



Editorial

Postcard from Valdivia

My adventure at the "IV Conferencia Internacional De Enfermeria Familiar, November 11-14, 1997" began before the actual conference with a Calgary-to-Los Angeles flight that allowed me to stop over in Portland, Oregon for a nursing class reunion. Satisfied and exhausted from visiting with classmates from 25 years ago, I began the next leg of my journey early Sunday morning. This entailed a brief refueling stop in Lima, Peru on a flight from Los Angeles to Santiago, Chile. I arrived in Santiago at dawn (after flying for 14 hours) and caught my first glimpse of the magnificent Andes Mountains. Next it was Ladeco Airlines for a 90-minute flight to Osorno and then another 90-minute death-defying taxi ride! At 1:00 p.m. on Monday, November 10, I arrived in Valdivia, a small city of 95,000 people, located 750 km. south of Santiago, site of the Universidad Austral de Chile, and host of the long-awaited Fourth International Family Nursing Conference.

Comparing travel stories became an engagement ritual for jetlagged conference participants: "How far did you fly?" (A 40-hour trip from Korea for Dr. Yang-Heui Ahn made my weariness seem insignificant!) "At which neighboring airport did you land?" (The Valdivia airport was under repair.) "What local sightseeing tours are you booking?" "Can you speak Spanish?" "How long are you staying in South America?" "Are you tempted to buy some of the local lapis lazuli jewelry?"

The climate reminded me of spring on the West Coast of North America-rainy and overcast with the lush green vegetation of spring and many flowering shrubs and trees. Valdivia, founded in the 1500s, was named after the famous Spanish explorer, Pedro de Valdivia. The influence of mid-19th-century German immigration was noticeable in the city's architecture, cuisine (kuchen was on the menu), dairy farms, and chocolate stores. The city was repairing its sewer system construction was occurring everywhere one looked. Modern buildings were juxtaposed with the occasional horse-drawn cart. Located on a beautiful riverfront, the Hotel Villa del Rio provided a comfortable conference venue.

The reason we were in Valdivia was succinctly captured in the opening remarks of Dr. Laurie Gottlieb, from McGill University in Montreal, who chaired the Organizing Committee of the Third International Family Nursing Conference in 1994. She reminded us that we are a grassroots organization-a spontaneously organized group of nurses who have a passion for families and an intent to develop a science about caring for families in health and illness. We have no formal organization-no constitution, no by-laws, no dues-just one journal (*Journal of Family Nursing*) and an international meeting once every 3 years, hosted by whoever volunteers.

Laurie Gottlieb's comments invited me to reflect on the significant and unique aspects of this group of nurses. Our lack of hierarchy and the lack of admission/membership requirements eliminates an "in-group" and a corresponding "out-group." We are isomorphic to what we value in working with families: collaboration, recognition of the expertise of all involved in family work, and a realization that we are reciprocally changed through our interaction with one another. These are valued aspects of our conferences that I hope we will continue to protect.

In her historical overview, Dr. Gottlieb recalled the previous conferences. The First International Family Nursing Conference was held in 1988 in Calgary, Alberta under the leadership of Dr. Lorraine Wright from the University of Calgary. At this conference, the scope and boundaries for the theory, research, practice, and education of family nursing began to be delineated. The Second International Family Nursing Conference, held in Portland, Oregon in 1991, was co-sponsored by a consortium of universities: Oregon Health Sciences University; University of California, San Francisco; University of Washington; and University of Montana. A book of selected papers from the Second Conference was published by Sage Publications: *The Nursing of Families: Theory/Research/Education/Practice (1993)*. The Third International Family Nursing Conference, held in 1994, was co-sponsored by McGill University and the University of Montreal. There was more evidence of family intervention in the research and practice papers presented at this conference. The *Journal of Family Nursing*, published by Sage Publications and sponsored by the University of Calgary's Faculty of Nursing, became a reality. A group of Chilean nurses who attended the Third International Family Nursing Conference in Montreal asked to host the 1997 conference. Conference planning and sponsorship were eventually provided by the School of Nursing at the Universidad Austral in Valdivia, Chile.

The Organizing Committee for the Fourth International Family Nursing Conference was chaired by Dr. Luz Angelica Munoz of the Universidad Austral de Chile. She was assisted by colleagues from her university as well as faculty from the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Universidad de Concepción, and Universidad de Chile. Susan Watson, a Texan who was employed at the Universidad Austral de Chile, lent her proficiency with the English language both to the Organizing Committee and to those of us who required a translator in our communication with the Chilean hosts.

The colorful opening ceremonies began and ended with music. The national anthem of Chile was followed by the anthem of the Universidad Austral de Chile. Dr. Munoz and Professor Manfred Max-Neef, the rector of the Universidad Austral de Chile, provided a warm welcome. The conference was especially honored with the presence of the First Lady of Chile, Mrs. Marta Larraechea de Frei, who also addressed the conference participants. Ethnic songs and dances by the Ballet Folclórico of the Universidad Austral de Chile provided a sampling of the local culture.

According to the conference organizers, nearly 400 nurses from 20 countries were registered for the conference. A group of 5 African nurses came from Botswana. There was a strong representation of nurses from Central and South America; more than 60% of the conference presentations were offered by participants from Chile, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, and Columbia. Simultaneous translation of selected sessions in English and Spanish was provided. It might have been useful to translate more of the written conference materials, or at least the titles of the presentations for the conference program and abstracts. On each morning of the conference, an ambitious 13 paper presentations were organized from 8:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. across 5 concurrent sessions ($n = 65$ papers per morning). Different starting times for each 15-minute paper, as well as missing presenters, made "room-hopping" from session to session to hear the paper of your choice very difficult. Three sets of two concurrent plenary addresses occupied the rest of the afternoon. Posters were displayed each day.

On Thursday, a concert of Latin American music was offered for the evening's entertainment. Two male musicians played a variety of instruments and accompanied a female soloist. The music was enchanting, and soon the conference participants were on their feet, swaying to the Latin beat and experiencing music as a global language.

While it was impossible to attend every session, what stood out for me was the excitement about the nursing of families around the world. Finnish nurses reported their research about families; Brazilian nurses talked about their success in legislating family involvement in health care; Canadian nurses offered many exemplars and practice models of clinical interventions with families. Dr. Kathy Knafl from the United States presented a co-authored paper which evaluated the state of the science in family nursing. A young Brazilian undergraduate nursing student, Juliana Giovanetti Jesus, presented a co-authored paper with her professor in which she offered astute observations of family role changes when the mother experiences cancer. The paper had an intriguing title: "When the Housewife Is Missing." The student reported that the mothers in her study, in the face of the increasing demands of their illness over time, gradually shifted their interest from wanting to go back home as soon as possible towards a greater concentration of energy on their own healing.

During the closing ceremonies held late Friday afternoon, a variety of tributes and acknowledgments were given by the conference organizers. One of these was to Dr. Shirley Hanson of Oregon Health Sciences University, for her contributions to the field of family nursing. Plans for the Fifth International Family Nursing Conference in Chicago in the year 2000 were announced. It is reported that later that evening, the nursing students of the Universidad de Austral invited participants to an *unofficial* closing party which began at midnight at a local discotheque.

The essence of these international family nursing conferences is captured well in a poem read by Dr. Gottlieb in her opening comments:

A pebble of an idea
honed
on the whetstone
of women's [family nurses'] experience
went skipping
across once perceived barriers
creating a rippling out,
ever-widening
circles meeting,
becoming one;
and that which once seemed
insuperable
through sharing
became
avenues of unity.

(composed by Gracie, a friend from Fiji, and cited in *Women at Work*, a publication of World's Women Banking)

Conference participants left feeling hopeful, energized, and united in their belief of the importance of providing nursing care to families and developing the science to support that work. A special thank you is extended to Dr. Munoz and her colleagues for their tremendous effort in organizing the Fourth International Family Conference. The "pebble" that went skipping to Chile offered a unique opportunity to hear about the exciting progress of family nursing in countries which have not been represented in previous conferences. Hopefully, some of the papers presented at the conference will appear in future issues of the Journal of Family Nursing.

Being at the Fourth International Family Nursing Conference was a tremendous reawakening. Family nursing is a global affair, much wonderful work with families *is* occurring around the world, and our language differences do not diminish our mutual enthusiasm for the development of family nursing. There is a sense of eager anticipation for the Fifth International Family Nursing Conference in Chicago in 2000.

Janice M. Bell, R.N., Ph.D. *Editor*