursuit of solutions.

Obama's win is not so much a rejection of one candidate or another, or a debunking of one political party or another. It is a resounding affirmation that the stars are aligned for our new multi-racial and multi-cultural President to help us embrace the wider world, with all of its complexity and diversity, and show us the way.