

## A "YANK" IN BRITAIN

SIA President Pat and Executive Director Liz recently attended the SI of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Federation's 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Brighton, England, October 27-30, 2011.

Upon our arrival at Heathrow, we were whisked by our designated driver to the seaside venue of Brighton, known as London by the Sea. We were greeted by our hosts, SIGBI President Liz Morgan-Lewis and President-elect Maureen Maguire.

The Conference began Thursday evening with a Welcome from the Conference's Chief Steward, Ruth Healey, and was followed by a cadre of Girl Guides that carried in the 28 flags of the countries of the Federation. Introductions also included SI International President Alice, and SIE Federation President Kathy. International President Alice spoke and then presented Best Practice Awards from SI to SIGBI's award winning clubs. The University of Winchester's Dance Team presented a dance based on the Conference theme: "Inspiring Action, Transforming Lives".

Friday was a day filled with inspiring speakers and thought-provoking workshops which are scheduled simultaneously. We had been asked to sign-up for a workshop at the time we submitted our registration materials selecting our first, second or third choice. In the morning, Liz attended the "general session" and heard Ann Cotton, the Executive Director of CAMFED, a charity she founded to campaign for female education to give girls in Africa the skills and opportunities they need. I attended a workshop entitled "Together We Can" which focused on several issues affecting girls particularly. The topics included a study of 20,000 Girl Guides in the UK which indicated body image as a major self-esteem issue including severely restrictive dieting having long term health effects; the lack of women in the study of sciences; a young women's story of forced marriage at 13 and her escape from her brother who sought to kidnap and kill her for dishonoring her family; and the importance of micro-credit networks in Gambia to help raise women and their families above the subsistence levels.

The afternoon session included additional workshops and general sessions including the presentation of SIGBI's Best Practice Awards. The day concluded with yet another outstanding speaker, Sandi Toksvig, a writer, broadcaster, and political humorist. An opportunity for wine and networking followed which provided Liz and me an opportunity to meet SIGBI's members.

Saturday morning found us back at the Brighton Dome, where business and program activities occurred, hearing about the "The Future of Federation Programme" by Sue Biggs, SIGBI's (volunteer) Programme Director. (The spelling is English form). Following were two reports from the SIE and SIA Presidents. I spoke specifically about our Federation's WOA Awards program and club projects focused on education – from funding scholarships, providing readiness for high school programs, and assisting with the provision of school supplies. I like bragging about our Federation's work. SIE President Kathy spoke about her program emphasis – Soroptimists Go for Water and Food – particularly in the countries within Africa that our part of her Federation.

Immediately after lunch with our host Federation's President, we returned to the auditorium for a Hustings for International President Elect. It is SIGBI's turn to nominate a candidate for President Elect. The Hustings was moderated by former SI International Program Director Dawn Marie Lemonds who asked the four candidates a series of questions that had been proposed by clubs in the Federation. Each candidate at the conclusion of the question period had an opportunity to make a campaign statement of 2 minutes. The candidates are: Ann Dawson, SI Stafford; Ann Garvie, SI Glasgow City; Joan Smyth, SI Bangor; and, Marguerite Woodstock-Riley, SI Barbados. Ballots will be distributed to the Federation's clubs and the results known in December.

The afternoon concluded with the Change of Insignia Ceremony including a final address by outgoing President Liz Morgan-Lewis; the installation of the Federation Management Board for 2011-12 (SIGBI is a registered company) including President-elect Pat Black; and newly installed President Maureen hosted the installation of regional/national association/network Presidents. Each new President was presented the chain of office (usually a heavy chain with medallion) by the outgoing President while a close-up of the Chain of Office was shown on a large screen and its history explained by the narrator. I appreciated the history of the chains and some chains were quite old and intricate in their design.

President Maureen then spoke to her Federation and shared her vision for the future including her theme “moving forward together”. Saturday’s lively Gala Dinner concluded the Conference activities.

Our trip allowed us to build bridges with SGIBI officers and to forge relationships with SI board members. It enabled us to gain a better understanding and appreciation for the efforts SI President Alice Wells is leading to ensure SI is no longer operating in the red and begins using best practices in financial management. The value of our attendance has already demonstrated value as we have been able to better understand our role in the SI strategic plan over the next two years.

There were several take-aways from SIGBI’s conference: I appreciated the flag ceremony and it was obviously meaningful for the conference attendees; the bestowing of “honorary membership” in recognition of exemplary Soroptimist service to Hilary Page, former SIGBI and SI President; the Federation’s Best Practice Awards that showcased the work of clubs; and the warm hospitality of all the conference attendees. The city of Brighton with its Royal Pavilion, “The Lanes” shopping area, and the quaint pubs and restaurants were postcard perfect. Liz and I also enjoyed a typical “High Tea” at the Grand Hotel while working on SIA business. With English and Irish ancestry, I felt both at home and yet very aware that I was a “Yank in Britain”.