

## Going to speeches or holy days at the New Yorker and Belvedere

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*Photo Belvedere garage, date unknown*

After walking through the metal detector at security and showing your ID, you took your shoes off before entering the main room. In the WMC (World Mission Center, aka the New Yorker), you went through the terrace room. Left your shoes by the wall, or on the steps. I tried to find a corner, a curtain or a potted plant to put them next to. There would be three or four layers of shoes next to the wall.

At Belvedere, you went through the basement garage, then left your shoes in the wooden cubicles or on the sides of the stairs. The cubbies filled up quickly. When the stairs filled up, shoes went on top of the ones already there. I always tied my laces together. If your shoes got separated you might never see them again. If I had no laces, I'd try and jam one shoe into the other.

Once in the main room, we sat down, brothers on the right, sisters on the left. (This tradition got challenged when thousands of us got matched and blessed. Couples wanting to sit together under this arrangement could only sit in the center of the room, between the two sides. There were only so many spaces for this, never enough).

At first, you'd sit in rows with plenty of space in between. As the room began to fill up, the MC would step up to the microphone and say "Brothers and sisters, everybody please stand up and take three steps forward."

With less space, the moment when you sat down was critical. You could kneel to see more, but you'd lose the space around you and it would be hard to sit down again. So I sat cross-legged, with my knees spread out. The first time you'd be not quite touching your neighbor.

The second or third time we stood up and moved forward, it got tighter. The rows got closer. Your knees would be touching people next to you. Some would try and save space for a friend, but you could only do that for so long. People would come around and point to a space the size of a notebook and ask "Is anyone sitting there?" Later on, someone would point to a tiny piece of carpet showing in the tangle of arms and legs and ask "Is anyone sitting there?" Somehow they'd shoehorn in. Your knees rose higher and higher as more people packed in.

One thing you learned quickly was never to lean back with your hands on the floor. Your fingers would get stepped on.

When we stood to sing, we took up less room and more people slid in. There was a quick jostle as we sat down. One MC (I think it was Philip Shanker or Tyler Hendricks) said "You should be touching at least four people. If you're not, we still have room."

You'd have your knees pressed into the person in front of you, and the person behind you would have their knees touching you. You'd be pressed between people on either side, and you couldn't adjust your position without bumping into somebody.

By the time the speech began, my knees would be up so high that I would have just enough room to hold my notebook and pen in front of me like a praying mantis.

You never knew how long you'd be there. For Rev Moon, a short speech would be two hours, and the longer ones could go 14 or more. There were no breaks. If you got up to go out, you lost your spot. Rev Moon never took a break either. The most he would do would be to drink water or Ginseng-Up while the translator was talking.

If you needed to stand up to stay awake, stretch or revive your legs, the custom was to stand by the wall or in the back. Often at a holy day or major speech, a newly arrived European member or someone who just joined would stand up in the middle of the crowd. Now those behind them couldn't see. If calling "Please sit down or move to the side" didn't work, then they'd stand up so they could see. Now more people behind them were blocked, and it started a chain reaction.

At one holy day in the Grand Ballroom, several hundred people were standing up by the end. The shorter members couldn't see a thing in the crowd.

It sounds crazy to sit packed in so tightly and for so long, but when Rev Moon was speaking, we were so swept up in his vision that we forgot eating, bathrooms, or sleeping.

Well, maybe not sleeping. Not always. The handwritten notes members jotted at Father's speeches often had long, wobbly lines where they nodded off. Several of them. Drool spots, too.

Reverend Moon's speeches took us to amazing places. We felt like we were swept up to heaven. The landing back to Earth could be bumpy.

When we stood up at the end, we'd sometimes have to hold each other up until our legs got their feeling back. You just grabbed the nearest shoulder, even if you didn't know them.

Eyes gleaming with inspiration, we now filed out and joined the scrimmage to retrieve our shoes. Often you found God in the speech and then lost your shoes right outside. It could be a challenge. Some just looked for a pair the same size and color, figuring it would balance out. Others shrugged it off and offered it up.

Not everyone could. At one holy day, a skinny, intellectual-looking brother addressed the shoe-seekers. "Brothers and sisters, someone has taken my shoes. They are brown, size 10. If you are wearing brown shoes, please take a moment to check if they are yours. If they are not, please return them." He spoke politely, but with an edge to his voice. He repeated his speech several times, getting a little louder and redder in the face each time. When I left, he was still asking people to check their shoes.

After shoeing up, the next stop was the bathroom. There were huge lines at each one. If you had a room at the WMC, you could take an elevator up and use yours. But the elevator lobby was packed. People hopefully waiting on the mezzanine saw elevator after elevator going up, already packed full. Some went down to the basement and got on there. People in the lobby grumbled when up elevators arrived, already full.

More crafty members got on at the mezzanine going down, then stayed on for the ride up. This slowed everything, as the elevator was stopping at the mezzanine going down, then at the lobby, the basement where it filled up, then stopped again going up at the lobby and the mezzanine. Anybody coming down to the lobby during the rush had to squeeze through the tightly packed crowd trying to get on.

The rule was 12 (Or was it 13? Does anyone remember?) People in an elevator. You could also take the freight elevators in the service stairwell, but they would be jammed as well.

At Belvedere, there was one bathroom line. After that, many went to the Holy Rock to pray. Then you could wander a little, pick some apples from the trees. It took a long time to get out of the dirt parking lot if you were in the back. As the vehicles crawled up the drive through the crowd, the mingling was great. You could catch up with people you never saw otherwise.

If you needed a ride, pretty much any family member going your way would tell you to hop in if they had a seat. Only once do I remember being refused: a group of German business members in a station wagon thought it was out of the question to give a ride to someone they didn't know. I remember being shocked by this.

After the ride back to the city, after the bathroom came what Kevin McCarthy called the "hyung-sang crisis" - eat first, or sleep first? Many went out to a diner, or across the street to McDonalds. Sometimes so many members piled into McDs, there was a mini=reunion inside, mixed in with the New York street people. Some got a snack at KoyaMart. Others went straight up to their rooms and just collapsed.

What memories do you have of large gatherings?