

THE HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S CLUB OF LUGNAO

In Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus" the goddess is gently blown to shore by Zephyr, ready to step out of her seashell and begin a new life. For many of us in the IWCL the winds of choice or obligation brought us to Ticino to begin a new phase of our lives. Whether we came because of a new job, or a new love, or perhaps to retire and enjoy the sunshine and palms, or perhaps we were born here and wanted to bring an international touch into our daily lives – whatever the reason, the IWCL has provided a forum, a meeting place, created by women and for women, for three decades.

THE EARLY YEARS

In 1987 two newcomers to Ticino met and began sharing their own experiences of living in a new environment. Inger Guler from Sweden, and Marcella Bertholds from Argentina, came to think there might be other women in the area who would be interested in joining them in an informal social group with an international focus and using English as the spoken language. This led to a small ad being placed in the *Cerca Trova* in late 1987 – and the response to that invitation became our reason to celebrate in 2018.

The first meeting was held at Inger Guler's apartment in Lugano on Tuesday, 9 February, 1988, and brought together an unexpectedly large group of women originating from four continents. Leslie Guggiari volunteered to be the group's membership secretary and wrote the early letters reporting the results of the monthly meeting's, attendance, and announcement of the next get-together. These friendly "letters", photocopied and sent to the members, evolved over the years into the monthly newsletter of today.

The indefatigable Marcella found a venue which could accommodate at least 20 people at the Palazzo dei Congressi for the second meeting on Tuesday, 22 March, and Leslie gave the first presentation entitled "Our Lives as Intercultural People", which led to a lively discussion and suggestions for future topics. The existence of this new club was spreading fast by word of mouth and it was decided that a fee of SFR 25 was needed to cover administrative costs such as photocopying, postage, and room rentals when needed.

On April 12th the members met again at Inger Guler's and by now called themselves The International Women's Group. For those who were working or too occupied with small children for daytime meetings, an Evening Group was started. At the fourth meeting on 3 May in Cadro at the Ristorante Ombrone, Chicca Martinoni, a Ticinese member, recalls a fascinating discussion on the different attitudes towards time and appointments in their home cultures and the necessary adjustments to life in Switzerland. We were bringing ourselves together with wonder and laughter.

By the summer of 1988 the Group had 50 members, with many offering to organize an interest group or share their particular expertise in a lecture. From playing bridge to playing tennis, from touring museums to hunting for mushrooms, cooking sessions to dining out, investments to hiking – the ideas were flowing. Many of these activities continue today.

One major driver of creativity and organization was new member Phyllis Serianni. Her previous experience as president of American women's clubs in Holland and Basel brought a distinctive framework to the Group. Phyllis suggested choosing a charity which could be funded by the profits from special events and activities, and the beneficiary chosen in the first year was a Swiss nurse working in the jungles of Brazil. A raffle brought in the grand sum of CHF 700, of which we were enormously proud. Selections for the charity in later years were usually closer to home, but the concept gave the Group further depth and attention within the local region. Many of us will cherish the enthusiastic contributions of Albie Serianni, Phyllis' husband, who for years performed as auctioneer for our charity events.

MOVING FORWARD

By the end of 1988 the attendance at regular monthly meetings had grown beyond being accommodated in member's homes and we began meeting regularly in an upper room of the Cafe Vanini. By now most meetings, including those in the evening, featured a guest speaker – often by one of our members. The first cooking group started up featuring Sayedah Terrani's Chicken Curry. And the monthly newsletter now included personal announcements by members and lists of upcoming local events.

1989 started off with the presentation of the new Organizing Committee which delegated responsibility for the increasing activities and needs of the Group to its team leaders.

INTEREST GROUPS AND GROUP LEADERS

Organisation and Charity	Inger Guler
Speakers	Marcella Bertholds and Ruth Vera
Group Participation Manager	Victoria Certik
Newsletter	Leslie Guggiari
Membership	Sharon Parlette
Annual Events	Fay Manz
Treasurer	Irma Mülhofer
Charity Fund	Phyllis Serianni
Evening Group	Julie Lohse

We went to the carnival in Tesserete, had private tours of the new Villa Sassa and the Banca del Gottardo, and painted Swedish-style Easter eggs. Dues at this time were still SFR 25.

Membership was steadily increasing and the decision was made, reluctantly by some, to go beyond the informal Organizational Committee format and institute by-laws to govern the structure of the group. At the end of 1989, at a general meeting in the Cafe Vanini, club officers were elected and the first President and Vice-President were Phyllis Serianni and Sharon Parlette. Irma Mülhofer and Leslie Guggiari carried out the task of writing of our first by-laws and we were officially registered as The International Women's Group of Lugano.

For the year 1991 the first membership directory was compiled and printed including our new by-laws, and it remains in a similar format today.

HAVING FUN

To celebrate and share the cultural origins of the membership these early years brought an American Thanksgiving turkey dinner (with members making the desserts), a German-Austrian traditional St. Martin's goose, and a Scandinavian St. Lucia's festival procession with a crown of candles on the leader. Continuing the theme of sharing food and culture we celebrated an International Festival in Manno with the appetizers, main courses and desserts as national dishes prepared by our members.

In monthly meetings we learned about Ticino history as well as Islamic banking and women's health. We took day trips to nearby cities in Italy with guided tours. We cruised the Lake of Lugano on a moonlight night to the music of a steel band. Our spouses and children, friends, and even dogs enjoyably shared in some of our activities. Young mothers organized a Mom's and Tot's group. Various interest groups were improving their Italian, playing Mah Jong, or discussing books.

In the early 1990's the American women's interest group decided to separate into an independent club, American Women of Ticino, for the purpose of focussing on issues related to US citizens. Many members maintained their participation in both clubs, and information and activities were often shared between AWOT and the IWGL. AWOT members were also the driving force in the creation of "The Book Nook", Ticino's first English library, which opened in 1999.

The new millennium brought not only new members but new ideas. The monthly "Ladies Lunch", for example, might combine with the Walking or Gardening Group or the Museum and Cultural Tours for an enhanced outing. We visited the Borromean Islands in 2003, Brescia in 2005, Pavia in 2007, and celebrated our 20th anniversary with a memorable day's outing in Monza in June 2008. The end of this exciting decade brought the first of our Spring Party at the Lido events and the introduction of the well-loved, elegant Christmas Candelight Dinner.

PRESENT DAY

Time moves on and generations change. Quiet, generous Inger Guler, our founding "mother" passed away. Phyllis Serianni, with her enthusiasm and her cheerful little poems, will also be long remembered. The monthly "letter to friends" has become a colorful, multi-page, professionally printed version including photographs thanks to Anna-Marie Matthew and carried on by our current editor Ann Lutz. A website with public information and members-only access links us to today's 24-hour information world. Members have returned home, gone back to work, or moved to another destination. The IWGL is now officially registered and audited as The International Women's Club of Lugano.

Our membership has grown to over 250, from 38 countries but the purpose of the group has remained constant and relevant to our lives. We are women from all over the world who have stepped onto these shores of the Ceresio for whatever reason and length of time and want to share our talents, interests and our concerns, while making new friends, and exploring our local environment. We have both a social conscience and a sense of fun. We find support and knowledge and want to give it to others.

The IWCL was started by women, and for women, and what our founders considered important is still valid today. Thirty years on we are still giving of ourselves and still celebrating each other.

IWCL PRESIDENTS

1990 - 1991	Phyllis Serianini	2006	Patricia Bracci
1992 - 1993	Ornella Gebhard.	2007 - 2008	Jinny Blomberg
1994 - 1995	Petronella Vuylk	2009 - 2010	Ornella Gebhardt
1996 - 1997	Elisabeth Heimann	2011 - 2012	Julie Renn
1998 - 1999	Petronella Vuylk.	2013	Pascale Morrit
2000	Fay Manz	2014 - 2015	Nicole Crabtree
2001 - 2003	Nathalie Belet	2016 - 2017	Sue March
2004 - 2005	Susan Brambilla	2018	Giovanna Di Lillo Milner

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

1993	Lago d'Orto, Italy	5th
10.02.1998	Locanda del Boschetto, Lugano	10th
12.06.2008	Monza, Italy	20th
13.09.2013	Varenna, Italy	25th
13.09.2018	Still a secret!	30th

CHARITIES SUPPORTED BY IWCL

1989	Swiss nurse working in Brazil (Rahel Steingruber)
1990	Associazione Consultorio delle Donne
1991	SOS International Children's Villages, Bulgaria
1992	Orphans of Montagnards, Vietnam
1993 - 1994	SOS Infanzia, Ticino
1995	Swiss School of Guide Dogs for the Blind
1996 - 1997	Okoa Dada Home for Girls, Nairobi, Kenya
1998	IWCL Emergency Fund
1999	REGA
2000 - 2001	Hospice Organisation, Ticino
2002	Helveticas
2003 - 2004	Zuleika Tzipismania, IWCL member and accident victim
2005	Theodora Foundation
2006	IMBEWU, South Africa
2009 - 2010	OTAF
2010 - 2012	Aiuto Svizzero alla Pace in Bosnia
2013 - 2014	Make a Wish Foundation
2016	Associazione Consultorio delle Donne
2017	Progetto Avventuno