Happy 20th Birthday Spycher

by Diane White

In September 2019, the delightful celebration for Spycher highlighted the DREAM, DARE, DO & DEVELOP theme. Thanks to the coordinated efforts of Marjolein Zoll-Schriek on behalf of the Foundation and Swiss Friends. Charlotte Christ-Weber and Peira Fleiner founding Swiss members of the Foundation, former Guiders-in-Charge Inge Lyck and Katharina Kalcsics, Our Chalet’s historian Ann Mitchell, Katherine Duncan-Brown, and many others were in attendance. Delicious sweet treats, a special cake and sandwiches on a braided bread loaf, along with tea and coffee, juice and hot chocolate, were enjoyed. A warm and special thank you to Tanya Tulloch, World Centre Manager, and her staff for making all our dreams come true.

The DREAM for a new building began in the 1980s when the need for more beds, office space, handicapped accessibility, and a conference room was explored. Our Chalet’s program events highlighted the beginning of the Helen Storrow Seminars in 1986. The staff needed proper work areas. Additionally, we wanted to be able to welcome all guests and more guests.

The DARE involved gaining permission from the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts for a new building and the formation of the Swiss Foundation in 1996 to legally own and manage the site. With persistent negotiations, this was accomplished. Will enough funds be generated for the project? Yes, within two years one million CHFs was raised and plans were on the drawing board.

The DO had begun. Across the driveway from the main house, the Spycher’s foundation was dug in 1998. The following year, in September 1999, the Spycher (which is the name given to a Swiss barn) officially opened. The traditional carved inscription in Swiss German on the upper front of the building reads: “God’s greetings to all who come here, enjoy it and return.”

The DEVELOP is an ongoing process. Today the Spycher welcomes all. On the first floor, the front area is reception, the shop and the manager’s small office. Program and operation offices are located down the hall and in the Ann Bodsen Room. On the second level are seven bedrooms, with 18 beds and three full bathrooms which are handicapped-accessible by a motorized lift. Each bedroom is named for one of the local mountains. The third level, the attic, accommodates eight beds and has a half-bath. The handicapped-accessible ground floor has a large conference room for presentations, evening programs, trainings, and meetings. The bomb shelter, mandated by local regulations, is home to Our Chalet’s archives. It houses the important documents, scrapbooks, pictures, and one of Helen Storrow’s uniforms. Additionally, the ground level has guest lockers and a ski cellar/boot room. Bathroom facilities are available on this lower level. The oil tank has been removed and that area will soon be updated.

Most importantly, Skippy Storrow, the longest serving staff member, resides in Spycher. She patrols the grounds, catches mice and is an integral member of Our Chalet family.

Today, the Spycher is a vital component of Our Chalet World Center. We often wonder how we operated before the Spycher! Change is good. Thank you to all who have made and are continuing to make Our Chalet a magical special world center.
A Visit to Our Chalet 65 Years Ago Changed My Life*

I grew up in Highland Park, Illinois, and I come from a Girl Scout family. When I was 17 years old, I was selected to go to Our Chalet, a World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) World Centre in Adelboden, Switzerland, for a Juliette Gordon Low Session. It was 1954, and I was chosen to be one of 18 young women who were Girl Guides or Girl Scouts in different countries. I went through a series of complicated interviews and I was selected as one of five women from the United States to go to Switzerland for three weeks.

When the letter arrived saying I had been selected, my mother brought it to me in the lunchroom at school, and the whole cafeteria erupted in cheers. It was such a big deal to have the opportunity to see the world at that time. Our mission was to learn about different cultures and create international friendships. It was pretty intense, because different languages had to be accommodated for us to have these discussions. Because there were no cell phones or email back then, we did all the planning in advance by mail.

When I arrived, after a long ride on the S.S. United States ocean liner, I discovered that we came from seven countries and spoke eight languages from around the world. There were people from the United States, Italy, Germany, Brazil, Pakistan, Finland, and Sweden. Everyone would sit next to someone who could translate from their language into another language. We would give presentations and then explain them to each other in what must have looked like a large game of telephone. We had varying degrees of language skills, and there were lots of giggles over translations.

Many dignitaries visited and spoke to us and it was quite formal. We raised the flag every day, we talked about what service meant, and we talked about peace. We regularly recited the Girl Scout Promise and the Girl Scout Law. On Sunday evenings, we had Girl Scouts’ Own ceremonies instead of religious services. We chose a theme and had a quiet time with inspirational poems on the theme. As a group, we had pot luck dinner parties where we cooked our dinner over campfires. I brought a ham, and it was a complicated process to have it delivered to Our Chalet. It was right after the war, and meat was hard to come by, so the ham was a big hit. After dinner we would sit around the campfire, and everyone knew the same songs.

Our Chalet is in the Alps, so we went on hikes, played compass games, helped the neighbors rake hay, and spent the night in a barn with cows where cheese was being made. Before we came home, Girl Scouts sent us around Europe on a tour, which sparked a life-long passion for travel. London was still bombed out from World War II when we visited. I have been to 101 countries now, and I still think that Switzerland is the most beautiful place in the world.

My experience was idyllic, but full of adventure. My suitcase got lost on the way to Switzerland, so early in the trip I went hiking in a green corduroy suit with a skirt. I spoke with one woman on the trail that day about not having any clothes and she made me an outfit that night.

The experience propelled all of us to new heights of understanding and travel. Nine years later, I led a similar program at Our Cabaña in Cuernavaca, Mexico. There were 25 girls from ten countries in that group. But it was my Switzerland experience that started it all for me and changed the lives of everyone involved. We had one girl from Australia who was struggling in school, but because of the confidence she gained from this experience she went on to earn a PhD in psychology, teach medical school, and serve in the Cabinet of Australia.

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Chalet Trip Changed My Life

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One of the women spent her career advocating for the handicapped, testifying before Congress about handicapped parking. Another became a child psychologist, spent time working in VA hospitals, and was the director of health for the state of Washington. There are teachers, lawyers, and doctors — they’re all people who made a difference in the world, and they brought Girl Scout values to whatever they did. Now that they’re retired, they’re doing wonderful volunteer work all over the world.

Over the last 65 years, we’ve had newsletters the whole time— sometimes once a year, sometimes more often. Every five years we meet somewhere in the world, and I’ve hosted many reunions at my house. Girl Scouts from generations after ours are also close, and they travel around to see each other just like we do.

There are only three of us left who are in good health, and we still go hiking together. My Girl Scout experience in Switzerland brought so much to my life, and it introduced me to travel. After retirement, I became a watercolor artist and I have 60 products with my artwork on them, from clothing to paper and household goods. I did a watercolor kaleidoscope for Our Chalet, and one for Our Cabaña, and it feels wonderful to have something I created hanging in those places that meant so much to me.

I’m 82, and still awed by having had this experience.

Julie Dawson
Birmingham, Michigan

* [Article] Used with permission of GIRL SCOUTS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

New Committee Member

Friends of USA’s committee’s newest member is Shanna Schluter from Hallsville, TX, Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas Council. She is a fourth generation lifelong Girl Scout and is the leader of her daughter’s troop which is mixed Junior and Cadette levels. One of her current pursuits is completing the requirements to become a trainer. The council has a “travel club” and she is active in the club’s international sub-group.

When she was 18, Shanna worked at Pax Chalet Trip Changed My Life

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Lodge for four-and-a-half months, learning a lot about the World Centres and WAGGGS. Her original intent was to join Friends of Our Cabaña, encouraged by a current member friend, Jenny Hoch. Before that transpired, however, Shanna led a council-sponsored trip to Our Chalet in June 2019 for a high adventure week with nine girls and changed her mind. She really connected with Our Chalet, the program, the staff, and the country. She is planning on taking a group — including her Girl Scout husband — to an adult hiking session in the fall of 2020 or 2021.

Shanna has worked at Girl Scout camps, too, and advocates for girl planning and involvement. She has helped with STEM and STEAM camps and events and has had conversations with the head of the Citrus Council about STEAM exhibits for the 2020 convention. She is working to have her employer, Pittsburgh Paint and Glass (PP&G), be a sponsor or exhibitor in Orlando. Her position with PP&G is in computer technology and industrial coatings.

↑ SMILE! The Friends of Our Chalet posed on the stairs at the Gathering last fall at the Edith Macy Conference Center in Briarcliff Manor, NY.

↑ SHANNA SCHLUTER
"We Are All People Who Can Change The World"
Innovative Event Empowers 36 Young Women to Break Down Gender Barriers to Leadership
by Fran Northcott

“It feels like we are all daughters of the same mother.”
From November 14 to 20, 2019, 36 young women from 33 countries came together at Our Chalet, the first established World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts World Centre, to take part in the Juliette Low Seminar (JLS). This was a six-day event to empower these women (and nearly 500 others across the globe at different locations) with leadership skills and behaviours for them to take back to their national Girl Guiding or Girl Scouting organisations, take the lead in their lives and communities, and build an international network of friends.

On the final day of the seminar, tears were shed as the participants reflected on their journey through the week, the strengths they had built, the connections they had made, and the impact they are going to create. One participant stated: “I am so excited to see what our world will look like when we meet again.”

During the course of the seminar, the participants, led by seven facilitators from six different countries, gained knowledge and understanding of gender equality, leadership, and social innovation. They reflected personally, learnt about one another’s cultures and communities, and were visited by guest speakers Vanessa Candeias, a member of the Executive Committee at the World Economic Forum; and Marta Zaragozá Navarro, a 2018 Global Changemaker.

Participants also connected with the local community through a visit to Bern. One-half of the group visited Sah Bern, a second-hand bookshop which employs people who have been out of work and teaches them skills and practices to help them gain employment again. The second group visited Pfasylbern, a Swiss Scout/Guide group which offers activities for children and teenagers living in asylum centres in Bern. These outings inspired the participants and imparted useful and encouraging information on how to approach and deliver social plans to positively impact your community.

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Building on the knowledge and inspiration the young women learned during the initial sessions and community connection visits, the participants spent the final two days of the seminar creating individual “100 Girls Project” plans, supported by skills workshops delivered by the facilitators. These projects will reach, impact, and empower 100 young girls in their communities once they return home – considering the JLS participants from Our Chalet alone, this will mean an impact on 3,600 young girls within the next two years.

More broadly, the Juliette Low Seminars had over 500 participants across 18 hub locations in 17 different countries, meaning a reach to 50,000 young girls across the globe. It was fitting that Our Chalet hosted a JLS in 2019 since it was the site of the original Juliette Low Seminar in 1932.

Situated in the Swiss Alps with a beautiful view of Adelboden and the valley, a wintry walk to a mystical hollow tree which grants wishes, and a friendly Chalet cat named Skippy, Our Chalet provided a magical and wonderful setting for the myriad of passions, excitement, empathy, and courage of the women who came together for those six days.

At the very beginning of the seminar, facilitators tasked the participants with writing down and sharing their expectations for the Juliette Low Seminar 2019. One woman wrote: “Sun, snow, women power and energy”. There was, definitively, an abundance of all.
Trip to Europe a Bonding Experience for Adult Girl Scout Alumnae

(Excerpted from Londonderry (NH) News, May 17, 2019)

For some women, Girl Scouting isn’t just a thing they did in their childhood — it’s a lifelong passion. Through membership in the Alumnae Association of Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains [headquartered in Bedford, NH, and Williston, VT], adult Girl Scout members are mentoring girls, going on hikes, volunteering their service, and more. One group of intrepid alums has just returned from a 10-day trip to England and Switzerland, highlighted by stops at Pax Lodge and Our Chalet, World Centres for the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS).

...After a few days in the United Kingdom, the women were off to Switzerland and Our Chalet, nestled in the breathtaking scenery of the Swiss Alps.

This is the first World Centre, where visitors have been coming since 1932. There is even a New England connection to Our Chalet, as construction and three years of operating costs came from Helen Storrow of Boston.

The alums spent three nights there, and participated in a pinning ceremony. While there, they met and interacted with a group of Irish Girl Guides. Hiking the Alps in Adelboden, they enjoyed spectacular views and spent time in the local museum. As they left Our Chalet for Zurich, snow fell.

Participants ranged in age from 22 to 85, from widely varying professional backgrounds, Girl Scout roles, and current hometowns, but all shared in the specific and powerful common interest of sharing the Girl Scout Experience and making new friends.

“The world is a lot bigger than our current existence,” said Patricia Casey, director of advancement at Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains, describing the unique experience of this trip. “We are part of a worldwide association – millions strong.”

Suzanna Brown, a Girl Scout trainer from Milton, VT, is an experienced business traveler, but this trip with a large group of Girl Scout alums was a change for her. “It was fun to get to know people in a totally different way,” she said.

Notice: Due to the increased cost of printing and postage, this is probably the last hard-copy version of Chalet Chatter you will receive. We would love to send you Chalet Chatter via email if you will share an email address with us. Thanks!

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