

For Whales' Sake
By Jackie Hildering

Yes We Can

As I write, it is the evening before the inauguration of President Barack Obama. For the last days, the media has been vibrating with pre-inauguration stories reflecting the full range of human emotion and expectation: from euphoria to darkest pessimism.

Whatever gets reported, whatever the content of the inaugural speech tomorrow, I wonder if anything can carry the intense power of what has already been said? Those 3 words that have already, forever left their mark on history . . . "Yes, we can."

I admit it. I was one of the millions sobbing during Obama's presidential victory speech on November 4th. Like geysers tears sprung with every "Yes, we can."

Why? What gave 3 little words that much power?

Of course it was relevant that the man-to-be-president stating the words is black. This marks such a huge evolution in social justice, so long overdue. We've been made to reflect on how recent overt racism was in North America.

In the 1940s, it was a normative thing to see signs like "No Dogs, No Negroes, No Mexicans" in the US. Racial segregation was even law in the southern States into the 1950s.

Much closer to home, realize that in 1964, government threatened to cut off support to local remote First Nations communities unless they moved "on reserve" to Port Hardy. When they arrived, there were not enough houses as had been agreed upon. Some tried to return to their homes only to discover that those in Blunden Harbour had been burned. Remember too that the residential school in Alert Bay only closed in the early 1970s. Yep, we've come a long way baby.

But the power locked in "Yes, we can" goes even further than proving that society can rise above racism, rejecting the abominable values of our recent past.

They resound so strongly at this time in history because so many of us hope for further change, for even better, for further recognition that the old ways were wrong and just don't work anymore.

There is a financial crisis because change is needed. There are societal and military crises because change is needed. There is environmental chaos because . . . change is needed.

The 3 words speak to this desire for change (Yes), to working together (we) and to empowerment (can).

Will we be able to deal with adapting our value system to do what's needed? The sheer volume of tears flowing around the world on November 4th has given me renewed hope that we can.

Whatever President Obama's legacy to the world will ultimately prove to be, nothing can taint the historical significance of this "Yes, we can" president being elected.

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