



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

Cyber-Friends and the Helsinki Hotline

by *Liz Morgan-Lewis, Editor, Helsinki Hotline*

The chatline was out in force in Helsinki with over 60 members present from this fastest growing club that crosses Federations. Easily recognised sporting their Cyber-Friends badges, the chatliners quickly showed the amazing power of Seroptimist friendship and co-operation that has developed between them.

Reports of every session, tour and social event of the Convention were written up by chatliners and posted (usually around 2 am by the indefatigable Kate Moore and her band of helpers!) on the 'line' for cyber-friends following the Convention from their homes. These chatline reports formed the raw material for inclusion on the daily SI Helsinki Hotline web page and daily Helsinki Hotline newsletter.

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The Editorial team hope that you have enjoyed reading Helsinki Hotline newsletter each day here at Convention. Thank you for the compliments we have received!

The team would like to thank everyone who has contributed to make this publication possible. Do take copies back to your Club so you can share with them the fun and friendship we have enjoyed. It will help you remember the events of Convention for your report, too!



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Messages in our Genes
from *Helsinki Hotline*

Dr Leena Peltonen-Palotie explained how genetics will form the core of future medicine for the physicians and health care systems of tomorrow.

By 2003 the Human Genome Project aims to read the complete message written in our genome - 80,000 gene words made up of 3 billion letters.

To survive and thrive, the human species has adapted at genetic level in response to changing environment and lifestyles. "Spelling errors" within gene words, some resulting in genetic diseases, and other predisposing people to illness during our life time (perhaps triggered by external factors such as life style or environment). Geneticists are identifying gene defects, and genetic predispositions, which will enable the development of treatments, intervention and prevention strategies.

Leaders of our scientific and social communities have articulated the fears that new problems could spring from our new capabilities. Dr Peltonen told us "If used wisely, the knowledge gained from genetics will increase quality of life of individuals and whole societies."



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International Goodwill and Understanding - Interactive Panel
“World's Indigenous People -- Future Perspective”

by Tex Cornwall, La Mesa Club, Desert Coast Region, SIA

“World's Indigenous People -- Future Perspective” was the title of a thought provoking discussion on the first people to occupy the lands on which they are still living. Three hundred million strong, they exist on all five continents with the largest concentration being the Indians of Mexico and South America.

With their own cultures and social structures, indigenous people have been subjected to harsh and cruel treatment by conquering governments trying to force the adoption of the ‘white man's ways’. A vivid description of this misguided attempt to ‘care for’ these proud people was given by Jackie Huggins, an Australian aborigine, as she told of the humiliations suffered by her people. Slowly things are beginning to change. As with any movement dealing with human rights, it is the women who are demanding reconciliation. Their dreams for their children are the same as any other mother, an opportunity for a good education and the hope for a better future. As one of the speakers quoted, ‘Women of the world, we are the ones who will create the brightest social change in this world’.

The United Nations has recognised the needs and plight of indigenous people and declared this ‘The Decade for World Indigenous People’. The goal is to improve conditions in the areas of health, education, human rights, environment, economics, and social self-governance.

Many nations are beginning to recognise that indigenous people have a basic right to their own culture and social structure. Reconciliation is being brought about by giving them representation and in some instances, self-government.

NGOs are working with the people in many ways. May Lamont of SISWP gave an excellent report on how three Seroptimist clubs in the Townsville area started the Palm Project which combines three different cultures in the Southwest Pacific. She refers to it as ‘Bringing Beijing Back Home’.

The objective of the Palm Project is to encourage women to become working partners in the governance of mankind -- in this case their islands. The first step the Seroptimists undertook was to build a relationship of trust with indigenous women to help them build self-reliance. As a result of the Palm Project, these indigenous people are now productive contributors to society while retaining their own cultures and social structures.

The discussions of the panel may be summed up in this way: Peace can only be achieved by total participation. Now is the time for a healing of the mind; a time to listen to indigenous people; a time for active participation and partnership for reconciliation.



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Federation Roundup
from *Helsinki Hotline*

The four Federation Presidents briefed Convention on the work of their Federations.

Pamela Lee GBI, outlined recent changes to the Federation Constitution to give a vote on the Executive Council to each member country; and outlined several projects including landmines, street children (GBI's millennium project), provision of schools and teachers; and provision of a village clinic in Bangladesh.

Margaret Lobo SWP, spoke of education to enable the girl child to reach her potential as the theme for much excellent work in her Federation. She described projects, including the "Baby think it over" programme; provision of scholarships; grants to shanty dwellers to build homes with water supply, and provision of food, clothing and counselling following natural disasters in Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

Helen van Themsche SIE, described work done under SI/E's two key programme areas - Multiculturalism (1995-1997) and The Child of Violence (1997-1999); and told how SIE's several funds have supported education and humanitarian programmes, including support for refugees in Ljubljana, Rwanda and Kosovo.

Donna Walker SIA, gave examples of projects undertaken across the Federation, illustrating how the cultures and prevailing attitudes of the different countries influence their work to achieve Soroptimist goals; and a video showed projects undertaken by clubs with grants under the Federation's "Make a Difference" grant scheme.



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Tomorrows Member

by *Kate Goddard, SI Beverley & District, Yorkshire Region, SIGBI*

This plenary session was a joint presentation by members of the SI outgoing committee for Extension and the new incoming team. It was led by Lorna Mead (well known chat liner) currently the SI International Extension Coordinator and Joan Cromer the incoming Chairman of the International Extension Committee, note the change of title for this international office.

Each Federation then presented its figures for overall membership, recruitment figures and changes in the countries represented in their Federation. Both SIA and SIE reported growth in membership. But despite the increase in the number of new clubs in SIGBI and to a lesser extent in SISWP, the total number of members has been showing a fall. The decline in membership seems to particularly affect the UK and Ireland with a high turnover of new members. SISWP believes that the Asian financial crisis has affected retention in their Federation.

A further statistic showed that in 1998 11,190 members were recruited and 11,381 ceased to be members. There is no doubt that retention is an issue about which we cannot be complacent.

Tomorrows Member Is Today's Woman

- embarking on a career
- achievement orientated
- a professional person who may have to retrain or change occupation several times in her lifetime
- very likely a mother
- concerned with the advancement of women

Vital Ingredients for Our Future

- adopt structures to reflect changing needs
- tackle issues that make a significant difference for women
- devise stimulating programmes that inspire members
- ask yourself, if your club projects make a real difference for women
- a sense of achievement is necessary to retain members, involve your new members and work together.

Ten Tips for Retention

1. Resources - your member's expertise
2. Tolerance - value the differences
3. Delegation - share responsibilities and cultivate leadership
4. Personal Development - develop the new member's potential and skills
5. Empowerment - value and promote new members
6. Communication - effectively disseminate information
7. Mentor - nurture new members

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8. Awareness - understand issues affecting women
9. Flexibility - review traditional practices of your club
10. Action - devise challenging programmes for positive outcomes

Remember we are still the largest classified service club for women in the world.



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**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.