



CATHOLIC COURIER

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NY

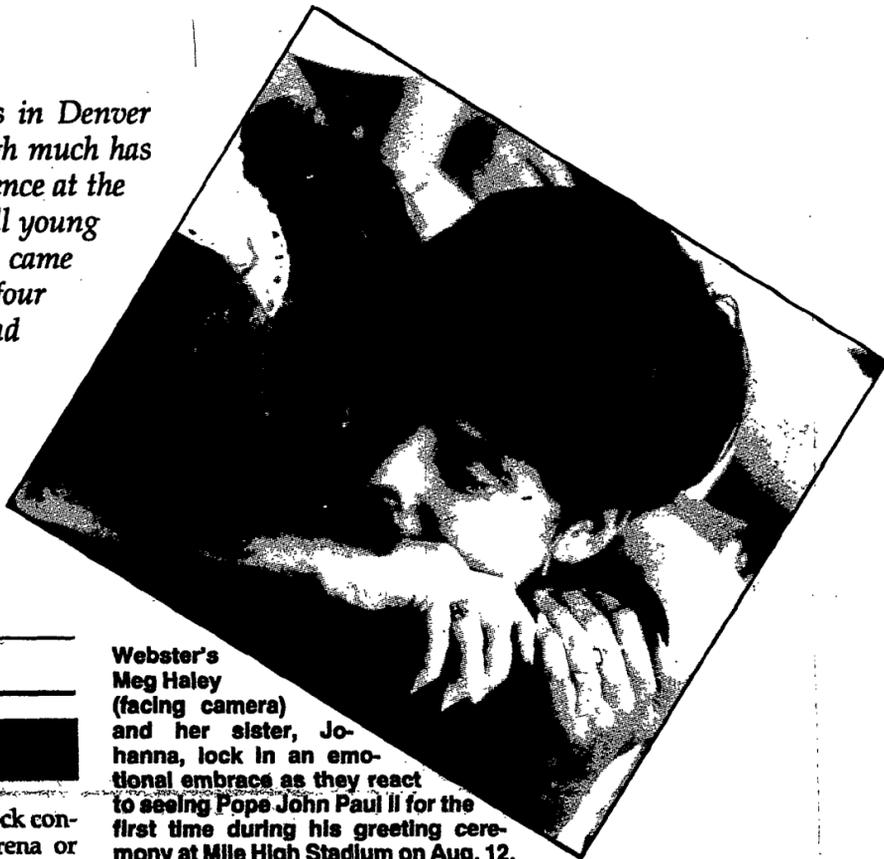
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EDITORS' NOTE: Staff writer Mike Latona was in Denver Aug. 12-15 to report on World Youth Day. Although much has been said and written about Pope John Paul II's presence at the gathering, Latona said he was also moved by how well young Catholics from the diocese and around the world came together in prayer, song and other activities over the four days he was there. What follows are his impressions and observations from Denver.

'A microcosm of world peace'

By Mike Latona, staff writer



Webster's Meg Haley (facing camera) and her sister, Johanna, lock in an emotional embrace as they react to seeing Pope John Paul II for the first time during his greeting ceremony at Mile High Stadium on Aug. 12.

Thursday, Aug. 12

Picture the best sporting event or rock concert you've ever attended. An arena or stadium jammed to capacity and crackling with near-hysteria.

Well, Pope John Paul II doesn't throw touchdown passes or belt out rock-and-roll hits, but he sure does know how to send a crowd into a frenzy — even *before* he appears to his audience.

For a great majority of the 90,000 people packed into Mile High Stadium — including this reporter — tonight's greeting ceremony was the first chance to see the pope in person.

While the pontiff was still meeting across town with President Bill Clinton, the stadium seats were filling up with young people from all corners of the world, singing and chanting in anticipation. Among the "pre-game festivities" was a powerful Gospel set by pop star Deneice Williams, which drew loud cheers.

But Williams' vocals were no match for the big-screen display intermittently showing where the pope was heading to at the time. The crowd went crazy anytime his face appeared on the screen, and the anticipatory hoopla deepened when the pope's helicopter departed from Jesuit-run Regis University, where he had met with Clinton. In just a few short minutes, he would be landing at Mile High to meet with the masses.

When he did enter the stadium, tooling around the field in his bullet-proof "Popemobile," the emotion he evoked was once more difficult to put into words. Everyone began waving furiously, much in contrast to the pontiff's gentle waves. Many people had tears running down their faces as he passed by.

"He's an icon. It's not so much the person, but the thing he represents," observed Shane Eisen-

man, a 16-year-old parishioner at St. James Church, 130 Brett Road, Irondequoit.

Eisenman and the rest of the Rochester diocesan group had the good fortune of experiencing the ceremony up close. The Diocese of Rochester was drawn from a "lottery" used because the seating capacity at Mile High was only about half the amount of all registered World Youth Day participants.

The pope did his part to address all corners of the crowd, naming each country that was represented. Participants closed the evening out with a rousing version of the World Youth Day theme song, "We Are One Body."

Michelle Morante, 22, had an interesting view of what this night meant to her.

"This is like a little microcosm of world peace," remarked Morante, a parishioner at Holy Trinity Church, 1460 Ridge Road, Webster.

Congratulations, Michelle. You might be the first person who ever described a 90,000-person gathering as "little."

But then I'm reminded that upwards of *five times* as many people are expected to attend Mass this Sunday. Maybe this is a tiny congregation after all.

Friday, Aug. 13

Tonight I saw that World Youth Day means much, much more than just getting to see the pope.

I spent the late afternoon attending a

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