

SERVAS DISCUSSION

The Future Of Servas

Servas is middle aged, over 50. It can look forward to a resurgence of vigor and vision or a decaying into senility. Those in it and those inspired to join will decide its future. A human run organization is like a living being. It is always changing, never still. To keep vital it needs to be fed, stimulated, exercised and loved. If most members ride it like on a tired camel whipping it to move on without feeding it or allowing it to drink it soon collapses into the desert. Or we riders can give it affectionate feedings and attention that will bring it new energy.

Everyone who reads this must ask, "Am I going along for the ride? Am I satisfied to take advantage of all those who have nurtured my camel, trained her and loved her, while I give nothing in return?" If many say yes, Servas is on its last legs. The numerous free traveler's hospitality systems springing up, many inspired by the success of Servas, will take over and maybe will say a kind word at Servas' grave.

Fortunately the future of Servas is not in the hands of fate. It is our hands. We have a precious global network full of peace minded people who are exceedingly trusting for this troubled world. Over the years we have had many great spirited people who made Servas prosper. In future issues I'll take you on imaginary visits to meet some of them. But reminiscing is not my main interest. Our fast moving world will move on leaving behind those looking backwards.

One reason we have become confused with the free hospitality clubs is because we have not put down peace building roots. A simple list of global hosts lacks the foundation needed to become a substantial organization. We who started Servas, over half a century ago, envisioned the travel system as only one element of the program – a means for young people with limited funds to visit other countries and learn from others so they could create peace building teams back home. We understood that to advance peace one needs to create local groups that work for better human relations – "free of the seeds of war", the early Quakers insisted. Many present day institutions dominated by money power and frequently led by power seeking individuals do not lay the foundations for gentle relations or compassionate or communities.

The world is calling for the kind of Servas teams that can build a new spirit in local communities. Such wide spread teams world give Servas roots and a new vitality. It could be an inspiration and a shining beacon to many people in our tired world. It could attract new members to Servas – younger people and enthusiastic older folks. Imagine the vigor we would gain by having Servas teams on many college campuses around the world. They would open gates that welcomed emerging adults into our great movement. They would give Servas travelers something to connect to when they returned home. They would give hosts in the area a program to assist – better than sitting waiting for travelers who may rarely visit. They would give Servas a reputation as caring peace makers believing in SERVICE.

In the next issue I will describe some of the peace making teams I have been in or seen in various parts of the world. In the meantime please send me your ideas.

Bob Luitweiler owl@stedi.org

Wheel Chair traveller

I have been with Servas for 5 to 6 years. I live in Angers in the west of France. I am physically handicapped and in a wheel chair. I helped with the General Assembly of Servas France in Nantes in Jun 2003 and this was my first main encounter with Servas. On the Saturday afternoon, whilst waiting for the vote results, I was chatting with a small group when Monica asked me a very pertinent question, 'Is my house sufficiently accessible to take you with your wheel chair.' An excellent question.

The people present asked me to write an article in response to Monica's question: about whether, if such an occasion arose, it would be possible to accommodate a wheel chair person without too much difficulty.

First, the person in the wheel chair must ask themselves questions to help them find out if they can easily get into your house considering their handicap.

With a light weight manual wheel chair one can manage several steps, outside and inside with a small aide. It is welcome to find interior doors which are large enough, (70cm minimum) and to know if its is possible to use the toilet and bathroom with out problems and to know the size of the bedroom to be able to get up to the bed with the chair.

With an electric chair it is more difficult: one cannot climb a single step because the chairs are very heavy and often quite large. So in this case it is essential that the house is very accessible. It is evidently preferable that rooms where the person with the wheel chair will be placed should be at the same level.

A physically handicapped person always travels with a companion (spouse, friend, parents,..). Exceptions are rare. In this way Patrick Segal tells us of his experience in his book 'L'homme qui marchait dans sa tête'.

Having done my job of finding if I could manage staying with you, don't worry, when I come just do as normal, no more, no less.

Claudine Cadoret, France

Tenures Of National Secretaries

Possibly the Exco members so far have felt that the matter was sensitive & they were unable to find a way of defining/ implementing the tenures of National Secretaries. I feel the present Exco can ask all the NSs to choose one of the following options

I would like to:

- (a) be replaced after I die
- (b) be replaced when, because of bad health/major incapacitation through injury, I become ineffective to do NS job
- (c) allow change of leadership after I have completed ... years (3 or 6) as national secretary.

Most NSs will choose last option if they are asked otherwise they'll most likely assume first option. Based on majority consensus the Exco can define/implement the NS tenure. Most NS preferring first or second option are unlikely to respond. In their case the Exco can presume that they'll abide by Exco decision.

Gurdev, India

