

# ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT

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## Hope Returns After Historic Election

In a stroke, the rest of the world must regard America differently. It's big. Barack Hussein Obama is President-Elect of the United States of America.

I was 18, in geology lab ("rocks for jocks") in my first year at Middlebury College, and the wonderful teacher, Brewster Baldwin (who died of a heart attack a few weeks after he retired) came into the lab and dismissed us, "the President has been shot." We spent the next three days in front of the TV in the student union.

Lee Harvey Oswald. Jack Ruby.

I was in Europe, southern France, on my way from Nice to Barcelona in April 1968, hitch-hiking. I got picked up by a laborer in a Deux Chevaux. He told me, "'Mar-teh Lu-tair Keeng' - il est mort." I knew that much French. I picked up the *Paris Herald-Tribune* the next day. I wasn't sure I wanted to come home.

James Earl Ray.

Just back from that six-month Europe/North Africa adventure, I stopped to spend two days with my college friend, Jane, who was in grad school at Columbia, where students were on strike and all Hell was breaking loose.

Mark Rudd.

Back home in Lewiston, Maine, I got up at 5:00 one morning to hitch-hike to Middlebury to help my friends in the class of '68 celebrate their graduation. Hushed voices instead of music on the radio. Bobby Kennedy had been shot in California. He had come out against the war and was our hope. I went into the bathroom and threw up - and sat in my quiet house alone with the news of his assassination until my parents woke up and I told them.

Sirhan Sirhan.

Perhaps worst of all was a tragedy of a different sort. We had a Presidential candidate in 1972 who said he would bring the troops home from Vietnam the day after he took office. I worked for McGovern's campaign. He was running against Nixon, the incumbent, who won in '68 with a plan to end the war. My college friend Bayard Russ, from Peterborough, NH, was killed in Vietnam. Four years later, the rationale for the war long since lost, "Peace with Honor" was Nixon's euphemism for more killing.

Henry Kissinger.

Nixon won 49 states. It was a landslide. Who are these people that live in America with me? I went to an election night party. McGovern conceded at about 7:30. When Nixon came on the TV, I lost it, screamed at him, and had to leave. Mary Schwab, the party host, intercepted me at my car and consoled me, told me she felt the same way. I love her for that gesture alone.

Never again, I vowed, at age 28. Screw- it. I would not care. American institutions were stable enough, regardless: I could get a job, fall in love, raise a family, play pick-up basketball till I got old. What did it all have to do with me, presidential politics? My life, my concerns, would be local. I would vote, but I wouldn't delude myself thinking it mattered.

Tuesday night, watching the election returns into the early morning, was powerful stuff. I care deeply again, despite myself.

I'm not sure I like it. My fate, I fear, is to worry constantly.

Barack Obama. President

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