

AT RANDOM

by Andrea Connell

Andrews extraordinaire

The student page experience at General Conference in Toronto

There are many extraordinary things for an Andrews student to do during summer vacation, but the option that surpassed all others this past June was being a page at the 57th General Conference of Seventh-day-Adventists in Toronto, Canada.

We arrived at the Royal York Hotel on June 27, 2000, and began a 12-day work-marathon the next morning. Between June 27 and July 8 there were 26 pages from Andrews who assisted with GC operations by answering phones and questions, taking pictures and messages, running errands, directing, guiding, lifting, typing, talking, photocopying, faxing, printing, labeling, listening, smiling, guarding and organizing. Then we sadly bade farewell to the Skydome, the Crowne Plaza Convention Center, the Royal York Hotel, and Toronto, Canada, on July 9.

The General Conference that convenes every five years provides a unique, global glimpse into all aspects of church life and distinct opportunities to its participants. Taking part as an Andrews University page, I observed six facets that were indeed extraordinary.

The most remarkable aspect of the experience was the people. From the bird's-eye view in the press/media area of the Skydome, it was possible to look down onto the floor where the delegates from all over the world sat. Scanning the floor I could see a woman from Ghana walking by a gentleman from Australia. One delegate from Haiti spoke into the microphone at a business session directly after a delegate from Argentina. Where else in the world could we find such a diverse, but unified body? Where else do so many representatives of the human race come together under one roof every five years to discuss issues and policies that concern them all?

The second amazing feature of the GC was the opportunity to interact with some great leaders. The leaders were present in an assortment of ages, races and perspectives. As a press/media page, I had the opportunity to work with the General Conference communication team. I was able to interact with people from all over the world who were working for their respective divisions, reporting forthcoming events and news to their own corners of the world. My co-workers had also volunteered from all over the world to assist with the General Conference. I

worked under people from Australia and from Denmark. Unity in diversity continued as a key theme.

Third, I witnessed how the church functions on an executive level. It was interesting to see the interaction between the delegates and the various committees. I was proud as Dr. Niels-Erik Andreasen presented the proposals of the nominating committee to the general delegates. Also, it was insightful to observe how church issues were addressed (or not addressed), how church business was handled, and the differing

perspectives the world church brought to the issues. I realized what a slow process it is to bring about change within our organization considering the global perspective from which we operate.

The fourth phenomenal aspect of being a page at General Conference was the city of Toronto itself. It is a diverse, clean, thriving and international city that provided the perfect atmosphere for our church conference. The CN Tower continually cast its shadow on GC participants as they scurried between meetings, little cafes provided perfect breakfast nooks, and the beautiful architecture of innovatively designed buildings

surrounded us. The hot-dog and ice-cream vendors took advantage of the 60,000 conference guests and set up shop along the street by the Crowne Plaza Convention Center. Furthermore, to cater to our traditional vegetarian diet, the hot-dog vendors sold vegetarian hot-dogs with a plethora of condiments to hungry Adventists at lunch-time. It seemed as if the city of Toronto welcomed us with open arms and we basked in her hospitality.

The fifth facet of being a page was my fellow pages. We all worked together to help the conference run smoothly. It was a wonderful opportunity to get to know one another better by collaborating on work during the day and then relaxing in the evenings by sampling various restaurants in the area, paying visits to the health club and attending the evening GC sessions together. I hold dear the memories of times spent with fellow Andrews students outside of the university context.

Lastly, an integral part of the GC experience was meeting new people and old friends in the Skydome, on the city sidewalk, in the hotel lobby, in the convention center, or in the next-line-over at lunch. Our global church community provides us with opportunities for travel, meeting diverse people, and a unique worldview. General Conference gives us a chance to reconnect with old friends. Or we are able to meet people whose paths we will cross once again.

Being a page at the 57th General Conference Session of Seventh-day Adventists was truly an extraordinary experience. It provided both a unique social and professional climate in which to learn more about our church, what being a Seventh-day Adventist means, and connect with some awesome

people. It only seems fitting that this experience was granted to me courtesy of Andrews University.



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Andrea Connell graduated this spring with a bachelor of arts in modern languages. She is pictured above with her fellow GC page Andrew Bueno after commencement in June.