

From front-row seats, to fainting in line: lowans who witnessed Presidential inaugurations share their stories

Kristen Meyers drove cross-country to see Obama's inauguration. Ken Quinn served at the White House in the 1970's, one of few to witness Gerald Ford's swearing-in.



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DES MOINES, Iowa — For Kristen Meyers, it was 2009, at a very cold, outdoor inauguration for President Barack Obama.

For Kenneth Quinn, it was in 1974, at a closed-door swearing in for President Gerald Ford, in the East Room of the White House.

Both lowans witnessed historic U.S. Presidential inaugurations, albeit very different than what is taking place this week.

Meyers, an event planner in Des Moines, worked for the Obama campaign when she was a freshman at UNI. When Obama was elected, she was lucky enough to get her hands on an inauguration ticket.

Tickets were different colors for different security clearances, Meyers remembers.

"Gold was like, for Oprah," Meyers laughed. "My sister and I had blue tickets."

The Iowa girls drove halfway across the country to attend, and that day, they woke up at 3:00 a.m. and had a hard time choosing an outfit.

"We had no idea, like, what do you wear to an outdoor, fancy, January event?" said Meyers.

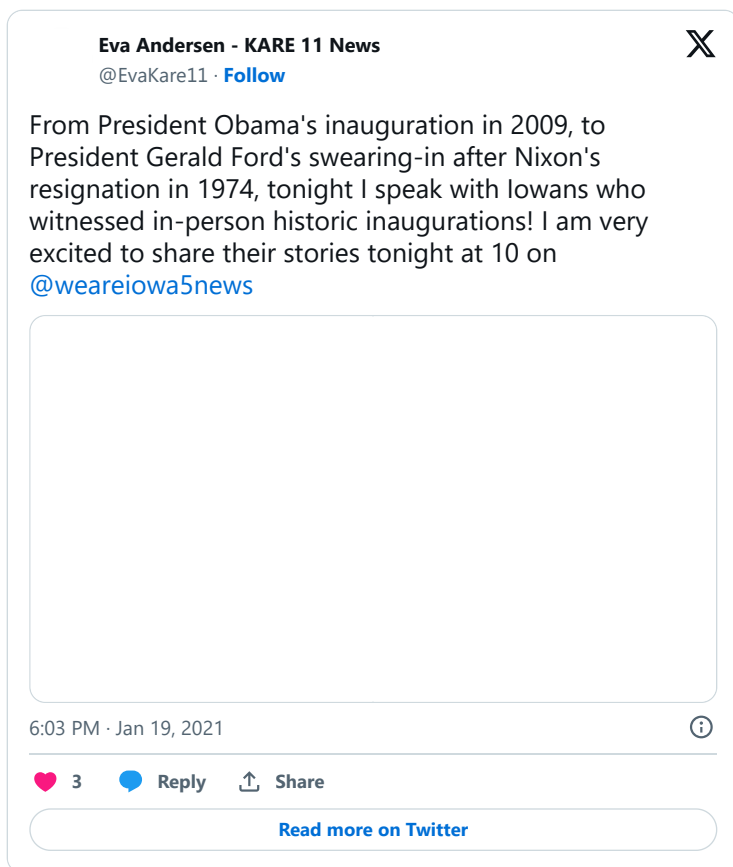
She and her sister opted for winter coats, as it was lower than 30 degrees that day. That wasn't warm enough for Meyers--she fainted, twice.



Credit: Kristen Meyers

Amy and Kristen Meyers, of Iowa, attended President Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration.

"I came to with strangers shoving newspapers in my pants and in my sleeves to warm me up," said Meyers, who said she cried because she was afraid she'd lose her place in line.



Fortunately, she was able to make it through the day and witness history.

"As luck would have it, we saw the Bushes and the Obamas both walking out and getting into a helicopter and there was maybe 50 people around," said Meyers.

The next day, she got to attend the staffer's ball. There, she even gave a fist bump to First Lady Michelle and President Barack Obama.

"I got a couple fist bumps from Michelle and Barack, so that was really nice!" Meyers said.

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Thirty-five years earlier, U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Quinn found himself at a very different inauguration: the 1974 swearing-in of President Gerald Ford, after the resignation of Richard Nixon.

"Like the inauguration [Wednesday], the President wasn't there. Nixon wasn't in the room when Ford was sworn in," said Quinn.

Quinn had a front-row seat. He was serving on the National Security Council Staff at the White House at the time, under Henry Kissinger.





Credit: Kenneth Quinn

Kenneth Quinn, right, shakes the hand of President Gerald Ford in 1975.

"There's a lot of similarities to what's going to happen tomorrow," said Quinn. "But it wasn't at the Capitol. It was in the East Room of the White House with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and his wife holding the Bible."



Credit: Public Domain/White House Photo

President Gerald Ford is sworn in in 1974.

Quinn, who served as U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia, even remembers getting in the same elevator with President Ford, and being (what he guesses was) the first person to say, "Good luck, Mr. President!"

Directly afterward, Quinn was photographed exiting the White House behind President Ford, a photo that is showcased in the Ford's presidential museum.

"My hand is coming up to pat down my hair...it looks like I'm waving to the crowd," said Quinn. "And for 30-some years, at the Ford museum, no one could figure out who I was, and why I'm with them, and why I'm waving to the crowd!"

