

*“Courage is doing what you are afraid to do;
learn from yesterday: if you can dream it, you can achieve it”
Ann Garvie*



SEROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL

*A message from Ann Garvie,
International President 2013-2015*

I have been privileged and honoured to have been given the leadership of a wonderful global organization of vibrant, professional, skilled and compassionate women, each wanting to advocate for the enhanced wellbeing of all members of civil society within their local, national and international communities.

My international journey has impacted upon my very existence, and has illustrated and influenced my perspective on life. One of the things which has impacted upon me most is the way individual members and Clubs have risen to challenges, taken risks and shown such commitment and compassion in their action. The greatest single asset that this organization has is the global membership - the unique stars of Seroptimist International.

I shall retain for the rest of my life, vivid, heart renching and euphoric memories.

Allow me to illustrate some of the most exciting and tear-jerking moments and experiences. Please forgive me if during this task, I fail to make specific mention of your particular project, protest, a matter of significance, your efforts in lobbying and advocacy; you are all astounding. Every meeting with you, every visit to your Club, every project you have created or campaign you have worked on is important, and I value each and every one of you and your comittment to this organisation.

Let me first focus and pay tribute to the outstanding work and commitment of Seroptimist International's United Nations Representatives, in New York, Vienna, Geneva, Rome, Nairobi, and Paris. I have (with the exception of Nairobi) visited and spoken at every United Nation Centre. I relished the opportunities afforded me to raise the profile of Seroptimist International, particulalry in the various debating chambers, along with Ambassadors and other members of civil society. Our role as advocates for gender equality, sustainable development, elimination of violence against women and girls, education for all and the elimination of poverty, must remain Seroptimist International's key focus.

Seroptimist International must continue to position itself as an advocate at the annual session of the Commission on the Status for Women. It is also critical that our representation is continuously developed to embrace the up and coming United Nations centres, such as Bangkok. I salute the phenomenal commitment and dedication of our Representatives and wish to record my sincere appreciation.

See Solar, Cook Solar, International President's December 10 Appeal, 2013-2015, has impacted upon the lives of women, girls and entire communities, thanks to the tremendous support of every Federation and the members therein. The projects implemented have benefited communities. Through the provision of light, we have enabled education to continue after dark. Through the provision of solar ovens the appeal has removed the need to spend hours every day gathering firewood, eliminating the toxic inhalation of smoke, additionally achieving a basic human right of clean water through solar filtration.

I have visited each of the four Federations and thus experienced the diversity of each. The Federation's project work sustains their member countries and communities, whilst enhancing the global opportunities for women and girls - through education, empowerment and enablement; all an absolute credit to their members.

I was fortunate to experience a Convention or Conference within each Federation. A few weeks before becoming President, I enjoyed the experience of Soroptimist International of Europe's Convention in Berlin, Germany. Following that, during my time as President, the Soroptimist International of South West Pacific in Kuching, Borneo, Soroptimist International of the Americas in Vancouver, Canada, and Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland in both Gateshead UK, and Harrogate UK.

I would recommend that every Soroptimist where possible, endeavors to attend their own Federation Convention or Conference, as it will prove an exciting and enlightening experience - the bond of friendship is truly magical. I attended in Bruges, Belgium, Soroptimist International of Europe's 10th European Meeting and Friendship Days, the theme Women and Peace - an excellent event with most interesting and enriching speakers in a most beautiful location. The event was organized by Mimi Marivoet, Vice President of the Belgium Union, supported by the Union President Marthe Claeys and the seven Clubs of the Union. A terrific formula which I would recommend to others to regenerate, invigorate and renew friendships and Club friendship links.

1500 people attended the Nordic Forum in Sweden in 2014. I was invited as a speaker, discussing 'Soroptimist Role as a Voice in the United Nations'. The Nordic Soroptimists are to be congratulated - their presence most certainly raised Soroptimist International's profile. Our Nordic Soroptimist who took part addressed issues surrounding human rights, equality and violence. Research undertaken by the countries of the Nordic forum evidenced the fact that the most dangerous place for a woman is within the home, a dire statistic and one which continues to haunt me.

The process of the Incorporation of Soroptimist International continued during my tenure and was completed. The International Board has and are continuing to consider the construct of the International Board, which I hope eventually will result in rationalising the size of the Board, and culminate in the appointment of Federation Elected Representative(s).

The appointment of the International Global Executive Director, Deborah Thomas was a turning point for the organization and has resulted in a critical review of the role of Soroptimist International and the ability of the available staffing resources to deliver global advocacy and global communications. This function will continue to be developed under her stewardship, the input from the Directors, Officers and staff and in particular



International Communications Manager Sarah Wilkin, International Advocacy Manager Francesca Fletcher Williams and most recently, ratified 4 September 2015, International Advocacy Director Pat Black - a formidable team.

I have been overwhelmed by the project work which I have witnessed first hand in every Federation. The range and diversity illustrates the uniqueness of Soroptimist International activities, from Live Your Dream to the December 10th Appeal, through to each and every activity and project delivered by SI Clubs.

I have a memory of a project by SI Club Ipoh, Malaysia. I saw a group of children - dark brown eyes the size of organ stops. Their image and their faces will remain with me for the rest of my life. They danced beautifully for us, they played in safety and they devoured their after school project celebration cake, all because of - as with so many worldwide Club projects - the determination, diligence and business planning of the Club and its members..

The culmination of the quadrennium 2011 to 2015 was the International Convention in Istanbul. 'Educate to Lead, Fresh Ideas Empowering Women', in my humble opinion a resounding success, and I trust for every International delegate a powerful and enriching experience in a magnificent, culturally rich city.

The team who planned the convention were and are outstanding. The planning of the plenary sessions and workshops was masterminded by Anne Simon, Executive Director of Europe and supported by many very able and informed Soroptimists. The finances were managed by International Treasurer Pat Carruthers and Convention Treasurer Yasemin Ozes. I am indebted to every Federation and the Turkish Union for their support throughout the years of planning - words can never adequately illustrate my gratitude to both the International and local Committee, Chaired by International Convention Chair, Emine Erdem.

Planning and delivering an International Convention is a logistical challenge, however I am delighted that a powerful, enlightening and culturally engaging International Convention was delivered, illustrating the true value of this organisation and the need for Soroptimist International to truly celebrate its one hundred years of service locally, nationally and internationally in 2021. The SI vision and mission must thrive for the next 100 years if the world is going to reach the potential of gender equality and equity.

I thank the Officers during my tenure, Past President Alice Wells, President Elect Yvonne Simpson, International Treasurer Pat Carruthers, International Programme Director Hilary Ratcliffe, the International Board, International Staff and Presidential Consultants, Carwen Wynne-Howells, Bozena Benton and Jenny Vince, for their tireless service to Soroptimist International throughout by biennium 2013-2015 and most of all to the global membership, for whom we serve and without whom we would never make a difference to the lives of women and girls.

I wish the Officers of the 2015-2017 biennium, International President Yvonne Simpson, New Zealand, International Advocacy Director Pat Black, United Kingdom and International Treasurer Susanna Raccis, Italy, the Directors of the Board and the International Staff, every success.

This has been the journey of a lifetime and oh how humble I am. I will cherish and treasure every memory and every friendship.

