

# A Memorable Convention, and a General Meeting Facing the Future with Solidarity

**For more than three years, we had dreamed of transforming our annual convention into an international event. Nurses from all over the French-speaking world responded to our call.**

**E**very great plan starts with a utopian ideal. We wanted to do something exceptional to mark the year 2000. And what better way to give ourselves strength, courage and vision than by fraternizing and discussing our professional experiences at a huge convention? Today we can look back with pleasure on the valuable scientific knowledge we exchanged and the social contacts we made.

There was a feverish and festive atmosphere filling the Montreal Convention Centre. It was a highly emotional event, right from the opening ceremonies. In this International Year for the Culture of Peace, Justice Louise Arbour of the Supreme Court of Canada reminded us how fragile human rights are in lands devastated by armed conflicts. We went on to honour the nurses who work for Doctors Without Borders and the exceptional contribution of a "borderless" Québec nurse, Élisabeth Carrier, who received an ovation

from the assembly. Ms. Carrier served with the International Red Cross, and her memoirs (*Entre le rire et les larmes*) were published by Éditions de l'Homme.

Finally, a remarkable choir, made up of singers from the Petits chanteurs du Mont-Royal and the Disciples de Massenet, moved everyone as they sang *Quand les hommes vivront d'amour*, by Raymond Lévesque. It all set the tone for the three days to come!

## **Excellent speakers**

Great conventions, by definition, are an opportunity to hear great speeches. Louise Hagan, of Université Laval, and Francine Ducharme, of the Université de Montréal, delighted their listeners with the quality of their content and their dynamic delivery. It was nursing leadership in Quebec at its best!

A reflection on the ethical questions arising from technological

advances, presented by Maureen McTeer, and a more philosophical look at the concept of hospitality and welcome, by Bruno Cadoré, an ethics expert from France, gave us insight into some very topical issues.

Journalist Céline Galipeau offered us an account of her experiences as a war correspondent, illustrated by excerpts from reports on Chechnya, in particular, and made us achingly aware of how humanitarian considerations are swept aside in wars and genocidal conflicts. It was almost too much to bear. I will never again be able to watch the news in the same light. How can such cruelty, such barbarity still thrive today with impunity and, above all, how can the international community react with almost total indifference?

## **Friendly discussions**

What a pleasure it was to people from all over the French-speaking world talking about care, nursing and the profession in all their different accents!

The *Soirée québécoise* offered everyone a chance not only to appreciate some local dishes, but also to dance the *rigodon* and swing their partners all they wanted. The African delegates soon captured the rhythm, and the Belgians, French, Swiss and Quebecers really put their hearts



Photo Michel Gagné

into it. Nurses from the Outaouais, led by the regional President and decked out in *ceintures fléchées*, were definitely the life of the party. Their festive spirit spread at an "epidemic" rate! I should point out that they were seated at the table next to mine... Unfortunately, we had to work the next day, and like Cinderella, we had a midnight curfew.

### Notable political support

At the opening ceremonies in the evening, the Minister of State for Municipal Affairs and Greater Montréal, Louise Harel, gave her whole-hearted endorsement to the Secrétariat international des infirmières et infirmiers de l'espace francophone (SIDIEF). Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Secretary General of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, also confirmed the importance of the convention in a message of support addressed to the French-speaking nursing community.

Finally, Pauline Marois, Minister of State for Health and Social Services, personally awarded the Clinical

Innovation 3M Grand Prize to the winners from the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. The Minister emphasized the remarkable job done by the profession in these difficult times. She thanked the nurses for their steadfast dedication to maintaining quality of care, and the Order for its role in seeking solutions to the shortage.

Ms. Marois' comments were particularly appreciated when she announced her intention of recognizing and supporting the emergence of new roles for nurses, particularly nurse practitioners. Her comments also received extensive

coverage in the press.

### A new mandate

For me, the General Meeting marked the start of a new term as President of the Order. The 2000-2002 term began at the completion of a General Meeting at which delegates debated an increase in their assessment, after eight years of stability. The proposed increase was approved by a large majority. This was an opportunity for the delegates to pronounce on the relevance and results of the Order's activities, both in its role as an association and in terms of its responsibilities under the *Professional Code*.

The solid support for the Order, delegates' overwhelming solidarity as they face the future and the expressions of renewed confidence warmed my heart. After many years at the head of the Order, it was important for me to be assured of members' trust if I am to complete the vitally important negotiations on modernizing nurses' field of practice and obtaining legal recognition for new roles for nurses.

We can also be proud of the tone of delegates' discussions, as their international peers looked on. I have always applied a policy of complete transparency in dealing with delegates. Every question deserves a clear and specific answer, documented if necessary. Over the years, the information we have exchanged and shared has helped to create an atmosphere in which our debates are marked by mutual respect.

### A promising future

Work to realize the dream of closer relations in the international Francophone community and a tight-woven nursing community began in earnest the day after the convention, as the first general meeting of SIDIEF members was held. The international board of directors submitted a substantial annual report describing its first year of existence.

With the support of the École La Source, of Lausanne, Switzerland, the OIIQ has managed to build a real partnership, giving the SIDIEF a solid foundation. Individual members expressed their interest in co-operating on an extensive international project, confirming the value of this highly democratic network.

We would have liked to be able to announce the date and location of the next international convention. The SIDIEF, which is taking over from the Order in this respect, plans to confirm the event, to be held in 2003 in Europe. The Order's 2001 convention will return to its Quebec roots, but the pleasures of this year will remain with us for a long time to come. ☺

Gyslaine Desrosiers

PRESIDENT