

Postcard from Colombia ☺

CHAIRS REPORT TO THE REGION OF Region Chairs Committee (RCC) Meeting (3rd Meeting 2011) and Attendance at Region 8 Assembly Wed 2nd Nov – Mon 7th Nov 2011 - Medellin, Colombia – South America

Our Region Chairs Committee (RCC) meeting and the Region 8 Assembly were held at the Intercontinental Hotel, Medellin, Colombia. There were eight other Region Chairs besides myself (R 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) as well as the RCC Board Of Trustees (BOT) Co Chair – Janice S.

Representatives from Region 8 Intergroups and the Colombian National Service Board (NSB) were present. The NSB had expected perhaps 100 – actually 162 members registered! The Colombians were wonderfully welcoming and energetic.

OA R8 covers the area: the Southern part of North America as well as the continent of South America and the Caribbean Islands. Colombia is one of twelve independent countries of South America.

The RCC rotate around the various regions and this year the visit to R8 in the city of Medellin, Colombia was a huge accomplishment. Medellin nestles in lush mountains – the temperature was very pleasant and the food excellent for my abstinence – deliciously fresh vegetables and fruit.

In the past R8 has only ever held its Assemblies in the southern part of the United States of America – mainly the Florida area and have never gone into the Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in the South America continent.

Most of the OA literature is translated into Colombian Spanish - I will speak about this more further into my report.

There are three reasons for attending what is described as the third RCC meeting in the calendar year for the Region Chairs. My report is broken down under each of these purposes. However, I have also added a further category which in a way - goes before all others – to carry and share the message of OA recovery – one member to another.

Carry / share to message of OA recovery

OA Meeting in Downtown Medellin & NSB of Colombia Office.

Towards the end of the first day the RCC and Region 8 Board were whisked into 'downtown' Medellin to visit the office of the National Service Board of Colombia. A tiny couple of rooms in a basic building – whilst far from what you might describe as 'grand' – absolutely serves its purpose. I have included a few photos of the translated OA literature and the banner for this wonderful event (the whole weekend). Clearly there had been many months and much effort by a lot of OA members for this visit and in a way this is summed up in that colourful banner. Many thousands of leaflets had been produced and handed out by the local OA members to let folk know this recovery event was going ahead. After the office visit we attended an OA meeting on the top floor of the same downtown building. There were about 80 people in attendance. The topic was the OA Tools and folk shared and were translated in much the same way we do in our Region 9 events where there is more than one language – i.e. one member speaks (remembering to pause appropriately) and another member with the gift of language then translates. When the translator can't find a word – they are helped along by others. Just as we always do in OA – one OA member helping another. As far as I am aware there were no 'brand new' newcomers and we all pass the message of recovery back and forth as members – but one of the other region chairs told me later that there was 'much note taking' and 'scribbling down' when members (Region Chairs included – we are never shy about offering to share what we have so freely been given) shared their experience strength and hope – especially on the Action Plan. The local OA members are obviously 'hungry' for recovery and requests for abstinent sponsors were made frequently – at this OA meeting and over the entire weekend. We closed with the OA Promise in Spanish and the Serenity Prayer in English.

I am sure it can be very tiring for the members thinking and translating into another language – especially when there is emotion involved – God bless them for their gift of language and for using it to the good of OA.

OA Region 8 has a 'tradition' of attending an OA meeting in the local area before their business events. How wonderful to be at your local OA meeting and have visitors from all over the United States, Canada and Europe. Well done to R8.

I first experienced a similar event when I attended an OA meeting in a library in Jerusalem after our R9 Assembly! Esti brought myself and three or four Region 9 reps to her local OA meeting (from memory we were from Belgium, Finland, France and England – apologies if I left a country out and you were there! It's a while ago now and my old brain forgets!). In my mind this attendance at OA meetings when we go anywhere to give service is a smashing way to carry the OA message.

After the OA meeting we were taken to a downtown restaurant for an abstinent dinner and dancing – the band was great (not sure if local members – but lovely to hear & dance to the Latin music). Again – a ‘basic’ venue – however the food was good and nutritious and the welcome from the local OA members unsurpassable! Ambiance – just fab. One OA member reaching out to another and experiencing a very fulfilling life ☺ My how lucky we really are.



Translation during the Convention

The convention was predominantly conducted in Spanish. However, in the individual meetings and workshops – where there was an English speaker – this was translated as mentioned above - by another OA member just as we do in Region 9.

However, Region 8 also did what they refer to as ‘simultaneously translating’. This is where a professional translator is hired to do the translation simultaneously while the speaker is speaking. There is a very slight delay but no interruption. The translated version is delivered over headphones (each person – (all 160 of us) - was issued with headphones and a small handheld unit). Translation was carried out by the professional listening to the speaker whilst sitting in a ‘booth’ at the back of the room. This was done for selected parts of the Convention – the opening event speakers (Region 5 – Canada & ourselves Region 9 – so as to include the International flavour), the lunch time Friday speakers (Region 7) and the closing session (Region 8 Chair & members and ‘thank you’).

This made up a total of 2 hours. Very professional. But also quite expensive. It was \$3000 for the 2 hours.

Convention – OA Road Show

The Twelve Step Within Committee performed the ‘OA Road show’ Skit during the closing session. This was translated simultaneously from English into Spanish. When I first watched this skit – I found it incredibly moving and made me profoundly aware of my own responsibility as an OA member. I would love to hear what the Spanish speaking members felt if they were witnessing this for the first time. As mentioned above this session was simultaneously translated into Spanish.

Initial opening, interpretive dance and ‘breaking free’ of our disease!

At the opening session of the Convention there was ‘mood music’ played and the lights dimmed. We were asked to find a table with our country on it – each table had a large piece of paper on which was drawn ‘bricks’. We were asked to draw around our hand on that piece of paper and then write in our hand print – aspects of the disease. I wrote – hopelessness & dishonesty.

On the Saturday evening (which was formal dress – I was delighted to wear a ball gown that I would never have worn pre OA – whatever my weight!) – the local members performed an interpretive dance – I struggled to understand most of it, but....

During the closing ceremony – those paper bricks were put together and hung up as a brick wall. A local OA member did some more interpretive dance behind the wall (the paper was thin and therefore we in the audience could just see a shadow of her body moving to the music). The interpretation then became apparent as the aspects of the disease, then the actions of the OA tools and increasing hope – the finally being the OA member behind the wall desperately shouting ‘Poder superior..... Poder superior’ (Hire Power) over and over with increasing desperation and eventually breaking through the wall with fists flying! It was incredible!

Other snippets to share

Before we travelled we were all asked to bring one item for the fundraising boutique – a great way to share the responsibility of raising funds.

There are flash drives available of the whole weekend but I was too late to purchase these as they sold out very quickly – I will try to get one before the R9 Assembly.

R8 has a motto 'Fun in Abstinence' – would we in R9 like a motto of our own? The photo below is the banner that hung in the Assembly throughout.

I brought some displays of pictures of translated literature etc. from our Region 9. This is a photo of those displays.



Review and observe the host Regions Assembly.

Another purpose for attending is to see how the host Region functions with regard to their assembly and to share ideas on this and what works in other Regions.

Region 8 starts their first day of business with a R8 Board meeting in the morning at which they finalise things for the Assembly. Then in the afternoon they meet with the R8s Committee chairs. R8 Committee Chairs are voting members just like ours in R9 but they are funded by the region and not by their IGs / SBs.

The RCC attended these first two meetings. They observed and were also given a chance to share how we do things in each of our own regions. I was initially very surprised at the hotel we were staying at (very 'plush') I realised later in the week that there are some very real issues with regard to hygiene and security in Colombia and there does not seem to be any 'in between' – i.e. the standard of our hotel and down town. I had brought with me some pictures of our forthcoming venue in Belgium and details of costs – and passed these around.



Hotel Intercontinental Medellin



Downtown Medellin

The RCC then sat in on the R8 Assembly. During the first session the Regions Committee Chairs each did a presentation on activities that went on in their committee. These came in various guises from a presentation by the committee chair in a summary bullet point form to a song performed by the committee as a whole (who says finances can't be fun).

This was a great way of explaining to the new Region Rep - what each committee does.

I wrote notes during the assembly which I will not only include in passing on the job to the new region chair but this will also assist in updating the script that the Region Chair uses during our assembly. I will do this before our assembly.

Region 8 are quite formal in their approach to their assembly – they address the various officers as 'Madame Chair, Madam Trustee' etc. They use a parliamentarian (local OA member) and also use a centre mic for questions as well as the pro & con mic. whilst debating the motions.

One of the motions brought the topic of remote attendance to assembly and voting as well to the fore. This was debated at length. One member was virtually present on a system called 'oovoo' (I am not familiar with this but it seems to have less 'glitches' than Skype) for the full assembly and another for part of it.

Concerns such as anonymity, security of voting – over 'video' or email etc., change of atmosphere of the assembly by less physical attendance etc. were all raised by cons or questions.

The aspect of anonymity (with the attendance of members outside the room virtually by oovoo) this time was overcome by a cunning system of the person being concerned – picking up a red stop sign to indicate they did not want to be on camera when they approached the mic and then the camera being turned off.

This aspect worked very well – but the motion was defeated, partly due to the concerns raised and partly because the technicalities and wording of the motions needed looking at. The concerns raised were very similar to those raised at attendance and voting of WSBC virtually. My feeling is that the motion / s may come back after consideration of the wording etc. but that ultimately this may not be the way to do OA business. I do not know how much the equipment cost that was used. It did appear that R8 has a very good and well versed web tech committee.

Region 8 on this occasion dealt with the whole aspect of translation in an entirely different way than we have in R9. The assembly was conducted in English and then translated into Spanish. Thus – the Chair facilitated in English and the Spanish members were 'huddled' in a group with one member translating so there was a low whisper.

The debate however – pros & cons & questions was translated to the whole assembly – so we heard it in English and then in Spanish. This had the effect that it doubled the debate time for each motion. I don't know whether they may have made the decision to translate into Portuguese if countries such as Brazil were present. Either way – translation in this way does mean that the whole process takes quite a lot longer. Region 8 has two main languages – Spanish and Portuguese – clearly Region 9 has many more. I am not sure whether this method of translation would work in our Region. It would appear that in general in Region 8, there are fewer members that speak English than what seems apparent in our own region. But this is just an impression and may not be so. Maybe translation in this way should be considered by our region – I suggest we consider this in our translations workshop?

Region 8 has similar committees to our own. Each Region Chair sat in on a committee meeting. My own was 12 Step Within. I thought this would be useful for both of our regions as we might have activities that we each might benefit from and some things to share. Just like in R9 – they are working on a sponsors list, meeting list accuracy and a speakers list. They have also just been passed the topic of Lifeline – more about this later in my report.

Another OA visitor from Colombia sat in on this committee and I felt that together we did add a lot to a committee that were doing their best in trying to step outside the confines of their past experience which had consisted of a totally

English speaking part of their region.

Region 8 does not send 40% of their service bodies to WSBC and therefore just like R9 – they can send delegates from their Region. They have a system of application – in which OA members from the region apply with a written application of their OA recovery and then speak to their application at the assembly. Voting is then carried out by ballot. The successful applicants need a majority – once this is achieved they are ranked in order of number of votes so that priority can be given and the funds available distributed according to that priority. This helps in the case of successful applicants with different distances to travel and therefore different costs.

Some Regions hold their convention at the same time as their assembly and this is the case with Region 8 this time.

Towards the end of the assembly I and the chair from Region 7 helped out as ‘tellers and runners’ for the voting by ballot for new officers.

Ironically at my first R9 Assembly at which I attended as a visitor – I also did this job.

To carry the message to that Region as a body (i.e. the Region Chairs Committee).

My first experience of this was in 2003 - the Region Chairs as a ‘body’ came out of the USA and visited Region 9 during our Assembly in Belgium. I learned a lot and amongst other things witnessed at first hand over the period of the Assembly & Convention what an extremely powerful ‘body’ the Region Chairs Committee are when seen as a whole. As an OA member I came away from that experience in 2003 with a huge renewal of my commitment to abstinence and saw at first glance – that long term and lasting recovery is possible – relapse is not inevitable – if we ‘keep getting up each morning and doing what we did yesterday to keep our recovery’ (i.e. work the steps, commit to abstinence etc.).

Each Region Chair spoke at one of the many meetings and workshops of the convention - we told our stories and then depending on the content – led into a particular aspect of recovery.

As the Chair of R9 which has many of the language implications that R8 have (but multiplied by the sheer no of languages in our region) I was asked to speak at the opening event. My instructions were to tell my story and to include anything with implications for a Worldwide Fellowship and how being involved in Region has improved my recovery. I did so and included my initial experience of Region 9 as an unwitting visitor to the assembly and attendance at the convention in Belgium in 2003 and then subsequent attendance as a rep for OAGB NSB. And also serving on the R9 board.

I gave a workshop on Translation at the Convention. I covered various questions involving 7th Tradition use of skills for the good of OA, the Assignment Agreement, and the Three Translation Licences. After I shared - members shared from the floor.

The Colombian National Service Board has most OA literature items translated – but the following aspects were raised during that meeting:

The OA Book – Seeking the Spiritual Path is translated into ‘Colombian’ Spanish – it is not listed as one of the books available in Spanish in our region.

The 12 Step Within hand book is listed as translated into Spanish in our region 9 – but is not in Colombian Spanish.

Thus –

Should we be sharing these two items? (I bought a copy of the book and will bring it with me to R9)

Do we really need to wait to begin a translation all over again before we use the literature that is available?

Is Spanish so different in these countries that the literature that is translated does not carry the OA message?

When we start to translate literature – do we check whether it is translated already before we begin?

Perhaps we can discuss these aspects at our assembly?

We also raised the aspect of Portuguese translation of OA literature however there wasn’t any representation.

RCC Responsibilities of The OA Strategic Plan etc.

The RCC also use the opportunity to meet during the time in Region 8 so that they could discuss the progress of their responsibilities given in the Strategic Plan and also the arrangements for their work at World Service Business Conference (WSBC) 2012. (The RCC are organising the Wednesday Forum).

Had a Region Chairs Committee (RCC) Meeting to discuss any updates for our committee. Here's what we discussed and arranged:-

Region Chairs Tasks covered at the RCC Meeting

- Concepts Motion from RCC – The Concepts are currently drafted as if the only part of the service structure of OA is involved at the WSBC and WSO level and this makes it very difficult to apply them and make them relevant at the local IG / SB & group level. There was a motion put before the WSBC earlier this year that had the effect that all groups must be registered with WSO and also must be guided by the Concepts of Service. This will now be part of the suggested meeting format. The RCC have reviewed the Concepts of Service and suggested revisions to wording so that all aspects of the service structure are included in it. This motion was reviewed by us as a committee this time and will go before the WSBC in 2012
- We discussed the possibility of using electronic means of meeting such as Skype – and we did make contact during the meeting with the R10 Chair. However there were communication difficulties at times and it was difficult to maintain the feeling that the R10 Chair was part of the meeting and it was generally distracting. Therefore we decided that at this stage the technology was not quite ready for this yet.
- We made progress in arrangements for the Wednesday Forum at WSBC in 2012 which is the RCC Committee responsibility. The topic is a surprise but it promises to be fun and very informative. Please make sure your IG considers sending a delegate to WSBC next year.
- Region Tent Cards have now been developed by all regions. – You may remember that the R9 versions were issued at the R9 Assembly last year – have they been translated into your language? This topic will be discussed at the R9 Assembly next week.
- RCC now has a functioning Web site and Manual – these will be kept up to date to assist with cross sharing of information between regions and for new Region chairs.
- Green Dot mentor program – the RCC have now developed a list of things to discuss between Green Dot & mentor which will now be part of the admin handled by the RCC.
- Lifeline Update – the deficit for Lifeline has reduced but it is still not fully self- supporting. We shared and one of the considerations and parallels came up – if one person buys a 'salad buffet meal' and then goes up to the salad bar – would they then let others go and help themselves to the food without consideration to the restaurant? Would a person order a drink in a restaurant – and then let others drink from their glass? Are we doing this with our OA Lifeline? A member made the point that when they are finished with their Lifeline they bring it to the doctor's surgery – they do not bring it to their OA meeting as they hope that the local OA members would have their own subscription. Does this raise questions for us in Region 9? We did discuss the fact that paper copies of magazines in general were somewhat reducing but in general the overall feeling was that there is a place for both electronic and paper and that if we want an OA magazine then we need to support it.

We had been asked to stay for the closing session on Sunday morning (till noon) which I dually did. Our hosts then treated us to an afternoon of sightseeing. I enjoyed this immensely but was glad of the security of local OA members that knew the area and spoke Spanish. It had been a truly life changing experience.

I think that's all for now folks. This is my last report as Region 9 Chair as I step down in a few weeks' time.

When I was elected as Region Chair – an OA member hugged me and was gracious enough to say that I would make a 'good region chair' – my knee jerk response was – that 'it was an honour and a privilege to do so'.

I cannot begin to say how fulfilling the experience has been – it has indeed without a doubt lived up to that initial feeling! My how blessed I am. Thank you for allowing me to serve.

Kind Regards –

Stella

Stella C (Region 9 Chair)