

Servas Canada

Newsletter 15 - November 2007

IN THIS ISSUE

1. [Paint us a picture...](#)
 2. [Report on Canada–US–Mexico Servas Conference “Peace in Everyday Life”](#)
 3. [Costa Rica memories](#)
 4. [Servas Picnics](#)
 5. [A rustic experience](#)
 6. [Trip to B.C. and Alberta, Canada 2007](#)
 7. [A request from a Servas traveler to help schools in Morocco](#)
 8. [Western warmth](#)
 9. [Credits](#)
-

1. Paint us a picture...

Not literally, although any amateur painters could submit a work and we could perhaps scan it into the website.

What I mean is a short description of the highlights of your little corner of the world, what you find interesting or fascinating there and would like to share with travelers from out of town. If we printed a ‘word picture’ a month (or two, if we have space) we’d have verbal snapshots of places to visit with Servas across the country.

Please send us a picture of YOUR neighbourhood by snail or e-mail for our next newsletter and see if intra-Canada visits do not increase in leaps and bounds. What a wonderfully diverse country we live in!

2. Report on Canada–US–Mexico Servas Conference “Peace in Everyday Life”

by Penny Pattison and Michael Johnson

Some 50 members of Servas attended this meeting in San Diego last July, including five from Canada, along with Pablo Chufeni from Argentina and Blanca Gonzalez from

Guatemala.

Topics for discussion ranged from discrimination, border war and under-represented members to youth representatives, volunteers and host list options. Gary Sealey, Servas International (SI) President and Ottawa host, presented a big picture of Servas using a structured mapping approach, as well as some of his concerns around dwindling SI income. He also had ideas about the possible ways to celebrate Servas' 60th anniversary in 2009

A fascinating panel discussion on "Peace in Everyday Life" brought together a Jesuit priest, a Unitarian Universalist, a Quaker and a member of the Baha'i faith. The message this left with our National Secretary, Penny Pattison, was that volunteering and activism are like breathing: breathing out is the work and the helping, but you must first breathe in to support yourself. Food for thought! Another panel discussion, this one on "Crossing Borders" saw a US immigration officer, the Canadian Consul in San Diego and a Mexican consul representative discussing cross-border issues..

Gary Sealey presented a Servas Mapping workshop, in which everyone mapped their own life, discussed it in small groups and then synthesized the group discussions for the whole group. Our Canadian participants found this a wonderful exercise for getting to know fellow Servas members beyond the surface level in a short time. Travelers might find this tool useful when visiting hosts in Canada or abroad. For more information about it, contact Gary Sealey or Michael Johnson, at canada@servas.org.

Servas, like all other associations and groups, is obliged to keep up with the times and resort to IT to ensure operating efficiency. It is in light of this need that US Servas volunteer John Gunther presented his vision for the US Servas on-line database design – one database for hosts, travelers and members, and ready availability of on-line access. The three countries discussed the pros and cons of travelers having on-line access and agreed on the basic principles of privacy and security.

Looking around at who makes up the membership of Servas in Canada, US and Mexico, it is obvious that there are under-represented groups in our organization. These differ in the different countries, of course. In the US, Hispanic people are rarely part of Servas, and in Canada we are primarily white middle class organization. At the same time, Servas travellers are very interested in the broad society in the countries that they visit. Penny Pattison has undertaken to try linking with a Vancouver Island aboriginal group to invite them to a Servas gathering.

For those who remember the article about SYLE in the last newsletter, this topic came up at the meeting at a session chaired by the youthful, energetic Pablo Chufeni, who had so impressed attendees at the US-Canada joint meeting in Vancouver two years ago. He gave an update on the latest Servas Youth activities, including the SYLE in B.C. in October-November 2007, in which a young man from Argentina will be spending a month in Vancouver and Comox. Servas Mexico has a solid youth organization and can help both Canada and the US in promoting youth activities in their Servas

communities. Marcelle Bouchard, a Qu bec Servas member has agreed to lead a project to set up a French SYLE in her province. Pablo ended his session with the plea: "Servas: go online or die," emphasizing that more info should be online as this is THE medium of youth. "If you want Youth, you MUST go online." **The next Servas Youth meeting is in Istanbul in 2008.**

Various activities were organized for those who wished to stay longer in San Diego. Before the conference there was a tour of an SOS village orphanage in Tijuana and participation in an English class for women who act as 'mothers' for 8 to 12 orphans in a family-style house, and a visit to the San Diego zoo. After the conference, a local host and her architect husband took a group to visit a housing project in Tecate, Mexico. Families must purchase the land and then groups of volunteers, mostly from church groups from Washington State, raise money for the materials and come for a week to help to build their house. The Servas visitors had the opportunity to visit houses under construction and completed, and to interact with the families and the arriving volunteer group.

3. Costa Rica memories

by Ruth Scoullar, Quesnel, B.C.

Prior to our tour group visiting Costa Rica in February, 2007, I was unsuccessful in contacting English-speaking hosts on the route of our travels. Tour scheduling was also a problem because there were no hosts when we were scheduled to have free time.

Hospitalization for nearly a week following an accident in San Jose gave me an opportunity to contact Servas host Elizabeth Villalobos Durarte who came to the clinic to see me. When she inquired about my injury, she informed me she does reiki and foot reflexology therapy treatments which can ease pain and help healing. She came faithfully every day. Her treatments were soothing but her friendship was a life saver. I was so thankful for the Costa Rica host list.

Elizabeth got in touch with a friend Carmen Mora Mora, also a host, who came to visit. Then she brought two young Servas women travellers who had just arrived from Denmark. It was such a positive experience. I got to gain insight and understanding of something of the people there, their warmth, passions, and their culture.

The names of these Servas contacts that I spent time with are going to be painted on flat stepping stones in my flower garden. I began the project last summer and have names of travelers and hosts from Australia, France, Malaysia, Montreal and Vancouver, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, Hungary, Belgium, Switzerland and the USA.

4. Servas Picnics

from Suzanne Gauthier and Marie-Christine Zelisko

In September 2003, my husband and I rented a house less than half a kilometer from the Italian village of San Gimignano, clustering around the many towers that date back to the Middle Ages. Wanting to meet several Servas members at the same time, I had the idea of inviting all the members living around there to a picnic. There was even a policeman member who came all the way from Bologna on a motorcycle!

The picnic took place in the yard at our house. I had asked those who could to bring a typical local dish in order to share all the good things together. If by any chance it had been poor weather we could have congregated inside. We adore picnics: what can be better than fresh bread, potatoes, cheese and wine... especially in good company!

For his first experience with a Servas picnic, a shepherd (Claudio Cavazzoni) played the guitar as he sang Italian folksongs with everyone accompanying him.

My husband filmed most of the picnic with his cine-camera.

Our second experience took place in the south of France. The house was located way out in the country near Mirandol-Bourgnounac in the heart of France in the Midi-Pyrenees region. Martine Breillot of Carcassone played the accordion at this occasion and we danced to Scottish dance tunes.

The evening before the picnic, we had prepared two well-known Quebec dishes: pigs' foot stew and a decadent maple syrup dessert. A couple of Servas members immediately offered to help, as they lived very close to where we were renting. Incidentally they have a son who has settled in Montreal and we have seen each other quite often since then, either in Quebec or in France.

In 2005, we repeated the picnic experience in Alsace on the outskirts of the village of Kaysersberg.

We always have very good reactions from the Servas members invited to our picnics in each place we have done them. Most congratulate us and find the idea is terrific. We write to them in advance by Internet to present ourselves.

These half-days have been great occasions for meeting people and sharing with them. And what more wonderful than to bump into these new friends on one of our walks and feel that they are no longer strangers but friends?

5. A rustic experience

from Connie Leigh

A street-smart young couple, he from France, she from Germany, are hosting Servas travelers in the non-conformist home in the village of La Martre on the Gaspé Peninsula.

Gaby calls herself a street-worker but don't take it wrong! She is a social worker who works in the streets with young folk of all ages who hang around in the evenings. She talks to them, suggests activities and establishes a trusting relationship with them.

Philippe, for his part, is a watchmaker but, apart from the Dalai Lama, who loves to takes watches to pieces and put them together, no-one now is interested in having a watch made when they can buy a new one for \$10. So Philippe - and Gaby when she has time - has become very active at the local archaeological museum.

The house they built themselves on the top of a small mountain using mainly recycled material. It has huge windows letting the light in, walls lined with books and magazines on a wide range of topics. The house has no electricity, cold showers and an outhouse!

They bake their own bread with flour, quinoa, spelt, honey, etc. ordered with all their staples from Québec City and they grow their own vegetables and herbs in their well tended garden. While they lack modern conveniences, they more than make up for it with the warmth of their welcome, their kindness and genuine interest in their guests and in their community life.

When I first contacted them in the summer of 2005, they immediately agreed to host me. It's not every day that La Martre enjoys visitors, especially Servas visitors! I asked what I might bring as a house gift from the 'Big City' and the response came without a moment's hesitation: "Fruit from Niagara, please" (i.e. NOT from the USA).

Since my stay with them in 2005, they have bought, although not yet installed, solar panels to generate energy and Philippe has installed propane lighting to replace the candles and kerosene lamp.

6. Trip to B.C. and Alberta, Canada 2007

from Belgian Servas traveller: Pascale Delaisse

It was the first time I had to organize a journey including stays with Servas hosts. I sent a dozen e-mails to addresses where I planned to visit, two weeks prior to departure (on July 7) I got a dozen replies, most of them enthusiastic! I phoned to confirm our arrival,

and our first hosts were there at the bus depot in Victoria on Vancouver Island to meet us!

My partner and I were able to enjoy three Servas visits in three weeks, with hosts not only friendly, available and trusty, but also extraordinary in the sense we could meet other very interesting and welcoming people, thanks to them! There was a 90-year-old retired photographer on Hornby Island to whom we paid a short visit, a famous 80-year-old naturalist on Gabriola Island who taught us all he knew about migrating species, and a 45 year old teacher in Denver who amazed us with her "School of Excellence" project.

I think the opportunity to get to know this wonderful country from the inside, thanks to deep conversations with committed people, was unique and unforgettable. My partner (Servas host for ages) was delighted to witness my fresh enthusiasm and joy in sharing these moments together.

7. A request from a Servas traveler to help schools in Morocco

from Martin Dion, Servas member in Longueuil (QC)

During a trip to Morocco in 2004, I met a French teacher from Zagora in the southwest part of the country. It is a very poor region in the desert. We have kept in touch since that first encounter.

I spoke to him about Cultures Partager, (<http://www.culturesapartager.org/>), an organization which has committed itself to sending supplies to the most needy schools. This organization has sent my Moroccan friend a series of books that were used but still in good condition. The most pressing need now is for furniture. Since I myself am a teacher, I really want to help my Moroccan colleague in his endeavour to provide students with the best learning conditions possible.

The reason I am writing to you is to enquire if you know people or organizations that could help me with sending desks, chairs and school books to Morocco. I am willing to contact different colleges and school commissions and pick up all the stuff but I obviously cannot pay the container transportation costs out of my own pocket. Does anyone have a good contact to suggest to me?

Thank you in advance

Yours in Servas!

8. Western warmth

by B. O'Keefe, Lindsay, Ontario

In June of this year I travelled as a visitor to Alberta. My two hosts were in Wetaskwin, near Edmonton.

Although my primary reason for being in Alberta was to attend an Open House for a cousin, the experience of being hosted was even better! I had heard of western hospitality, but had to find out for myself. The kindness and warmth that I received was overwhelming, and the whole trip was one that I will never forget.

9. Credits

This edition of the Servas Canada newsletter was written, compiled and edited by Lesley Rognier.

Contributions were provided by: Penny Pattison, Michael Johnson, Ruth Scoullar, Connie Leigh, Pascale Delaisse, Martin Dion, Suzanne Gauthier, Marie-Christine Zelisko and B. O'Keefe.

Translation to French was provided by Jean-Guy Charland, Jean-Guy Hamel and Daniele Monfette.

Translation to English was provided by Lesley Rognier.

Host list addresses were provided by Jim Leask. Robert Dar-Woon took care of e-mail distribution.

If you have ideas or contributions for the next Servas Canada newsletter, please forward them to canada@servas.org.