

THE BAD SIDE OF THE CROWDS

✘ Well, I was supposed to be watching this from the standing ticketed section.

But instead, I'm watching from the safety of Jane's house. Because it's not safe everywhere on the mall.

Lisa hauled my sorry a\$\$ out of bed this morning at 5 AM to get down to the mall in good time. I headed for the section where people with our tickets were supposed to gather; I was just one block from the gates at 7 AM. For the first hour, people were giddy and friendly. By the second hour, people had become great friends.

But then things took a turn for the worst. It didn't help that DC's cops were pushing people aside to get their bikes (yes, bikes, with wall to wall people, preventing them from using them) through. It didn't help that the cops seemed to have no idea where were supposed to go. It really didn't help that they never appeared to open the gate—which was supposed to open at 8, or maybe 9.

And then people started to collapse. First an roughly eight year old boy. Then an older woman. Then another one. Each time, we'd yell for a doctor, try to open space, pass water to the people. The cops, still, didn't help much. And then people tried to leave, creating giant waves of shoving people. Two kids followed their parents out, weeping. People couldn't see the few wheel chairs in the crowd, which meant those family members near the wheel chairs were yelling, trying to protect their family members.

I finally joined the crowds streaming out. We all streamed over one block, turned right, then reformed. And then it started again.

Elsewhere on the mall, people were still jubilant. And safe. But there are pockets of

weeping, dangerously disorganized crowds out
there today.