

WFWP USA's contributions to World Conference on Women - Beijing, China 1995

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Maureen Reagan (center) and Motoko Sugiyama (right), president of WFWP Japan in 1995, gathering with other NGO delegations at mealtime

In September 1995, all eyes were on China as representatives from 189 countries attended the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women and adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In the days prior to the UN conference, an NGO Forum was held in Huairou, about 40 miles north of Beijing. Both events drew in tens of thousands of women from around the world and it was a huge milestone in the history of women's rights.

The Women's Federation for World Peace International, which had been founded just three years prior, sent delegations from several nations as a participating non-governmental organization and hosted a couple of events at the NGO Forum, incredibly bringing together

more than 500 women and establishing a great foundation for future collaboration with the UN.

In honor of Beijing+25, the 25th anniversary of these historic events, UN member states and organizations are revisiting the Beijing Declaration for the 64th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) in New York from March 9 to 20, 2020.

As we are drawing closer to these dates, WFWP USA decided to look back at some reflections from eye-witnesses to the events in 1995 (published in Today's World magazine in May 1996) and share snippets of their experiences with you over the next few issues of the Logic of Love, beginning with the feature below about the WFWPI-hosted event on September 2, 1995, with Maureen Reagan, daughter of former President Ronald Reagan, as keynote speaker.

Reflections from Betsy Jones, then vice president of WFWP USA:



Betsy Jones in September 1995 on the Great Wall of China

The next morning [after I arrived in China], someone handed me a pamphlet listing the location of the WFWP event. I went directly there and found Mrs. Nora Spurgin, Ms. Maureen Reagan, Mrs. Gil Ja Sa Eu, Mrs. Motoko Sugiyama and many others, and we joyfully greeted each other.

That morning they had been pamphletting and also putting up beautiful posters called "Celebrate the Family." More and more interest was being expressed in our program: "True Families and the Moral Renaissance." About a half hour before the program began, a large air-conditioned auditorium became available, so we moved the whole group there. At the last minute everything fell into place.

More than 25 WFWP leaders came from Korea. Besides the American contingent, there were also delegations from Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines. This was our first event, so it was very exciting.

Many people were interested in the topic and in learning what Maureen Reagan was going to say. Mrs. Eu opened the program and gave some background information about Women's

Federation, as did Mrs. Sugiyama.

Maureen Reagan talked about her trip ten years ago to the Nairobi conference for women in Kenya. She talked about how the world has witnessed the end of apartheid and the long-awaited peace process in the Middle East. The Cold War can no longer be blamed for all the injustices, she said, but in too much of the world little girls are the last to be fed, the last to receive medical attention, and the last to be educated. These undernourished and undereducated girls will grow to become tomorrow's mothers. It is a wonder anyone survives when girls and women are denied the essentials of life and their rights as human beings are overlooked.

She talked about her trip to India for a conference on health and hygiene. At the end, an old woman stood up and said, "Where I live, a woman gets a bath three times in her life: the day she is born, the day she marries, and the day she dies. Don't talk to us about clean water. Do something." Ms. Reagan said that no one can claim to value the family if there is no value for the role of women. She said, "A family is the foundation of society, and at its center is the woman. The fulfillment of her dreams is essential to the harmony of the family. Deny her value and there is chaos." She mentioned that she was very proud to be at the NGO Forum: "If I can help untangle the web of the UN process, it will be my privilege. The NGO forums have a very important role."

In the afternoon we had speakers from the Philippines, Taiwan, Korea and Japan. Dr. Joon Lee addressed the participants, describing the characteristics of the ideal family, in which parents, children, husband and wife, and brothers and sisters, have a sense of solidarity, observe a proper relational order, give and receive sacrificial love, and create joy and happiness. She said that a true family is one in which the wife respects her husband as if she is attending God and the husband loves his wife as if he is loving God. This forms the foundation for a family. What a blessing for children to be born in such an environment of true love!

In response to reports that it costs \$40 to educate a girl in China, one of the Korean WFWP leaders suggested, "Why don't we have Project Hope help Chinese girls get an education?" They started to collect contributions right there for that purpose. This was something she suggested we could also think about in America.

Later that day we had another room reserved, so we scheduled the whole conference over again. We put more emphasis on discussion in the second conference. Both events were definitely noticed. In fact, we found out later that some people from Hillary Clinton's delegation were present.

Reflections from Christine Froehlich:



It was a wonderful experience to travel and attend the conference together with Maureen Reagan, daughter of former President Ronald Reagan. Nora Spurgin, national chairwoman of WFWP USA, had the mission of attending Ms. Reagan, and Shirley Chimes and I were to assist her. We were concerned about accommodations for Ms. Reagan and very anxious that she have a good experience with us. In this matter, we had amazing help from the spiritual world from the day we landed in Beijing.

We formed the "gang of seven," consisting of Maureen Reagan, four American and two Australian WFWP leaders.

One Australian lady brought with her some beautiful WFWP stickers which so delighted Ms. Reagan that we decided to make posters from them. Luckily there were computers and color copiers available for use and we made 150 posters to place at strategic locations around the forum site.

We also had to secure a room. Mrs. Spurgin learned that we had been given one room and one two-hour time slot on September 2 in the very hotel which had become our headquarters. Mrs. Spurgin negotiated for a second meeting room and time slot in the same hotel.

For two days before our event, we also had the opportunity to attend the workshops of other organizations, which were held every day from 9:00-11:00, 11:00-1:00, 1:00-3:00, 3:00-5:00, and 5:00-7:00. The schedule was very packed, with 20 to 30 workshops going on at the same time. Therefore, we split up to cover the meetings that seemed important or good for networking.

On the day of the WFWP event, Mrs. Spurgin inspected the room we had been given for our event and decided that it was too small. Quickly, one of the ten Japanese missionaries who had been working in China set to work to find another available room. By a miraculous turn of events, she found a large room which could seat more than 400 people very near our hotel. We quickly secured this room.

That morning the leaders of the various WFWP delegations met at the headquarters and prepared to hand out 5,000 leaflets and put up the posters. As they were leafleting, they met many WFWP members who had been trying to find each other in this enormous forum site, as well as many interested guests.

Our meeting was scheduled for 1 pm. We had someone posted at the hotel to direct people to the new room. We had very little time to set up, and the room began to fill even before 1 pm.

I was surprised to discover how many media people were present when Maureen Reagan got up to speak. She is quite an international celebrity, and dozens of cameras were flashing as she began to speak. She was very gracious with reporters afterward. I was impressed at how staunchly she supported the WFWP. She feels very much a part of our work. Over the course of the week we spent in China, she became very open and close with us, especially with Mrs. Spurgin.

We held two WFWP events that day, attended by about 500 people. The second meeting was more informal and in a smaller room; I was moved when the discussion spontaneously focused on how women can help the younger generation in these times of moral confusion.

The power of WFWP is amazing. Ours was the only meeting at the forum which united East and West so completely and which drew women of so many different nationalities into one network. WFWP was also the most action-oriented group. The tendency at such forums is to have a lot of talk and very little action. However, the WFWP video shows people an extraordinary variety of concrete activities which advance world peace, especially the Sisters of Peace ceremonies. We also had the largest meeting of any single NGO at the forum site.