



Ticket to History



Katie L. Fish '10 gets a unique perspective on the pageantry that surrounds a presidential inauguration.

By: Audrey R. Browka Photos: Katie L. Fish '10, Shaun M. Maciejewski

Where were you when President Barack Obama took the oath of office? **Katherine L. Fish '10** was among the nearly two million people in Washington, D.C. to witness the historic event. It was an opportunity the future social studies teacher could not pass up.

"I seek out hands-on learning experiences so that when I become a teacher, I'll have stories to tell my students," says Fish. "Stories are what capture their attention and are what get students to ask questions."

Fish was one of 5,000 college students invited to attend the University Presidential Inaugural Conference (UPIC) from January 17 -21. Participation in UPIC is reserved for alumni of the National Youth Leadership Conference (NYLC), an organization that recruits high-achieving high school students who demonstrate leadership qualities. Fish participated in NYLC while she was a student at Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart, as did her older sister, **Lauren A. Fish '08**, a student in the JD/MBA program at the State University of New York at Buffalo.



Pictured in front of the Washington Monument are Lauren A. Fish '08 (left) and Katie L. Fish '10 (right).

"This was said to be the election of our lifetimes," says Lauren Fish, who notes that this was the first presidential election in which she and Katie could vote. "To be able to witness history unfold as it did was a privilege but to be able to share that experience with my sister makes it all that more memorable."

The five-day event included visits to the National Mall's monuments and museums, entrance into the "We Are One" concert at the Lincoln Memorial and tickets to the UPIC Inaugural Gala. The conference culminated at noon on January 20, with the historic swearing-in of the nation's first African American president, Barack Obama.

"There were nearly two million people gathered in one place but the silence was deafening when President Obama recited the oath of office," recalls Katie Fish, who watched the events on television monitors located near the

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“He reminded us that we are the next generation of leaders.”

Washington Monument. “It didn’t matter to me where I stood. I was there, in the nation’s capital, participating in one of the most significant pieces of American history. The experience was overwhelming.” The pageantry of the Presidential Inauguration was the most momentous occasion for Fish but the days leading up to it included several other indelible learning experiences. White House veterans, political experts and commentators, and other sought-after personalities all participated in the conference.

Fish had a front-row seat during former Secretary of State (Ret.) General Colin Powell’s keynote address. “He reminded us that we are the next generation of leaders and that we need to prepare ourselves by becoming people of trust, character and integrity, people who learn from their mistakes, move forward and never look in the rearview mirror,” recalls Fish.

Former Vice President Al Gore told conference attendees that “This new generation coming of age has proven that young voters can make a difference,” says Fish. NBC News Correspondent Luke Russert commended young people for their use of social networking, which he said “played a key role in the election of President Obama.” And Democratic and Republican political strategists (respectively) James Carville and Mary Matalin spoke candidly about how “The digital age now permanently altered future political campaigns,” recalls Fish.

“It’s not everyday that students have an opportunity to hear from some of this country’s most powerful people about different issues and their different ways of looking at the problems, so when the opportunity arises, it’s important they use it to their advantage not only to enhance their education but to grow as individuals,” says **Lynn A. Fish, PhD**, professor of management/marketing at Canisius College – and mother to Katie and Lauren.

Indeed, Katie and Lauren walked away from the University Presidential Inaugural Conference with a deeper understanding of how democracy works in a modern society and memories that will last a lifetime. But there was one message that resonated most with Katie.

“In the days leading up to the Presidential Inauguration and the day of the actual event, I saw how people – millions of people – unified for a common purpose and the strength of that. It felt good. I felt proud and I want to be someone who helps sustain that.”

It’s a lesson that will reverberate a lifetime for Fish – and one that can’t possibly be found in a textbook. ■



Lauren '08 (left) and Katie '10 Fish (right) meet NBC News Correspondent Luke Russert (center), who was one of several speakers at the University Presidential Inaugural Conference (UPIC).



More than 5,000 UPIC inaugural scholars crowd the ballroom of the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in Washington, D.C. on the opening night of the conference.



Katie Fish '10 had a front-row seat at former Secretary of State General Colin L. Powell’s address to conference attendees.