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**BPW International Congress, October 23-28, 2008, Mexico City**

**Young BPW Fund Report**

Prior to my arrival to Mexico City, I was very excited, a bit nervous and extremely ready to learn both for my personal development and the advancement of my Manhattan chapter. Upon the first session, “Orientation: My First Congress”, I was very much put at ease by Sylvia Perry and her wonderful advice. My goals from then on were to network as much as possible, to not be shy, to open myself up to new experiences, and to learn as much as I could to bring back to my club. In addition, I was encouraged to be confident and contribute my experiences and ideas whenever possible.

Once the guidelines for Congress were laid out, I was able to catch up on what is happening in my region, the North America and Non-Spanish speaking Caribbean. The Caribbean has been ravaged by hurricanes recently, particularly Haiti, so there was much discussion about BPW sending funding and help to that region. We got to hear a little synopsis of each area in this region and the projects and programs are quite promising and inspiring. I hope to draw on some of these programs as inspiration for the Manhattan chapter and Young BPW.

Over the course of the Congress, I split my time between workshops and the Business Sessions. In particular, at the Business Sessions, I volunteered at the credentials desk. This was a great way to network and get to know who the voting delegates are. This knowledge is very important because if I or others wanted to lobby, we knew the right people to talk to. At the credentials desk, we worked hard to mesh with the university students and the BPW volunteers. Helping the delegates understand the digital voting process and how to handle their digital voting machines required patience, kindness, and knowledge. It was an enlightening experience, as I was able to meet many people, network, and work on skills on getting past language and cultural barriers.

At the Business sessions, my eyes were opened wide to debate and parliamentary procedure. I developed a much greater understanding of how resolutions and constitutional amendments are created,

put forth, debated, and passed or not passed. It was very impressive to hear the vast knowledge that our BPW sisters possess on so many different issues. I was particularly impressed and proud when Young BPW members spoke in front of the entire room on issues that were important to them.

The Plenary sessions were so inspiring and important to this Congress. Highlighting the work that women from around the world are taking on, and awarding many of them for their efforts, is essential for personal and club development. I was particularly inspired by hearing H.E. Annette Lu of Taiwan, Blanca Heredia of OECD, Mexico, Martha Lucia Micher Camarena, and of course our very own Young BPW, Deon! I am so proud of her and her accomplishments.

I went to many many parallel workshops and I will highlight some of my favorite learnings. In the very first session on Saturday morning, I had the unique experience of listening to an amazing piano player who used his musical harmony to explain how we all need to create harmony in our lives by working on projects that are close to our hearts. Our career should be a passion so that we are fully engaged and inspired. This is a topic very dear to my heart, because as a young woman, I know that I am capable but I struggle to try to find and focus my passions on a daily basis. It is not always easy to be in a career about which we are passionate but it really needs to be the ultimate goal in terms of business life, in order to be happy and a complete person. The speaker, Joaquin Borges, also spoke about finding harmony in daily life, when people are angry around you and there is negative energy. It was such a useful topic to help cope with daily pressures. Another great session that I went to was “Corporate Social Responsibility”. It was enlightening to hear from the women from Mexico and hear the difficulties and successes they have in achieving work-life balance in their companies. These are problems we all face but to hear how it was dealt with was interesting. As a young woman who will encounter family life in a few years, this is particularly topical. At the “Intercultural Communication and Win-Win Negotiation Skills” workshop, I learned from some very strong women who get what they want in negotiations. The topic of communicating across cultures is very topical for this conference, as we really need to understand customs in order to network here. In addition, in my business I deal with partners in Hong Kong, China, and Cambodia. The communication barrier is quite daunting so any tips in that area are much appreciated. I know that personally, I need to work on my negotiation skills. I tend to want to be a people-pleaser and this is not going to work as I try to grow and move forward in my career. I need to be willing to make some decisions that do not please everyone along the way.

A workshop that was very useful to me was “Advocacy at the UN to Improve the Status of Women”. Living in NY and being part of the Manhattan chapter, I have a wonderful opportunity to attend the CSW at the UN each year. I went this past year and had a wonderful learning experience. I also have face to face access with Eva Richter and Susan O’Malley so it is excellent to be able to pick their brains when I have questions. From this particular workshop, I gained a greater understanding of what the work at the UN means to BPW. From these speakers, I understand now that they are striving tirelessly to bring the activities and issues that BPW works towards, to light at the UN. This provides the work that BPW does with a highly visible world platform. The ability to lobby and get to know my country’s delegates are of utmost importance to me. I will certainly be speaking to Susan O’Malley much more to understand the work she does with UNICEF. It is interesting to me that the United States has not signed off on CEDAW so I will research that more when I return. This particular workshop, as well as the Plenary session on BPW and the UN, were quite informative as we come closer to the next CSW in NY. My goal is to ensure that my Manhattan chapter is aware of the CSW and understand that it would highly benefit

them to attend. I think this would greatly expand their horizons and their understanding of BPW as an international and historical group. The understanding of BPW on an international level is a challenge we are constantly facing in our Manhattan chapter.

Of great importance to me is the work that Young BPW is doing around the world. The “Young BPW Projects” workshop garnered wonderful information. I am hungry for information in this area, as my immediate goal in my club is to grow the Young BPW contingent. I gained some great feedback from other Young BPW members. I plan to work with BPW Australia to borrow their Gold, Silver, and Bronze action points in order to give our younger members something tangible to work towards. Some girls suggested targeting universities and it dawned on me that I have some highly international universities in my midst, least of which being NYU and Columbia. There are certainly women there that would be looking to be a part of an international club. All of the Young BPW members are going to work on sharing information more freely and frequently. We are all now aware of the Facebook and YouTube pages so we have no excuse to not keep in touch and exchange best practices, projects, and marketing strategies to young women.

Of course, one of the great benefits of the International Congress is the networking and life-long friendships. I was so excited to see the Korean women who had been so hospitable to me during the Young BPW Congress in May 2007. And now, after this Congress, I have many new friends. I also have excellent business contacts, as I am looking to grow my business, which is clothing manufacturing. I will be running my family business in a few months and my main task is to garner new business, so good networking is hugely topical right now. It is essential to my business, with the economy becoming so difficult and becoming more so in the future.

I was so pleased at how the Young BPWs came together and shared in many activities together, from the wonderful President’s breakfast, to a night with the mariachis, to celebrating a birthday. Wherever we go, whether it be social functions or workshops, we seek each other out, exchange ideas, and bond. One German Young BPW, Veronica, celebrated her birthday here and it was incredible to see all of us come together to make sure she had a most wonderful birthday.

I was also inspired at each of the evening functions. Seeing all of the flags come in during the Opening Ceremony created a lump of joy in my throat and I couldn’t wait to try to describe my feelings to friends and families when I get home. Of course, these feelings can never accurately be put into words. All of the wonderful speakers, awards, and entertainment are memories that will last with me for my lifetime. I also plan to compile a video/photo montage for my local club and use this as a marketing tool to attract new members.

To conclude, I am eternally grateful to President Nok for the Young BPW Fund scholarship to attend this Congress. I have certainly gained much more than I can even describe on paper. I have new and fresh ideas to bring to BPW Manhattan, in the important areas of fundraising, young BPW, membership development and retention, and community-minded projects. Getting out into the community and trying to get BPW’s name and action behind some serious problems that face New York women will be of great importance upon my return. We are beginning to work with a Youth Empowerment Mission that helps girls have options outside of gang life. I have new ideas on how to handle this partnership and ideas of other community projects that we can get behind as a club. I hope to inspire my other members

with my stories from this Congress. I believe that my passion will be infectious and will widen the eyes of my local club to the wonderful work that BPW International is doing.

Thank you.

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