



★ Journey to ★

BLUE

How Barack Obama
Won Indiana in 2008

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State Senior Advisor to the Campaign 2007-2008

Journey to Blue

he did and said was much more closely scrutinized. He was also very interested in winning the primary in Indiana and was looking for information he could take back to Chicago. There is no question the folks in Chicago had figured out much about what was necessary in Indiana to be successful and knew they could compete, but he was still searching for help.

I had the chance over the next six weeks to see him up close many more times in clutches and other events. He was consistent in each situation: calm, cool, collected, gracious, focused, humorous. A couple of the situations stand out, however. One involved the person introducing him in Lafayette, a small business owner named Todd Miller. The opening program was going on longer than the Senator had anticipated (he was actually ahead of schedule because bad weather had rearranged the schedule), but Miller was saying very nice things but going on and on and on. It was the first time I sensed a little bit of impatience. Senator Obama himself leaned over to me and remarked, "This guy ought to be in the Senate, he's so good at filibustering my introduction." This venue was also a chance for me to talk to him about some information about his ancestry that someone had brought to the campaign. I told him family from his mother's side had lived in Indiana for a while, and he was genuinely interested in what we knew because he did not know about it. I was a bit afraid that he probably heard this in lots of states and might be very skeptical. He asked me a couple of questions about it and then asked me to make sure his Chicago staff was aware and we would try to work something in the schedule that honored that ancestry and connection to Indiana. In fact, what I had hoped would happen with that story did. I wanted the press to cover the story as a light human-interest story and give Obama a connection to Indiana. As you can see from the following excerpt from Jim Shella, the veteran political reporter for WISH-TV in Indianapolis, not only did it work, but Shella even followed up after Obama became President:

Barack Obama's family roots reach deep into central Indiana and soon an old farm house near Kempton in Tipton County may serve as a living tribute to the President's ancestors.

The President's mother, Ann Dunham, was born and raised in Kansas, but her grandfather moved there from Indiana and a historic preservationist is now at work reconstructing some of the Obama family history here.

Shawn Clements loves showing off the Dunham house, a nineteenth century farmhouse that he purchased in 2004 with the idea of preserving it so that he could live here. When a neighbor told him to research the home's ownership he got big surprise. He found a copy of a land grant that shows the property was settled by Jacob Dunham in 1840. Jacob Dunham

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was Barack Obama's great-great-great-great grandfather. He is one of eleven Obama ancestors buried in the Kempton Cemetery.

And when word of the research got back to Barack Obama, he came to a potluck dinner at the Dunham home just days before the 2008 May primary election. Clements later got tickets to the Obama Inauguration and to an inaugural ball.

"This stopped being my house a while back," said Clements.

Now, with White House photos hanging on the wall, the preservation project has taken on new meaning and focus. Clements is seeking contributions and partners for what he hopes will become a nonprofit foundation.

He supported Obama in 2008 but says this is not about politics.

"You know I do historic preservation," he said. "It's about history for me. If it had been anybody else's house you have that obligation as a preservationist to restore it whether it was George Bush's house or Hillary Clinton's house."

The Dunham house was actually built by Barack Obama's great-uncle Riley Dunham, who was also a politician. He served in the Indiana General Assembly.

Barack Obama is not the first President to visit the house; that was Grover Cleveland. (Jim Shella, November 22, 2009, WISH-TV.)

The other time that stood out was when Obama played in the three-on-three basketball game. There were not many folks allowed in the audience at the event, but I was and it was fun to be there. I found him to be very competitive, and I do mean competitive. He had no interest in losing and was not afraid to engage in a little bit of talk—nothing too serious but without a doubt using his verbal skills to try to get an advantage or to push one of his teammates. He also seemed to be the most relaxed both before the game and afterwards. One interesting sidelight to that evening. The national press was allowed to film some of the game and was assembled on the stands right behind me. The reporter who was assigned to the Obama campaign for the *New York Times* was talking with the Fox News reporter about her report about the Philly steak Obama had consumed in Pennsylvania earlier in the week. He wanted to know from her whether or not Obama had raised his pinky finger when he was eating the sandwich. I was just a little astonished. Here these folks were looking for the most trivial of things to try and figure out if they could help with the narrative of him being an elitist, or effete, or whatever the hell they were trying to uncover with a potential raised pinky finger. I don't want to sound like a critic of the press, and I am an avid consumer of news and particularly the *New York Times*, but I am pretty sure the future of our democracy did not depend on this tidbit