

August 2015

This is my first submission as the new programme Director for SIGBI, a role I both look forward to and dread at the same time but one I will fulfill to the best of my ability. As Sue Biggs said in her first article "It will be a steep learning curve"!"

I got the news 2 days before attending the International Convention in Istanbul along with about 1400 other Soroptimists. I had some concerns about terrorist attacks and the problems of Syria but from arriving in Istanbul to leaving a week later there was an immense sense of friendship, joy and achievement with no hint of the horrors being perpetrated in the adjacent countries.

You can get a flavour of the Convention by reading [the daily blogs from SIGBI Delegates](#).

The opening flag ceremony was as emotional as ever. Welcoming speeches from Ulla Madsen, Marie-Jean Bosia and SI President Ann Garvie, followed by sincere welcomes from Turkish officials set the stage for an amazing Convention.



Friendship Evening

This was followed by a friendship evening with excellent food, a fashion show, in which SI President Ann modelled traditional Turkish attire, and music until late- all set beside a swimming pool in garden setting.

Elif Shafak, International Bestselling Author and Michael Kaufman of the White Ribbon Campaign were the two keynote speakers on the Friday. They were inspirational and moves are already being made to have closer links with the White Ribbon Campaign.

On Saturday Rashida Manjoo, UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women discussed what had been achieved and what still needed to be done.

The Plenary sessions were interesting, informative and interactive and the Final session on Listening to the voices of the future gave many of us a lot to think about.

Lunches and coffee breaks were taken in the exhibition area where clubs from around the world exhibited and sold a wonderful array of crafts and goods, all supporting their projects- it was difficult not to spend the holiday money in one go!

Breakout sessions started on Friday and ran through Saturday with a wide selection of topics for the delegates to attend and participate in. Many of the panelists were from SIGBI and they “did us proud”.

The Conference dinner on Saturday was a joy for all who attended, excellent company, wonderful entertainment- lots of laughter, photo taking, exchanging of business cards, rekindling old friendships and establishing new ones in the true spirit of Soroptimism.

Despite the late night festivities delegates were in Conference for the final session on Sunday when we were stunned by the eloquence, proficiency and commitment of 5 young women winners of public speaking competitions held in their area. They were – to quote President Ann Garvie “Awesome.”

The closing ceremony and handover were emotional for all with a Maori cloak being presented to incoming President Yvonne Simpson and her announcement of her project to work with Nepal – a project many will support with enthusiasm.

What a way to start my new role- fired with enthusiasm and almost too many projects to get involved with. There is so much for us to do and so much we can do to Educate, Empower and Enable our sisters around the world.

Barbara Dixon

Federation Programme Director