

**Washington, D.C.** — *From Becky Thomas, LWV of Greater Cleveland*

The Women's March in Washington, January 21, 2017 was an event that I wanted to be part of, just to be counted, if nothing else. But it was something else....

I got on the Rally bus at 12:15 a.m. in the parking lot at Severance, accompanied by my marching compatriots Diana and Carol. We checked in, found our seats, listened to the bus captains who were upbeat and organized, stored our stuff (granola, saltines, pretzels, water, aspirin, Tums, toothbrushes, extra socks, notepads, phone chargers, the latest New Yorker, plastic bags, eye drops, and a metro card) in the overhead compartments. We dropped back our seats, nestled into our neck pillows, covered our bodies with a throw or coat or blanket and tried to sleep. After three hours, we stopped at the Somerset exit to use the facilities. We, along with 15 other bus passengers, lined up before the women's bathroom (you know how long those lines are) and then crawled back into our bus seats for the rest of the journey.

Our bus driver, Al, had a challenge driving through fog and rain, but we made it safely and arrived at 8:30 a.m. My friends and I had purchased Metro cards online, but we decided the lines would be too long, so we set off for the Mall, about an hour away from RFK stadium. The walk was a visual pleasure because the homes in the Capitol Hill district were historic and attractive. Someone had posted Martin Luther King's words on signs in front of every home. Reading them as we passed reminded us we were there. Residents welcomed us with coffee and water thanking us for coming.

As we approached Independence Avenue the crowds thickened into impassable throngs. It was hard to breathe and virtually impossible to move. The six of us grabbed each others' hands or coats or scarves so we wouldn't be separated. We saw the back of the stage where speakers and musicians were to appear, so we were determined to have a better view and arrive on the Mall so we could hear and see. This was not to be.

Everywhere we turned people were moving with or against us. We would ask, "Is this the best way to get through?" and people would say, "No it's impossible to get close, we have turned around." We climbed over a wall near the Native American Museum, scrambled through the trees and stream to no avail. We joined hundreds waiting to use the 5 port-a-potties nearby. We made plans (many plans) of how to navigate the throngs to get to the stage, and then after giving up on that idea, of how to find a bathroom.

But everywhere we went we found joyful, polite, civil people of all colors, genders and ethnicities, who were friendly, eager to talk, and helpful in our journey. No matter how smashed together we were in these crowds, people made way for the six of us grasping at each others' coats, weaving single file through the crowd. We wanted to hear and see celebrity speakers, but after a while it didn't matter. We just resigned ourselves, as thousands did, to just being there. It was exhilarating and euphoric to know that all over the world people were demonstrating like we were for honesty, fairness, integrity and inclusiveness.

Finally, after a bathroom and food break at the National Gallery, we rejoined the parade to the White House. The event had become so huge that paraders were merging from alternate streets. In fact, it seemed as if there were many parades, not one. Our goal was to walk back to the bus (leaving at 6:30) so we found a less busy side street and began our trek towards RFK stadium. Many blocks later, there was a woman collecting unused Metro cards for poor people needing transportation, and an African American church offering water and bathrooms. The men in the church dressed in suits and ties welcomed us for a much needed rest. We arrived at the stadium to discover the bus dark and locked. Our driver had not been picked up by the shuttle taking him to a hotel for his 10-hour rest, so we hunkered down in the pedestrian tunnel and waited for 2 more hours.

On the bus ride home, people shared photographs and tales of encounters with friendly marchers from California, Florida, Minnesota and countless other states, who had driven or flown many more miles than we had. My seatmate was from Detroit. She had driven with her friend and her mother for 4 hours, arriving just in time to catch the midnight bus. When we pulled into Cleveland at 4:00 AM, she was faced with a drive back to Detroit in the fog and rain so she could sleep all day on Sunday and be ready for work on Monday. As a first time marcher, she was so excited that it was hard for her to get to sleep.

It was worth the 24-hour bus ride, the lack of sleep, the waiting at the stadium, the 20,000 steps we took that day (according to someone's cell phone) to be with these women, men and children in standing up for our human rights. We all pledged to continue our resistance. I hope it is enough.

### **Cleveland, Ohio — *From Lynda Mayer, LWV of Greater Cleveland***

LWVGC boots on the ground in Cleveland – our cohort was at least 50 including LWV of Greater Cleveland members, friends and spouses, and members of neighboring Leagues.

Folks who missed Washington can see thrilling accounts of the mind-bending (and back-breaking?) experience from friends or in the media, but for those who missed Cleveland, too -- here's my thrilling account:

We met up on that cloudless, balmy morning, many wearing League t-shirts and others in hand-knitted "pink pussy hats," behind our LWV pole-banner visibly staked out atop the steps by the Soldiers & Sailors Monument. At first we were far from the growing crowd, but by 10:30 am Public Square was wall-to-wall and noisy -- full of spirited women, men and little kids with homemade signs of varying levels of seriousness, artistry, humor, defiance or naughtiness. An enormous sense of solidarity and common resolve animated all of them -- the police estimated 15,000, but my experience at Tribe games tells me many more. We were photographed often, though only one pix and press interview made it into print and onto our website (I hope).

Our signs spelled out League issues we fear could be threatened: Voting Rights, Women's Health, Healthcare for All, Equal Protection, Civil Discourse, Fair Elections. Or they made strong points: Fix Gerrymandering! Promote Peace! Ethics Matter! Ban Dark Money! Curb Gun Violence! Support Public Schools! Welcome Immigrants! Climate Change is Real!

The march gradually moved slowly and loudly down Ontario and right onto Lakeside, turning right again at the Free Stamp onto E. 9th and back to Public Square via Superior, ending as it began with energizing and organizing from a central stage and speakers barely visible or audible over the waving signs and amid the clamor. Our group dispersed at the final destination, some to mingle and soak up more adrenaline, others to line up for standing-room-only Rapid rides home. We distributed many League buttons and membership brochures; so hopefully some of our camp followers will enlist!

More importantly, though, we must all remain pumped. We must make this huge burst of resurgent energy result in ongoing nationwide grassroots pressure on elected officials to advance or at least protect those rights and policies League works for every day. Each of us, marchers and non-marchers alike, must resolve to keep on participating in her or his own way!