

Servas Canada

Newsletter 6 - December 2001

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From the Editor

The events of September 11 and afterwards have touched everyone in one way or another. As members of Servas, we are particularly affected, since 'peace' and 'travel' are especially meaningful for us, and both have been severely threatened.

My wife, Laurie, and I were in the UK for much of October, just as the initial horror was receding, and the anthrax crisis and the war itself was beginning. Whatever isolation we North Americans had felt from the woes of the world was gone. At the same time, seeing shrapnel scars on London churches, and hearing stories from one of our hosts of the bombing of towns along the Clyde during the second world war, made not-so-long-ago horrors immediate and powerful. For many, the world did indeed change forever on September 11; for many others, the events of that awful day were one more example of the urgent necessity of finding effective ways of dialogue and understanding among us all. Towards the end of our stay, the British newspapers were filled with hopeful accounts of the progress of Northern Ireland towards peace—a welcome change from the apocalyptic headlines of earlier in the month.

Many of us think of Servas primarily as a travel organization—that's certainly how I was introduced to it. But what more can we, should we, be doing to foster a sense of community among our members? In addition to all the usual news and letters and comments and reports, this newsletter contains some thoughts by Gerry Staring and Mike Johnson about how Servas Canada could be more creatively supportive of Servas worldwide.

This newsletter, as with the previous three issues, is being sent primarily by email, with a printed version to follow later to those hosts for whom we have no email addresses. If you receive this letter by email and would prefer a printed copy, please let me know. As always,

your suggestions, comments, stories, and ideas for improvements are always welcome.

Whether you are celebrating Ramadan, Hanukah or Christmas; alone or with family and friends; at home or away; may you enjoy a meaningful holiday and a peaceful New Year.

Jamie Syer

R.R. 2

Sundre, AB T0M 1X0

NEWS FROM CANADA

The Annual Servas get-together in Edmonton will be a potluck on Saturday, February 2, 2002 at 7pm at the home of **Sylvia Krogh**
Apt 101, 11561 136 street
Edmonton, Alberta
Phone (780) 454 - 6216

All hosts and travellers are welcome.

Ruth Scouler, British Columbia, writes:

After my husband passed away in April I didn't feel comfortable as a Servas host. Although we had very positive experiences with single female hosts it just wouldn't be the same. When I received a call from a couple from Denmark wanting to visit my part of British Columbia I reassured myself that they were carefully screened and there would be nothing to worry about. And it was great. They shared much of themselves and their homeland. They had wanted to stop only one night but I persuaded them to a second which gave them the opportunity to visit historic Barkerville. Upon their return to Denmark they let me know they had arrived safely and we have been in touch via email. They even asked for a cookie recipe they had tasted here. But my real reason for writing was to reassure others on their own that, even though situations change, their hospitality is still valued.

Carl and Roseann Branston, Ontario, write:

North Bay and area hosts gathered on September 5 at our Boulton Twp. bush camp for an afternoon and evening enjoying the fall colours along logging roads as well as sharing Servas stories and a candlelight potluck dinner. It was a delight to share the day with Petra and Rheinhard Hopf, who were Servas hosts visiting from Germany.



London and area hosts enjoyed a November afternoon and evening in Stratford with Caroline and John Jenkins. Elizabeth Sebestyn and Graham Warwick were able to share their slides, impressions and highlights from when they attended the international Servas Conference in Bangkok, Thailand.

Hotel Servas??

A host from Quebec recently wrote:

Sometimes, as hosts, we find ourselves confronted with an embarrassing situation that seems to be caused, not by the travellers themselves, but by the way in which Servas is presented to new members. These travellers consider themselves our guests: expecting a room (of course!) and all meals throughout the two or three days of their visit, without troubling themselves to help in any way. Is it possible to make international coordinators aware of the necessity of explaining to new members that a Servas visit does not automatically include every meal? Am I mistaken in thinking that the first evening meal is generally offered to guests, and breakfasts as well, but not other meals, or at least only if the host feels like doing so?

And here are replies from three key Servas members:

from **Sandy Yudin**, Foreign Host List coordinator:

The host must set the limit here. First, I would remind the traveller of the rules and expectations of Servas and that they are supposed to be sharing not just taking. If they continue to abuse the privilege of being hosted, the host should ask them to leave. If there is a real problem with either misuse or misunderstanding of acceptable behaviour then the host should contact the host coordinator in their area and see if it can be straightened out. Travellers can have their Letters of Introduction taken away by a host or coordinator for continued misuse, and it is reported to their home country. Many people are too polite to tell others that they are overstepping the bounds and only complain later. That does not

help anyone and the traveller continues to misuse Servas hosts. The information this host wants given is already part of what an interviewer should be doing, both here and in other countries.

from **Gerry Staring**, National Secretary:

With reference to this enquiry, I can sure understand her frustration and while it is the duty of the interviewer of the traveller to emphasize the sharing of work around the house when possible, some hosts are overly obliging and indulge the travellers. Perhaps the host could bring out her expectations by questioning the traveller when she is talking to them before they come to her home. Presuming that the traveller is there for two nights, they should be encouraged to take their hosts out for dinner on one of those nights or instead, provide the ingredients and prepare the meal in the host's home.

from **Michael Johnson**, North American Area Coordinator:

Sharing of work around the house is often controversial and varies with members. I've been asked in one home to wash a week's worth of dishes without using soap, while other hosts won't allow me to lift a spoon. One Toronto host has a simple rule: 'I will provide your dinner the first night. You provide dinner the second night.' I offer to fix a light switch-hoping to avoid doing dishes. I'm sure we all have other examples, but we must leave some things for individuals to work out themselves.

Servas Mugs

Penny still has Servas mugs-at least 100 of them in her basement, she says. Can't you imagine using one for your morning cup of coffee? They are white, with a blue SERVAS logo in French and English on each side.

The cost is \$7.00 per mug (including shipping), if purchased in groups of 6 to a single mailing address. For any order that is not a multiple of 6 to one address, there is an additional \$5.00 'odd quantity' charge. If anyone is planning a Servas gathering, it might be a fine idea to phone around beforehand and pull together a group order to save the extra charge!

Orders indicating the number of mugs and the address to which they should be sent, with a cheque made out to Servas Canada, should be mailed to:

Penny Pattison
1442 Brooke St.
Victoria, BC V8S 1M3

Please allow up to 6 weeks for delivery. If you have any questions, Penny can also be reached at (250) 382-9190.

CARL AND ROSEANN BRANSTON WITH SERVAS IN PERU

Buenos Dias Everyone:

Along the Amazon River from Iquitos to Nauta took us 16 hours aboard a slow chugging ferry. For 5 soles (\$2CDN) you put your hammocks up on the deck. At Nauta we enjoyed the hospitality of a Servas couple. Hans Peter shared his vast knowledge of the rain forest here which is still pristine due to its inaccessibility and difficulty in harvesting the trees. We took an all day dug-out canoe trip followed by a jungle hike. Lots of monkey troops, colourful birds ,butterflies and plants. We watched a man making two dug-out canoes from a single fallen tree using only an axe. The paddles are shaped from a tree buttress. We managed to buy one, and got the carver to sign it.

On the return to Iquitos we were so lucky to make it as we happened to be there early to put the packs on the ferry, and then were surprised that it started to move. This was at 2pm, not 9pm-the stated time of departure. The boat only leaves Nauta three times a week. Iquitos is the largest city in the world that is only accessible by water and air. There is area in Iquitos that goes out into the Amazon River with houses on stilts and is served only by dug-out canoes. It is called the 'Venice of Peru', but it is among the poorest places we have seen here. The last couple of days we have enjoyed a stay with Sr. Celine. The sisters are involved with several great projects here, including a senior center that could well be a model for others and a commedore (soup kitchen) that is organized & run by Peruvians.

Yesterday was a very exciting time as it was Palm Sunday and also Election Day in Peru. The results of the election are split between Toledo & Garcia. A second vote will be held in June to decide the winner. This is an incredible hardship on the electorate . The voting is mandatory with heavy fines and loss of rights for not voting. Many people must travel vast distances to vote in the area in which they are registered. We know of one lady who had to take a bus to Lima, then fly to Iquitos (\$118CDN), take a boat to Tarpota and back just to vote. Now she has to do it again. What a problem for this woman who has to come to the soup kitchen for help.

Peru is a special place, rich in culture, history, flora and fauna. We are fortunate to have experienced the coastal, sierra and selva areas which are each unique and different. But our most lasting memory will be the people: they have won our hearts and we know we will return.

See you soon in Canada.

Carlos y Roseanna

These are the photographs of the Branstons' trip



Marcos family members in Belea, Peru



Enjoying a stroll through the streets of the tiny town of Nauta



View of Belén, along the Amazon River



Hand hewn dugout canoe making, encountered on jungle hike near Nauta

REPORT ON THE TRI-ANNUAL SERVAS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Sida Resort, Nakon Nayok, Thailand-July 15-21, 2001

Gerry Staring, National Secretary, Servas Canada

Sida Resort is north east of Bangkok on the edge of a National park with a rushing mountain river and lots of forest. It has the usual amenities including being fully air-conditioned. Lots

of food with good variety was available for the buffet meals-although you had to be careful about the spiced dishes.

The conference had many issues to resolve: in particular, the funding 'crunch' due to a reduction in the overall number of travellers (which results in lower income for Servas International) and dealing with discord within the Executive Committee. Measures were put into place to increase slightly the funds sent to Servas International from individual countries, and a complaint system was approved which provides a method for removing a member of Exco when necessary. We hope that resolving these two issues along with other several minor changes will result in a more effective committee for the coming years.

The pre-conference held on July 13 and 14 at in Bangkok was organized by Michael Johnson (North American Area Coordinator) and funded by Servas Canada as to room and meal costs. Forty-two persons attended including seven of the youth group. While no formal resolutions were intended or developed it did provide an opportunity for those attending to discuss issues and get into the conference frame of mind. The overall impression of those attending was that it was worthwhile; the support of Servas Canada was much appreciated.

Servas Canada did fund the travel and registration costs of two delegates and one translator (Leonardas Rinkevicius, National Secretary, Lithuania; Anatoly Ionesov, National Secretary, Uzbekistan; and Napoleon Escobar, Peace Secretary, Costa Rica). A small cash advance of \$200 US was made to Flory Mardjuki of Indonesia. All of these persons were in attendance at all the business meetings and participated in the discussions. Servas Canada also advised delegates that it is seeking to assist Servas organizations in developing countries with funding and expertise on an ongoing basis. At this time, nothing further has happened in this area.

Graham Warwick, the husband of Elizabeth Sebestyen, the Servas Canada Treasurer, was attending in an unofficial basis. When the SI President, Chris Slader, became ill part way into the conference, Graham was asked to be the presiding chairman and did a fine job of keeping the agenda moving and ensuring the resolution of issues.

For the first time, a Youth Conference was held in conjunction with the International Conference. Sixteen young people attended. They reported to the conference and were enthusiastic about the opportunity to get together. They performed for the delegates, led by Emily Silbert, the daughter of Michael Silbert (Host Coordinator, Niagara). Emily has a beautiful voice and the Youth Group was highly entertaining.

Any conference, especially when it happens only once every three years, has to be more than business meetings and the Thai conference was certainly that. People were meeting people that were just email addresses previously. Also, the Thai hosts provided lots of variety in entertainment-from the family orchestra of Theera Poomsanoh (National Secretary, Servas Thailand) to a group of young unicyclists, to various types of Thai dancing (some of which invited delegates to participate). Presentations on meditation, Thai culture and other issues were available, as well as everything from karaoke, to volleyball in the swimming pool, to hiking in the forest. The Wednesday of the conference week was a bus trip to visit the old capital of Thailand, Ayutthaya. There was never any shortage of things to do if one made the time.

This was my first SI Conference and I was impressed with the ability and willingness of the delegates to arrive at an effective consensus. Servas International is in good hands with the present Exco, I believe, and the conference was a positive experience. Of the 135 countries in Servas International, 52 were at the conference. 48 of these were formal delegates (from

countries with more than 10 hosts). The total attending was 176 including the Thailand group.

For the record, Servas Canada received a lot of credit at the conference. Our funding support for the pre-conference, the participants we funded, and having Graham Warwick being such an effective chairperson were all acknowledged.

There are other ways that Servas can promote peace, besides the obvious interaction between travellers and hosts. For instance, many of the countries in the Servas world are economically pressured, so that they do not have travellers of their own to support their organization through the Letter of Introduction fee; yet, they host Servas travellers on the same terms as all Servas countries (i.e. without charge). At this date we have received no request for help from any other country. However, once the new Area Representatives are identified by Servas International, I propose to write to them and ask them to identify countries that we could help. Then we could conduct a campaign among our Servas members (primarily the hosts) to raise funds so that this idea can be carried out, if the Board deems it to be feasible. No Servas organization should develop large surpluses, in my opinion. One of the reasons that Servas Canada does so well is that our overhead is very low: no rents, no salaries-only expenses are met.

For more information as well as pictures of the event in Thailand go to <http://www.bienhaus.com/thailand/>

NOTES FROM THE NORTH AMERICA AREA COORDINATOR

Do you view Servas as a family? We have 'rich uncles,' 'eccentric cousins' and 'growing children.' All of them will benefit by working together and sharing our resources. Is the family equal? In theory we are, but not in practice. Some of us have computers, telephones, mail delivered to our door and travel often. Others have none of these things and can't afford them.

Hosts in Peru pay \$32 a year for the privilege of belonging to Servas. Israeli hosts- even those with no visitors-pay \$15 annually or they are removed from the host list. Britain, Australia and others charge host fees also. Canadian host donations average \$2.

There is so much we could be doing both in Canada and abroad if we had more funds. A youth group started in Britain and showcased in Thailand will help keep Servas alive. Volunteers are developing regions where our travellers want to go. I would like to suggest that each host consider donating ONE HOUR of their time to Servas. If you already do so, as a volunteer, thank you very much. If you don't, please help by donating the amount your family earns working for ONE hour. Please help make Servas better.

Exco, the Servas International Board, has suggested that North America and Pacific countries, including New Zealand and Australia, merge to form one Area. There will be an election and I have offered to run for the office. Anyone interested in this position, or participating in Servas in any way, should contact your National Secretary or me.



Area Coordinators from around the world meet in Bangkok, 14 July 2001.
Canadians at top of photo: Michael Johnson, North American Area Coordinator, and
Elizabeth Sebestyen, Secretary

Michael Johnson, North America Area Coordinator

(Michael's full report on his national and international activities, including minutes of the Area Coordinator's meeting at the conference in Bangkok, are available from the newsletter editor on request.)

And just received from Michael is the following Special Report:

THE 'HOLY' LAND

The editor of this newsletter has asked me to comment on PEACE. It is coincidental that in Israel, where I am now staying, over 200 people were hospitalized today as the result of three suicide bombers. And those were the lucky ones: 25 were killed, all in the last twelve hours. I don't pretend to have an answer or even understand the problems, but I know that Servas Israel has tried to help. They have held more meetings than ever in the last year, including some in Arab towns, in hope that this may help. Despite the hazards of travelling, and having very few visitors this year, Servas Israel attracted over 100 members to a national meeting in the desert last month. It was a five hour drive for some. Hosts here must pay \$15 a year, or explain that they can't afford it, otherwise they are removed from the list. Their Executive Board meets every two months. I find their enthusiasm inspiring. I hope you do too.

YOUR SERVAS TEAM: KEY CONTACTS

Gerry Staring, National Secretary

Benny Beattie, Assistant National Secretary (Youth Involvement)

Elizabeth Sebestyen, Treasurer

Lesley Regnier, Peace Secretary

Sandy Yudin, Foreign Host Lists

Penny Pattison

Michael Johnson, Past National Secretary, North America Area Coordinator

Sylvia Krogh, Past Assistant National Secretary

Jim Leask, Mailing List Coordinator

Jamie Syer, Newsletter Editor

Servas Canada website <http://canada.servas.org>

Alvaro Barba, Webmaster

Submissions are welcome for the next issue of this newsletter.

Please send your news, letters, comments and photos (.jpg format) to

Jamie Syer, R.R. 2, Sundre, AB T0M 1X0
