

CONNECTIONS

“MUSIC TAKES OVER WHERE WORDS LEAVE OFF.”

by Tracee Gingrich

QUOTE BY FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Diversity. We hear the word in human resources, in student enrollments, in political circles, in restaurant choices. A challenge for some, a breeze for others, a seemingly impossible chasm to cross for countless others.

Celebrate Diversity was the theme of a recent awards luncheon that I attended in downtown Denver. Sponsored by Holme, Roberts & Owen, a heavyweight law firm in Denver, Channel 4, and Wells Fargo, this fifth annual luncheon recognized Ken Salazar, Colorado's Attorney General. Sherry Frame, one of my colleagues at The Women's College, who happens to be the law firm's event planner, invited me. (By the way, Sherry can tell you anything you want to know about planning a party—from flowers to food and every little detail in between).

Salazar is the first Latino, or Hispanic (your choice of labels, according to him), to be elected to a statewide office. His Colorado roots are deep, spanning five generations of farmers, ranchers, and homesteaders. His heritage includes horse-drawn wagons and rustic cabins, where his family eked out a living on land that often refused to yield and emphasized the importance of getting an education. He talked of family, of persistence, of ambition, and, most of all, of belief in oneself.

Who would have thought that a poor Hispanic farm boy would go to law school, earn several degrees, and get elected to one of the highest levels of state office? Ken Salazar did. Elected in 1998 as Colorado's Attorney General, Salazar is committed to protecting the state's environment and reducing youth and family violence. He's proud of his heritage and proud to serve the people of Colorado—his people. Diversity in the flesh.

The finale of the afternoon was a musical demonstration by Dan Egger-Belandria. I found myself clapping, laughing, and tapping my feet to the beat of his drums. His company, New World Synergy, was conceived out of an idea to promote multi-culturalism through music. With a Venezuelan mother and an American father, cultural difference has always been nothing new or strange to Dan. From his perspective, it is normal. Armed with a love of music and a desire to help break down cultural barriers,

Dan originally embarked on a mission to bring his musical program to schools. What kid doesn't love to beat on drums, shake bells, and make noise, especially if, while doing all that, cultural barriers melt, preconceived ideas begin to dissolve, and prejudice and fear die? From there his company expanded to performances at corporate meetings and luncheons.

With a table full of instruments whose names were new, whose shapes were foreign, Dan made music. He began on the drums, beating a rhythm on the *djembe*, a tall African drum, and on the *congas*. We heard the similar yet different sounds of African and Brazilian music, emanating from similar but different instruments. Reminds me of The Women's College. We're all women, but we are all different. Using various bells and shakers and inviting audience members to join the band, Dan soon had Ken Salazar joining in the beat.

What is it about music that captures diversity, breaks down the color and language barriers, and unites the family of humankind—even if just for the length of a concert? Do we rock to the beat, become entranced by the rhythm, and fail to remember our prejudice? Do we get lost in the words and forget to hate? If only the music would never stop playing.

A few nights ago the nation experienced a four network simultaneous broadcast featuring, among others, Michael Jackson and his new song, "What More Can I Give?" expected to rival his record-breaking fundraiser, "We Are The World." People have been digging deep into their pockets, donating into the millions to aid the victims of the nation's recent tragedy.

But recent events have also exacerbated the undercurrents of a long persistent problem. The scab of prejudice has been violently yanked off, and the wound is oozing. There are tales circulating of businesses being boycotted, dark-skinned passengers denied air travel, and students of Arab descent spit upon. I don't hear the music anymore. I hear "Celebrate Diversity," but I cannot ignore a faint whisper of "but fear it." Can music heal the world?