



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

**IGU - Friendship Link - Chat Line - Open Heart-Open Door
Supper at Hotel Ostrabotnia, Helsinki, Wednesday 7th July at 7pm**

by Fay Cori, SI Cardigan, Wales South Region, SIGBI

Anyone on the Chat Line who had seen SI/E IGU Coordinator Heidrun Konrad's impressive guest list for this supper knew it was an evening not to be missed. I heard later that Heidrun had been worried she wouldn't fill her provisional restaurant reservation and was delighted when 120 (one hundred and twenty) people arrived.

The Hotel Ostrabotnia is in a side street not far from Finlandia Hall. It is a well preserved 18th century building and gave a comfortable feeling of stepping back in time with its panelled walls, wide stone staircase, old portraits and tapestry hangings - a glimpse of the old Helsinki.

Heidrun's symbol of a strong red cardboard heart for this IGU meeting was given to each of us as we entered the upstairs restaurant. Heidrun had cut by hand each heart which was decorated by Finnish IGU Coordinator Paula Sorjonen with various extracts from the ancient Finnish saga, The Kalevala. On the reverse was a single name.

The hearts had been distributed randomly and we had to look for a table which matched our card. Heidrun and Paula wanted to avoid having a 'top' table and effectively mixed everyone on eight tables with fifteen places. (An attractive idea worth copying!)

Heidrun acted as Mistress of Ceremonies, welcomed us and introduced IP Hilary Page followed by IPE Jane Zimmerman, both of whom made short speeches highlighting the importance of IGU work to our organisation, congratulating Heidrun for her dedication and hard work - and, of course, how pleased they were to be in the company of so many Soroptimists interested in IGU.

Then Yildiz Belger, SI IGU Coordinator, shared with us her enthusiasm for the ever-increasing international aspects of so many club service projects. Soroptimists around the world are now wanting to extend their horizons further than their own local communities. In her four years in office Yildiz said she never ceased to be amazed at the diversity and creativeness of projects which were furthering international friendship and understanding among all sections of communities, both young and old.

Elizabeth Hughes, who will be taking over from Yildiz, reinforced the theme of international communication and the need for developing strong personal contacts between Friendship Link Clubs. She commented "they are not just people you send a Christmas card to and forget about for the rest of the year". Elizabeth urged everyone who has a Link Club to actively report about their own activities, projects, successes and failures on a regular basis. She continued "find out about them as individuals, what they do, what problems they have in their own community - try

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to make them part of your own club and wherever possible try to meet them". Elizabeth made many of us realise how far short we fall to meet her objectives.

A note of advice here (from the author). If you are ever on a speaker list to follow Elizabeth Hughes make sure you avoid it. She is an impossible act to follow! Unless of course you are Kate Moore.

Kate gave us a rundown on the creation, some eighteen months ago, of the Soroptimist official Chat Line, following encouragement from IP Hilary. There could have been few people present who had not heard of the way in which this has snowballed and now provides a forum for discussion on all aspects of Soroptimist activities around the globe. Kate commented on the strength of international friendships which have been formed using the most modern of technologies - electronic mail - and said for her "it is a dream come true".

I had seen many reports from Heidrun Konrad on the Chat Line and realised how hard she works. But I only realised just how dedicated she is to the SI/E programme of home hospitality - Open Heart, Open Door - when she told us of the dozens of Soroptimists who have welcomed or have been welcomed into one another's homes. Heidrun now has 475 names on her list and was hoping to hit a target of 500 by the end of the Convention.

Heidrun wished every success to Lisbeth Hass in Denmark (also on the Chat Line) who will be taking over from her as SI/E IGU Coordinator. As well as furthering the expansion of the Open Heart Open Door programme, Lisbeth wants to encourage Friendship Link Clubs to develop their contact through email.

After all these speeches, as you might imagine, the typically Finnish salad buffet was looking extraordinarily appealing! Heidrun gathered together the many Chat Liners, all wearing their distinctive badge, for a souvenir photograph on the staircase.

At so many of the social occasions in Helsinki the chance to renew old friendships and make new ones was something to treasure. This IGU meeting was no exception.