



4-8 July, 1999 XVI Soroptimist International Convention,
Helsinki, Finland

Hi Everyone

by *Anu Lehtinen, Hamina Club, Finland Region, SIE*

This is my “unofficial report” or almost my diary of last couple of days.

Sunday 4th July

I woke up at 4 am (!) and left home about 5 am to drive to Helsinki. 7 am I was in Hotel Intercontinental, parked my car and took an elevator to 9th floor. I thought I would be the first one in our meeting place, but no I wasn't! The very first person I met was my dear friend from Australia - Chris Knight! We finally met, and shared a real “koala-hug”! Lots of hugs and lots of tears of happiness! Joy Donelson and Heidrun Konrad were there too, and after that so many familiar names (not faces!) started to enter. It was a very special moment for me, and so hard to understand that it was really true! In the morning I woke up in my own bed, and after couple of hours I met all these wonderful people. I asked people to pinch me in case I was still dreaming... I finally met Meryl Caldwell-Smith and Mary Cassell - after all those letters we have written! And of course it was splendid to meet Kate! And many, many others...

After that we tried to eat something! But I must admit I was too busy to eat properly - it seemed like a waste of time when I finally had a possibility to meet all these people! You read a report of our breakfast meeting, so you know that I played piano there. It was my way to say thank you to all my cyber-sisters for what you did for me last March when I was in trouble.

I don't remember was it president Hilary or someone else who said that we have a special “Cyber Federation” and Kate is our President. So true, isn't it? I was shocked when Kate told us about Karyn. KATE: I send continuously green thoughts to Karyn and to you. I hope she recovers fine.

I took some photos there, but it was difficult because I didn't know who and what I should photograph - too many people and too little time! And too soon it was 9 am and we had to end our meeting. Chris, Meryl, Mary and I talked a while after that, and we will meet again after one week when they will spend couple of days with us here in Hamina.

After that I drove back to home. I was SOOOO tired after that, and I spent monday with an awful headache... ;-(

Tuesday 6th July

At 3 pm I started another trip to Helsinki with two of my friends from Hamina. We were in Helsinki at 5 pm and changed to our national dresses. We walked to Finlandia hall where there were hundreds of people waiting for buses to take them for “Light Summer Night” parties. I promised to be in charge of one bus, so I actually was working there. I saw many familiar faces (not only names any more!) there when 28 buses left from Finlandia Hall. Fay Cori and Mary

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Cassell was in my bus, and Jane Zimmermann was in the same party as we were. So at least four of us chatliners were in the same place! These Light Summer Night parties were arranged in many different places all over Helsinki, so there were about 100 persons in our party.

After meal and coffee, Marjatta, a friend of mine sang four Finnish songs (I accompanied), and then all together we sang the Soroptimist Symphony, and finally I played two Finnish piano pieces. The atmosphere was really warm and nice, and I think everyone enjoyed Finnish "Light Summer Night".

At 9.30 pm we left to go back to Helsinki city, and then we started to drive back home. I was home by midnight, so now I'm very tired - again...

One funny thing I just have to tell to you. One of my friends of our club in Hamina is one of the hostesses at the Helsinki convention. Marjukka arrived Helsinki last week, and just when she was signing in to her hotel, she first met two SI ladies and started to talk with them. Ladies asked Marjukka if she is from some club of Helsinki, and she said, "No, I'm from a very little town called Hamina..." And she didn't have to say anything more when these ladies said, "Oh - Hamina! Yes, we know that club. Our friend Anu is from that club!!!" Marjukka said that she was A LITTLE surprised. And these ladies - they were Meryl Caldwell-Smith and Mary Cassell!!!! How small the world is - indeed! And Marjukka told me that "Almost everyone here seems to know you..." Well, maybe that's not true, but she has obviously met many of chatliners!

Well, I think that's enough for now. I AM very tired at the moment, and now I try and rest a bit. So if there are many errors in my text it's only because my eyes and brains want to get back to sleep... Meryl, Mary and Chris will come here next monday, and I have many things to do before they arrive!

Almost forgot - again, GWENDA, my warmest congratulations to you and your new husband! A month ago we celebrated our 10th wedding anniversary.

Must end now.

Love, Anu