

AWI's Youth Leadership Development and Faculty Exchange Program

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September 4 - October 12, 1991

When I first learned that I was chosen to participate in The Asian Women's Institute (AWI), Youth Leadership Development and Faculty exchange, I was filled with excitement and apprehension all at the same time. I was to travel with other young women from different cultures to visit countries which were new to each one of the participants. We were to interact with each other, support and share our unique experiences, in order to develop a better understanding of each other's ideas, cultures and traditions. The challenge was to prepare us young women for leadership roles each, in her own field and among her own people. The theme for our deliberation was: "Women and Environment in an Age of Technology", hence coinciding with the AWI triennial conference theme. How was I going to manage? What if we have radically different and opposite beliefs? What if we do not get along? These and other questions were recurring to me as I was taking the long trip from Beirut to Seoul, Korea. But I knew that the challenge was great, but I was determined to make this learning experience a success.

Indeed, it turned out to be an eye opening experience. The theme of promoting cross-cultural dialogue and interaction among young women proved to carry in-depth revelations. This experience allowed similarities and differences between the cultures and between the experiences and value attitudes of the young women to be actual and real. It is different from reading about them in books and the media, hence, profoundly contributing to youth leadership and women's development. I came back home with a wider scope of women's culture, attitudes, problems, responsibilities not to mention women's gigantic abilities and talents to contribute to world development. The theme of women, pollution and development made me realize how much more has

to be done and that the best way to do is by sharing views, customs, information and knowledge through cooperation.

Accompanied by two faculty members of AWI member Colleges, our group set off on a journey which began in South Korea, and included Japan and the Philippines. My fellow travelers

provided us with a profound reminder of the universality of women's problems concerns despite cultural diversity. At Tokyo Woman's Christian University in Japan, we attended lectures about Japanese culture and were shown how to prepare the famous and exotic Japanese flower arrangements, an important cultural ritual. We had the privilege of interacting with the Japanese youth at a youth retreat camp of Asagaya Church



were four students, namely: Zanobia Sylvester from Kinnard College - Pakistan; Latha Ignatius from St. Christopher's College of Education - India; Vinothini Charles from Women's Christian College - India. We were chaperoned by Dr. Nikhat Khan from Kinnard College- Pakistan, and Dr. Priscilla Daniels, from St. Christopher's College of Education - India.

The six of us met for the first time at EWAH Women's University for ten days, and then moved to Seoul Women's College, both being in South Korea. The Korean agenda included visits to private and governmental women's institutes, sexual violence relief centers, day care centers and associations for anti-pollution activities, which

at Nobeyama highland center. This was one of the most enriching activities in Japan because interaction with the youth of the camp was genuine and sincere, an honest exchange and sharing experience.

On September 26, everybody moved to Kobe College, also in Japan, where we were invited to share our experience with the students of the College. Furthermore, we participated in two group discussions: The first dealing with a comparative description of the status of women in each of the member countries and the second focusing on environmental problems, observations made on the trip, thus far. In the farewell party, each one of us cooked a national dish from her country.



Four days later, the group joined the AWI Triennial Conference, to report their experiences to the Presidents and Directors of (AWI) member Institutions. Together with the entire AWI team at Kobe, we held a cultural night in which each one of us presented a dance, a poem or a song from her culture. The last stop was Silliman University in Dumaguete City, the Philippines. Silliman University, by the way, was the only co-educational institution visited in this trip.

The Youth Leadership Development and Faculty exchange Program experience was very fruitful to everybody, to the participants of the program as well as the people with whom contact was made throughout the trip. The AWI efforts to create cross-cultural awareness, exposure, acquisition of knowledge and suggestion of solutions to women's problems and environmental concerns are highly commendable. Everybody returned home with an earnest enthusiasm to apply, communicate and contribute to women's cultural development and to environmental concerns in the respective countries. IWSAW is grateful to AWI for the continuing contributions and efforts they are making to improving the conditions of women in Asia•