

Sorry I haven't responded sooner, it's been a very busy and emotional two weeks. I was set to go to London, Greece and the Ukraine for a BBC shoot about Greeks getting mail-order brides from the Ukraine but that fell through suddenly, though it might come back. In any event, I did work for ACT (America Coming Together) in Las Vegas in their Get Out The Vote campaign. It was a marvelous experience. I left LA Monday, at 5am with my friend and bandmate, Alex, listening to Dylan, Nilsson and a great Doc Pomus tribute record along the way. We arrived in time for the 10am team leader training, did a minimum of paperwork and I put together my team of canvassers, picked up a van and our maps and hit the road.

ACT really had their shit together. The entire city was laid out into individual books with lists of democratic voters broken down by odd and even side of each street so that a pair could work both sides of the street and move on. Every voter was listed with address, apartment number and a status section where we'd tick off whether they were home, had voted, had moved, when they would need a ride or if they were NJK (not John Kerry.) My job was to get my team to each neighborhood or "turf" as it was called, feed and water them, find them bathrooms and keep their morale up. It also involved distracting security guards while they slipped in unnoticed, climbing over fences to open the back gate to compounds, deciphering apartment numbering systems, driving voters to the polls (on Tuesday only) and walking the streets and knocking on doors myself.

I was very impressed by the ACT organization. The operation was cleverly scalable, able to absorb new people on a daily or even hourly basis and put them on the street immediately. The young administrators were enthusiastic and unflappable and we were "trained" in no time at all. By Election Day, we had over 2000 people out in the streets.

What most impressed and inspired me, however, was my team of six canvassers. Monday, my first day, one guy from San Francisco was around 50. The other five, from LA, were in their 70s and 80s, including one woman who had three children in their 50s. They were out there clocking miles every day and had been doing it for weeks. One couple had been in Arizona for two weeks before coming to Las Vegas and they had blocked out the month of October on their calendar a year ago. These wonderful and funny

people humbled me and the thought of them has buoyed me and kept me going this past week. On Election Day, we were joined by a young couple from San Francisco, very sweet, dedicated and earnest, who had met in Gabon while both were in the Peace Corps.

In the afternoon, one couple left us to use their own car to drive voters to the polls, so we could stay out in the field and they were replaced by two young black girls from Las Vegas who had been canvassing for weeks. They were sweet and hard workers and it was great to have some locals with us.

Election Day ended with a real push to get every last person to the polls and then our group broke up; I dropped the remaining out-of-towners off at their hotels and drove the girls back to the ACT assembly point. Spirits were high, returning volunteers gathered in a big group and updates were announced, exit polls showed that Kerry was up by several thousand votes in Nevada, not bad for a state where two weeks before Bush was leading by six points. It was hard not to be optimistic and hopeful and thankful, I could really taste it and thrilled in the moment, realizing just how long it had been since I was in a crowd full of joyous cheers. The SEIU (Service Employees International Union) people who worked alongside ACT were honoring specific individuals and it really WAS all coming together. I met up with Alex so we could drive home that night, as I had a shoot in the morning before heading out to New York on Wednesday night. I felt we had done it, in Nevada and throughout the country.

That night, driving back from Vegas, listening to the returns and slowly realizing that we'd lost, the only thing that got me through the toughest 100 miles or so was the first disc of Van Morrison's live album, *It's Too Late to Stop Now*, especially "Listen to the Lion" and a great version of "Caravan." Although the reports from Ohio wouldn't come until the next morning, it was becoming clear that the victory we thought we'd had wouldn't be coming. I took comfort in Van's voice and the recognition that what has ALWAYS and eternally inspired us and gotten us through dark days has been the individual's human spirit and creativity. No matter what these fiends conjure up in the next four years, great work by artists, writers and musicians will continue to make life worth living. Turn it up!

One of the saddest things on Wednesday was to speak with Elena, who was despondent, like many of her fellow students. I was very glad that I'd be seeing her in New York over the next few days.

New York was wonderful, though the streets were filled with people with long faces. I interviewed a Magnum photographer named Philip Jones Griffiths who last year published a book on Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange. Though we spoke for four hours of misery and death and another American tragedy, I was comforted to be in the company of this man who has spent the past thirty years documenting this and working to tell the story and try to bring about some justice.

I saw other dear friends but mostly I spent my time with Elena and was so gratified to see her thriving at Columbia and loving the city. She and her peers are not yet ready to steward this world, but I have high hopes for them, especially with our guidance.

So, yeah, it sucks, but I am strangely optimistic. We all know just what a mess our country is in and I can't say with any certainty that Kerry could have done much to turn it around, especially with a Republican congress. At least now, it's ALL Bush's problem and there's no way he can blame it on anyone else. I actually think that this might be the end of the Republican party, as crazy as that sounds. They have nowhere to go but down and I think this unholy alliance of neo-cons and evangelicals will fall apart as the economy fails to improve and the deaths in Iraq keep mounting. I believe the fear-mongering will stop having an effect, as well. To paraphrase John and Yoko, "Bush is over (if you want it)"

Mostly, I take comfort from the people I met in Las Vegas, their sacrifices, determination and love. I know the people I met and worked with are not going back home to collapse and watch tv. I know that the hundreds of thousands of us across the country who were in the streets and who gave whatever money we could are up to any challenge that comes our way and I know that there are AT LEAST 55 million Americans who see through all the lies and fear. I know that the people united can never be defeated and that we will always have to fight for justice and freedom.

A friend sent this at a crucial moment:

*Defenseless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.*
-W.H. Auden