

Servas Canada

Newsletter 4 Supplement - December 2000

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This is only supplemental information referred to by the email newsletter, for those who wish to see pictures and follow up on additional information that is not included there.



Servas Canada Members, board meeting, November 1999 back row, left to right: Graham Sebestyen (chair), Benny (Assistant National Secretary), Lesley Regnier (Peace Secretary), Norm Yan (minutes), Penny Pattison, Gerry Staring (National Secretary) front row, left to right: Michael Johnson (Past National Secretary), Elizabeth Sebestyen (Treasurer), Sandy Yudin (Foreign Host Lists), Sylvia Krogh (Past Assistant National

Secretary), Anne-Claude (Host List Layout)



Scene at the Great European Get Together, Tonbridge, Kent, England. Summer 2000

Servas Experience in South Carolina

I have to include this interesting account of a Servas experience in South Carolina, USA, submitted by Hennie Marsh of Kingston, Ontario.

'Visiting Bobbie Auld and her husband Dennis, our Servas hosts in Mount Pleasant, S.C., is like visiting family. We parked our RV in their yard and were welcomed inside. Soon Dennis was busy preparing boiled peanuts and sweet potatoes: appetizers before our trip to the Firemen's Oyster Roast. Bobbie packed rags, towels, and little crowbars. She told us to wear old clothes. She drove us to Sullivan's Island where the roast was being held. Despite the simple surroundings and humble furnishings (tables: plywood sheets over steel drums; no chairs) many of the Lowcountry's wealthy citizens were in attendance. Here's how it works: Claim a spot at a 'table.' Pick up plastic buckets filled with hot steaming oysters, crackers, sauce. Use a rag, leather gloves, or long socks to hold the hot gritty shell while prying it open with the little crowbar (oyster knife, shucker). Pull out the blob of hot grey oyster with your free hand. Swirl through the sauce and slide it down! Toss the shells in the hole in the

table (round holes cut in the plywood sheet positioned over each drum.) Try not to hit your dining companions. Reload.

'On the way home, we drove past hundreds of monster beach houses. Despite so much development on the Carolina coast, the beaches remain public, for the most part. Mount Pleasant and Charleston are expanding at a rate that alarms their residents; the area is very desirable and very expensive. Nevertheless, people keep moving in. Especially those damn Yankees.

'The next day we went to the Sunday morning service at the Olive Branch African Methodist Episcopal Church. Many churches are segregated, a place where Blacks have some power, control and status. Despite having dressed up, we were underdressed. The Black men all looked handsome in their suits and the women wore fancy dresses with lots of gold jewelry and some with very impressive hats, 'flying buttresses' Bobbie called them. The service started with organ music and singing: the male and female ushers swayed in an elegant and rhythmic procession to the front. They were in separate aisles, the women wore white everything: dresses, gloves, stockings, shoes, gloves, and little white caps. Despite our dowdy appearance we were welcomed (and announced!) with genuine warmth and interest. We rose and sat many times for the various aspects of the service. Announcements were made regarding upcoming events at the local school that parents needed to attend, and preparations for Christmas for 'the needy, not the greedy.' Collections were taken up for important church activities including a financial appeal for a young Black woman who was a contestant in the Miss South Carolina competition. The service was informal, people chatted occasionally, ushers handed candy to some of the youngsters. The minister called out friends and the choir sang, we joined in and clapped along. I envied the sense of community and support in these folks.

'Bobbie's friend Alfonso runs Gullah Tours in Charleston (Guyllah or Geechie is the name of sea island Black Folks' language and culture) and we joined the Monday afternoon tour. Charleston is a beautiful city: stories of slavery, plantations, and civil war are a strong part of its history. Alfonso is a local African American. If you go, avoid the college kid tour guides, they make stuff up. He taught us some Gullah expressions, showed us the usual sites and some important graveyards but would not discuss where you go for 'the root.' The root is voodoo or black magic. He said it was dangerous, keep away,, and he told a few stories to prove his point. We also went to the home of Phillip Simmons, a black man who makes the famous Charleston wrought iron gates. He has been identified a national treasure by the Smithsonian. Despite his increased wealth, he lives in a simple little house in a poor neighbourhood, and would be a treasure even without his talent. A tiny, elderly man, leathery and brown, he loved the attention, posed for photos and told us stories.

'South Carolina newspapers have frequent articles about how poorly their public school students fare when tested. Compared to many other US states the per pupil funding is low (\$2000 to \$3000 lower) and the many Black and poor children are not succeeding. The usual debate involves better discipline, reduced class size, specialized programs, teacher training, parent involvement, etc. Bobbie took us to visit with Virginia Geraty (www.ccpo.org/ccl/gullahcreole.html). Virginia is one of the very few persons who can read, speak, and write Gullah. She has been encouraging the local school boards to train teachers in understanding Gullah so that they can better instruct their students. We talked about ESL, heritage languages, and resistance to various approaches in education. Virginia read us her poem, in Gullah, about Charleston. You can find it on the website above. Before we left Mount Pleasant, Bobbie gave us tapes of the church service, the Brotherhood gospel singers, and Dennis' voice; she added some reading material, moonshine jelly, and we headed south.

'Why stay in a Holiday Inn when you can meet people like the Aulds?'

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A few more Additional Traveller Reports

Compiled by Danette Webster

Audrey Lavoie of Beauport, Quebec, travelled to Ireland this year and 'felt deceived by the large number of negative responses in trying to visit Irish Hosts.' He understood that 'Ireland is extremely touristic despite its small size. Many hosts had already received many travellers (and didn't want to receive more) or they were about to receive other travellers at the time we contacted them' They suggest 'it could be useful to state on the cover of the Irish list that it is highly recommended for this country, to get in touch with hosts several weeks in advance.'

Aline Marchand of Beauport, Quebec, asks travellers to be aware of Host Evelyn Young of Oxford, England, who made her sleep in a filthy shed that she affectionately called the 'gypsy caravan.' 'The place was as big as a sardine and had approximately the same smell...! The bathroom was outside as well, and I swear nobody had used it or at least cleaned it in twenty years. Thank God all the other Servas hosts were great, some even picked me up at the coach station, took me on tours, drove me places, in brief a wonderful experience!'

Ruth Beck from Nelson, B.C., travelled in France this year and met wonderful people who were kind, generous, interesting and interested in her. She suggests that travellers 'just be flexible and prepared to enjoy whatever style of hospitality your host offers because it is a wonderful experience to receive people's kindness to you as a relative stranger. I felt really blessed. People were generous and gave and gave and gave.'
