

A Day to Day Account of the ICBE Conference: An Affair to Remember

May 5-9, 2005

(Note: This was culled out from My Travelogue from May 1 to May 29, 2005, which I like to share to those interested as means of acknowledging people or recalling events, places, and names)

Kabunyan is Great!

ICBE Day 1, May 5, 2005. With Reto Ruttiman, a Swiss student who did his research at Mountain Province State Polytechnic College, and Airen, we got a bus from Zug to Zug Central train station, got the train to Lucern and at Trafic Cafe at the train station, we were met by Angie Wunderle, then she drove for us to their home where we met her husband who took us to Hotel Friedegg in Aeschi passing through tunnels one after the other, lakes, dairy farms, chateaus, chalets, hotels, etc. At 4 p.m. we were registering for the ICBE conference. Our luggage were carried to our assigned rooms by the committee members Frederick Baldo, Bart Aliten, Julian Monico, Ric Kilongan and others, while Christa Monico and Juerg Hafner attended to registrants at the registration desk. We were then met by the conference organizers Lolit and Juerg Hafner, Sabina Kuenzi, Violie Passerini, Rebecca Riesterer and others. Then at dinner, we started to acquaint ourselves with some German words as Juerg Hafner, a Swiss and Igorot by affinity, acted as English interpreter for the Swiss-German hotel manager who welcomed us at dinner time. This time, I learned to say `danke' for thank you, 'damen' for women.

With Claire and Martin Kohler as dignified emcees at the ethnic-inspired hall that gave a truly Cordillera atmosphere in a Swiss environment, the ICBE Conference commenced with the welcome program. After the program, it was time for the 'kakanference' as we sipped our tea/coffee together. We chatted with other delegates overseas, Mia Abeya, Nellie and Henry Pit-og, Caroline and Albert Bacdayan, Elizabeth Omengan from the USA. The most number of attendees second to Switzerland were those from Austria headed by Cristabel 'Dono' and Patrick Bounggick. I heard familiar voices and faces as I greeted Ingerith Pooten, Dominga and Douglas Webber, Theresa Bangsoy, Cecile Cobcobo, and Elizabeth Buring from the UK; Peter Agnaonao and Ric Cuyob from Belgium, Marjorie Lev from Israel, Fely Bongalos with her two healthy sons Val and Valiant, the Banban family and many more. As we got acquainted, we started to scrutinize each other's name tags for any change of names and for names we can not remember. Since I did not get my nametag yet, I used price tag instead. I advertised my books at CHF 10.00 each. The selling was attended to by my co-Philippine attendees, who were: Airen Kalley, Rose B. Madadsec, Luzviminda O. Tuazon. While others went to rest before 12 midnight, some of us continued to talk about many other things at random from 'A to Z', 'the sunshine and the rain', 'the good, the sweet, and the tasty' spiced with 'stories for adults only'. Unknowingly we saw the Swiss time as 4 a.m. that we had to give justice to the hotel beds.

ICBE Day 2, May 6, 2005. This day was the ICBE unique and symbolic formal opening program with an Igorot ritual by Patrick Bounggick and Henry Foken, the ICBE-Switzerland President and the opening remarks by Fred Labfayong. The ritual reflected the spirituality of Igorots as they acknowledged Kabunyan. This was immediately followed by the substantive PowerPoint presentation of Mia and enriched by Rhino Oblas on the topic, "What is it in Igorot culture that should be passed on to the second generation." The presentations provided a springboard to the workshops in the morning. By each group's peculiar ways, there were workshop output presentations in the afternoon. Making the topic comprehensive was the 2nd generation's active participation facilitated and reported by Ingerith Pooten.

The afternoon session continued with the thematic workshops with assigned facilitators/moderators. Themes were on issues affecting elderly migrants facilitated by Conchita Pooten who just arrived from the UK, Cordillera issues by Cesar Taguba, Igorot stories by Yvonne Belen, retirement issues by Dono Bounggick and 2nd generation issues by Ingerith Pooten.

In the evening was the thematic workshop output presentation, the IIC-6 Promotion, film viewing of IIC-5 in St. Louis, Missouri and the Bontoc Eulogy DVD. There was open forum, reactions, interaction, discussions on the films viewed which resulted in some resolutions with possible solutions. While it was already late, there was the general rehearsal in preparation for the grand Gala night on May 7, 2005.

ICBE Day 3, May 7, 2005. The day of the educational tour guided by Juerg Hafner, who was very knowledgeable of all facts and events. To some of us, it was a recall of the reality of what we learned in the grades like that of William Tell, Heidi, the UN, Red Cross, the cow bells, the Swiss knives, the cheese and chocolates, the chateaus, the chalets, etc. The tour did not only fully satisfy the eyes but including the brain. With Juerg's competence in guiding, he explained the history and symbolism of every historic spot. He conducted a quiz after the tour with the exclusion of Swiss citizens and courtesy of Juerg, Swiss knives were given as incentives to the 10 who scored 11 and above. Unfortunately, I did not make it to the top.

In the evening was the Gala Night which highlighted and punctuated the conference with the focus on social integration. The grand entrance of the Swiss Yoddlers with the sound of their cow bells as well as the equally grand Igorot procession with their gongs truly amused everybody including the Philippine Ambassador to Switzerland, Hon. Rora Navarro-Tolentino. Her message was relevant and material to the ICBE attainment of objectives.

ICBE Day 4, May 8, 2005. There was ecumenical service officiated by Cesar that integrated cultural chants. After the service was the formal turnover of the symbol of responsibility from Lolit Hafner to next host of ICBE, then the informal presentations facilitated by Dono, continuation of unfinished business facilitated by Consing that resulted to the raising of informal resolutions, then announcements by Yvonne. As everybody was motivated, the hotel manager had to extend the stay for some hours to give time to the giving of individual impressions, time for getting of telephone numbers, time for buying more books, time to say 'danke', time for the hugging, kissing, 'good byeing', 'toloding'/driving to train stations/airports while others continued the tour to the Grimmialp.

ICBE Day 5, May 9, 2005. The ICBE extension day for some attendees, who stayed behind, while others, who left the hotel, are now making recollections as they sit in private cars home or in trains or airplanes. Others with Swiss Francs went to Bern, to Interlaken to buy more chocolates, while others including me, Yvonne, Consing, Judith, Jane, Nellie, Henry P and Henry F, Julio, Rick went to Grimmialp for a shooting and to sleep in the chalet. Accordingly, only I snored. They may have snored too but I was asleep to hear their croaking snore.

The ICBE Consultation Gala Night: A Cultural Integration among the Swiss and Igorots (Cow bells and the Igorot Gongs in Unison)

The Gala Night, which was part of the 4-day Igorot Cordillera [BIMAAK] - Europe (ICBE) Consultation in Hotel Friedegg, Aeschi, Switzerland was held on May 7, 2005. This was well attended by Swiss families with Igorot in-laws and their friends, the Swiss-Philippine Embassy staff, in addition to the more than 70 registered participants of the conference.

A special feature of the ICBE Gala night that surprised most attendees was the impressive grand entrance in single file of the Swiss Alps Yoddlers of about 33 members with the striking sound of the cowbells. The Yoddlers synchronized the swinging of the cowbells left and right that produced marching music. As the Yoddlers entered, the music went on from slow and soft sound then fast and loud. The Yoddlers then gave way to the usual Philippine opening program protocols of having the opening prayer in the form of Uggayam, the singing of the Philippine national anthem followed by the singing of the Swiss National anthem. The Yoddlers then expressed their heartfelt welcome with their yoddles and the playing of the accordion.

Likewise, the Igorots had their equally impressive grand spiritually-inspired entrance led by the supposed Igorot men of elders holding the torch of fire, the man striking the kalasag and another with the gongs met by two women bringing the jars of rice wine. As they reached the stage as the supposed meeting point, the lead elder recited an emphatic prayer and opened the jar of rice wine with his wishes that Kabunian grants safety, happiness, success, more inter-marriages between Swiss and Igorots Then as a symbol of social integration, the lead elderly man shouted the coming of Igorots to join the Swiss. This was now the grand entrance of the men and women Igorots representing all provinces in Cordillera as the men came with their gongs and the women at their sides. The Igorots played the gongs to the tune of the different dances in Cordillera, one dance after the other.

After both tribal presentations (Swiss Yoddlers and Igorots), the Yoddlers held their cowbells and the Igorots held their gongs to produce music. This time everybody (Swiss or Igorots) danced as a group or by partners then there was the exchanging of instrument so some Yoddlers played the gongs and some Igorots played the cowbells all together. Dancing varied from tadek or sadngi or tayaw to swing, foxtrot, and all sort.

In appreciation, the Philippine Ambassador to Switzerland, Honorable Rora Tolentino, expressed her amusement and excitement as well as her closeness to the Igorot people, the Swiss, the supportive Swiss spouses of Igorots, the ICBE organizers for such a very impressive and successful cultural integration.

More presentations were performed by country participants and followed by picture taking. Hence, the Cultural Gala Night turned out as an avenue for the Swiss and Igorots to be familiar with one's cultural dances, songs and traditions. While there was language barrier since the Yoddlers can not understand English, we were able to understand the importance of cooperation, solidarity, relaxation, happy marriage among the Swiss farmer yoddlers who came with their wives and cowbells.