



friendship force
WISCONSIN - MADISON

ffwis.org



January 2021

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

What a challenging year 2020 has been! Perhaps *that* is the understatement of the year!

Our Friendship Force club had ambitious plans this year: hosting a delegation from Russia through the Open World Program; hosting a group of bicycling enthusiasts from around the globe; outgoing journeys to New Caledonia and New Zealand; and so much more. Those plans all changed during our Open World week, when the Covid-19 pandemic dominoes began to fall. We quickly had to arrange for our Open World guests to depart a day early to prevent potential issues with their return home. Our other journeys were cancelled. Even our incoming 2021 journeys have been cancelled for at least the first six months of the new year.

And the pandemic was not the only trouble in our world this past year. Other events in our country have surfaced profound injustices, societal rifts, as well as questions and concerns about the health of our democracy. The past year in virtual “lockdown” has forced a greater turn inward, and reflection upon what this all means for us and our future.

I want to share with you some resonating thoughts extracted from the Christmas Eve message from Kelly Crocker, minister at First Unitarian Society, Madison, WI:

“Just a few nights ago, the world was witness to what we could call our own Christmas star. A star, not seen for 800 years, created by the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. Perhaps this is the same star seen by those Wise Ones so long ago. The story tells us they followed that star to find perfect love in a holy child, a bearer of light. And this child arrived with a message of divine love, of a peace on earth found through the very human power of loving one another. ... Perhaps this star, too, is telling us that something new, something holy, is trying to be born among us.

This time I hope it is nothing less than humankind trying to find a new way of being human, finding a new way to live as one people on this small planet we share and finding a new way to love ourselves with an expansive

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love, a love that teaches us how to also to love others“..... We need more than ever to follow a star and

to hope for this perfect love. We need more than ever to examine our own hearts and to open our hearts to one another. We need more than ever to make friends beyond the conventions of sameness. May we let something be born in us that heals the brokenness, that does not bow down to hatred and fear but rather meets them and offers them love.....”

I am so grateful for the love that spreads worldwide through our Friendship Force community, and I look forward to a brighter 2021 for us all!

In friendship,
Kathy Speck Kemeny



TO OUR READERS: Since our Newsletter comes out on the first of each month please check on our FFI Wisconsin – Madison website (ffiwis.org) for any additions, updates or corrections to event schedules during the month, and keep an eye out for email updates as well. We don't want you to miss anything!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Monthly Board Meeting

The FFI Madison Board meets VIRTUALLY on the second Wednesday of the month @ 12:30 pm

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2021

January 6: Cocktails on the 6th. "Activities"

January 7: Second Harvest. "Activities"

January 25: Book Club. "Activities"

JOURNEYS

On Sunday, November 22, all Friendship Force clubs were invited to virtually celebrate the 25th anniversary of the **Lima, Peru** club..

Gail Holmes, Donna Hussin, and Lois Schulz had traveled with the Mid-Willamette Valley club to Trujillo, Peru and Machu Picchu in April 2018. The Lima club day hosted them for two full days of sightseeing and a farewell dinner with many of their club members.

So FF Wisconsin made a short video of congratulations from those who participated in the journey. FFI President Jeremy Snook, along with his two young sons, brought greetings in Spanish and English. More than a hundred people from all over the world attended this Zoom gathering!

The next day, Monday, November 23, a tour was presented by the club in **Christchurch, New Zealand** via ZOOM. Our club's journey - scheduled for April 2020 - was cancelled, but the Christchurch club wanted us to see some of the activities and sights that they offer to ambassadors. Newly-interested club members participated in the virtual tour and hopefully will join the journey as ambassadors when it's offered in the match for 2022. Dan Eggerding and Maureen Kind are the co-ambassador coordinators.

JOURNEYS

Do we sound like a broken record? Maybe, but every day offers new opportunities so --

We continue to remind members about on-going activities that allow us to reach out to new places and new people from the comfort of our own homes.

Virtual FFI journeys are always available to members by using this link:

<https://blog.friendshipforce.org/virtual-experiences/>

This link is **NOT** on the regular International website. It is a wonderful way to travel and meet people. Once you connect on this link you will find many unique and interesting opportunities to learn about other countries, foods, and on-line activities. At the bottom are also links for tutorials for using WhatsApp and ZOOM.

Another great experience available to FFI members is the Pen Pal program. Yes - real old-fashioned pen pals, the kind you write to and who write back to you.

FFI Pen Pals is a new way to experience different views and discover common ground. Get matched up with another FFI member based on your interests – shared hobbies, common interests, a specific region or city, or a foreign language you'd like to practice. Or simply be surprised and get matched randomly! Then sit down and start writing – all you need is a pen, a piece of paper, an envelope and a stamp.

Here is how to find the link to Pen Pal.

1. On the FFI website homepage click "Virtual Experiences" link at the top of the page.
2. Click on the purple "here" link just below the 3 virtual experiences icons.
3. Scroll down the page and find [Friendship Force Pen Pals](#). Do a single click and a google document link will appear.
4. Information on the Pen Pal program and a registration link are in that document.

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ACTIVITIES

COCKTAILS ON THE 6TH

We will gather via ZOOM at 4:30-6:00 pm on January 6 to welcome the New Year. Our host is Agnes Rona. For the first gathering of the year, Agnes invites you to share one positive thought or experience or aspiration that may be your foundation for renewal and healing in 2021. Sharing sometimes offers each of us new perspectives and understanding - something we can always appreciate. Please rsvp by Jan. 5 to Peter Kaufman at pkaufman@gmail.com so Peter can send you the ZOOM Link to attend. See you on the 6th!

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK

Members will meet on Thursday January 7th. The Food Bank activity is at 2802 Dairy Drive, Madison, from 12:30 till 3:30. They continue to practice social distancing, masks, hand washing, and their regular safeguards to keep everyone safe.

Contact Lois Schulz at 608-243-9761 or loisschulz1942@gmail.com by the Tuesday before each date we are scheduled so she can let them know how many are coming.

BOOK CLUB

The book club will meet on January 25 and discuss "The Island of Sea Women" by Lisa See. It is a historical novel about women in South Korea who "free dive" deep into the sea to catch and sell food from the sea to support their families. Friend and family relationships over the years of colonialism, invasions, and world war ebb and flow and reveal a fascinating story of these women and of the country of Korea.

Please Email Reta Haring at retaharring@charter.net to let her know you will attend. The meeting will be held January 25 at 7:00pm. If Reta gets your message you will receive a ZOOM key for the meeting.

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

DECEMBER SPECIAL COCKTAILS ON THE 6TH

Lise Skofronick, Peter Kaufman and David Blado created and presented a wonderful program with many stories, photos, videos and good laughs, taking us back to enjoy a variety of great journeys. Here are some highlights:

Phoenix (2014)

Heard Museum devoted to Native American Art

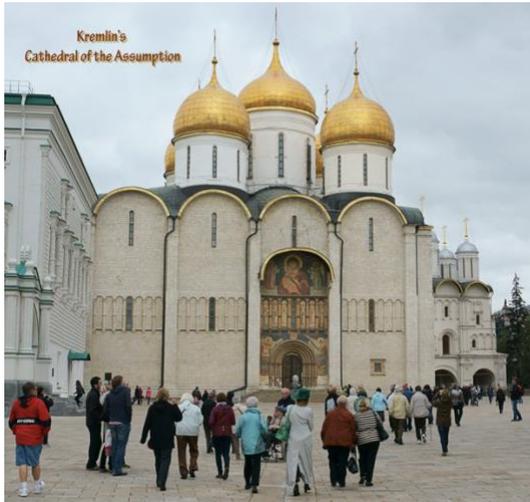


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ACTIVITIES REPORTS

DECEMBER SPECIAL COCKTAILS ON THE 6TH

Moscow Russia (2012)



The Cathedral of the Assumption is the oldest and most important church within the Kremlin. Former seat of the Russian Orthodox Church and place where tsars were crowned.

Vyborg Russia (2012)



George Wysock with the special birthday shirt made as a gift, given at the Vyborg Farewell Party – quite a party!

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ACTIVITIES REPORTS

DECEMBER SPECIAL COCKTAILS ON THE 6TH

Guadeloupe (2017)



Maureen Kind and her host at picnic.

HOLIDAY PARTY

A Virtual Journey Around the World

On December 18, 2020, the Programs Committee offered our membership a Zoom Party to celebrate the Holiday Season. Thirty nine members planned to participate, and most of them were able to actually join the party. Sadly, a few members did not receive their Zoom invitation due to a temporary interruption in Gmail services, and thus they were unable to log in. In the name of Gmail, we apologize for that unexpected and rare internet glitch!

The party started with lively, informal chatting. We were all delighted to see each other again, even if only on the screen! The presentation started with Mike Lambert's introduction, discussing the history of using "Merry Christmas" versus "Happy Holidays", and the controversy it generated over the past decades. After that, Magdi Sebestyen took our group for an imaginary journey to visit 10 Friendship Force Clubs around the world in order to experience their ways of celebrating the holiday season.

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

HOLIDAY PARTY

A Virtual Journey Around the World



Some of the holiday party-goers.

With the help of videos and pictures, we had a chance to peek into the traditions and customs of Hanukkah (in Israel), Kwanzaa (in the USA), Krampus Parade (in Germany), Diwali (in India), Bodhi Day (in South Korea), Winter Solstice (in Egypt), Russian Orthodox Christmas (in Russia), Chinese New Year (in China), Bamboo Lantern Festivals (in Japan), and Boxing Day (in Australia). Exhausted after all that traveling, we could finally undo our seatbelts at the end of the slideshow and commence the second part of our celebration: sharing personal holiday memories. Nine members had submitted photos prior to the party, and they told their stories related to those photos. Then other members joined in, as well, and shared some favorite memories, often going back to their childhoods. Almost everybody had something to share. We learnt a lot, we laughed a lot, and enjoyed a heartwarming sense of belonging and togetherness.

We closed this wonderfully warm and joyous celebration by singing "Let There Be Peace on Earth" and wishing each other Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays. We also wished ourselves and the world some normalcy returning to our lives in the New Year. **A happier 2021 to all of us!**

--Magdi Sebestyen

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ACTIVITIES REPORTS

LET'S WALK / LET'S HIKE

December 10 was a surprisingly mild and sunny day, when ten of our members set out for a long walk in the UW Arboretum. They covered 3.4 Miles in 90 minutes. Evergreens still provided nice patches of green colors, and in the glowing sun even some branches and dead plants painted the landscape to pretty yellows, oranges and reds. It was a lovely walk, spiced with good conversations!

During the winter we will not have pre-scheduled walks, due to the unpredictability of weather and road/trail conditions. Walks will still be organized on an ad hoc basis, when the short-term weather forecast looks favorable. Events will be announced by email to interested members. If you would like to join these walks, please sign up to the "Ad hoc walkers" email list by sending a message to magdi.sebestyen@gmail.com. Being on the list does not require any commitment; it just means you might get an occasional email that is not sent out to the entire membership. You can either respond and participate, or you can simply ignore them.



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ACTIVITIES REPORTS

BOOK CLUB

The Book Club met on Monday, November 30, via Zoom. Helen Ann Rugowski led discussion of the book selection *Hmong in Wisconsin* by Mai Zong Vue. Participants were Gail Holmes, Peter Kaufman, Maureen Kind, Tom Miller, Helen Ann Rugowski, Magdi Sebestyen, Stephanie Sorensen, and Sandi Wysock. Maureen shared a square of fabric handiwork and an embroidered cultural story cloth. Gail showed a handmade fabric bird, the size of a pigeon, she had purchased from a Hmong craft booth in Osseo.

Peter shared a special book from his mother about Hmong embroidery pieces that are in a museum collection in St. Paul, Minnesota. Members especially liked the stories of four Hmong families establishing new lives in Wisconsin.



LATE BREAKING AD HOC NEWS

As our biking and walking events are less likely to happen in the coming months, our club offers a seasonal alternative: cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

ACTIVITIES REPORTS

LATE BREAKING AD HOC NEWS

Events will happen on a short notice, when snow and weather conditions are favorable. The leader and organizer of these events will be Tamas Gaal. If you are interested in participating, please sign up for the "Winter Activities" email list by sending a message to Tamas' email address: tgaal@wisc.edu

And this is how you will feel:



Magdi Sebestyen blissed out in the snow

December 31, 2020 was the first ski day, organized overnight by Tamas Gaal. Skiers were invited to meet to ski on groomed trails in Elver Park. We will report back in the February Newsletter.

NEW MEMBERS

Stephanie Vanden Bush: A Road-Triping Traveler

Adventure, exploration, travel, new people, and global cultures are just a few reasons that led Stephanie to Friendship Force. During her first pregnancy four years ago, a close friend was sharing family experiences about hosting national and international guests and learning about their guests' lives, cultures, and countries. Stephanie wanted to share these types of experiences with her growing family, and her friend suggested she join Friendship Force. Since becoming a member, Stephanie has home-hosted Friendship Force ambassadors from Canada, and she looks forward to adventures and discoveries that group travel and homestays offer.

NEW MEMBERS

Stephanie Vanden Bush: A Road-Tripping Traveler



Stephanie loves road tripping. She and her husband would jump into their car with only a map and backpack, no plans, no reservations and hit the road. One of her favorite road trips was driving to Utah, where she and her husband hiked and discovered a tiny, remote campsite that was only advertised on a small, handcrafted sign. A six-mile gravel road led to an “oasis in the desert,” a real gem with a beautiful, bright red waterfall created by the reddish soil and a natural hot spring! As Stephanie comment, “No travel book would have listed this extremely isolated campsite.”

During her undergraduate years and while in veterinarian school, Stephanie participated in two study abroad programs in Ecuador. Her first experience in Ecuador was studying biology, and the visit sparked a love for the country and its people. When she returned for an immersive two-month public health program, she had opportunities to interact with health care workers and experience a home stay. On return trips, she introduced her mother to the country, its people and culture.

Later, Stephanie and her husband took a bus trip from the Ecuadorian coast to the mountains, with little advance planning, like their US road trips. An estimated four-hour bus ride took over ten hours to reach a remote mountain village. The bus driver dropped them off on the roadside four miles from their destination late at night, but another passenger who disembarked with them helped them get a ride to the hostel owned by his brother. As Stephanie commented, “This area is not on tourist maps, and certainly the hostel would not be listed in travel guides.” Finding common ground with people throughout the world is one of her main travel goals.

Stephanie is a veterinarian at the Stoughton Veterinary Service and lives in Brooklyn, Wisconsin, with her two daughters Evelyn and Hazel, ages 2 and 4, her husband, Dean, and two dogs, Porter and Citra. Stephanie and Dean want their daughters to experience adventures like the ones they enjoyed in the United States and abroad. A dream destination for her and her family is Angkor Wat, Cambodia, where they plan to do some road tripping and discover “round the corner...a new road or a secret gate” (J. R. R. Tolkien).

BOARD ACTIVITIES

This is a message from Friendship Force International. The words in green typeface are direct links to the videos:

In November, we sent you a video [“A Stronger Way Forward”](#), where we informed you of what we have been working on this year in the absence of our regularly scheduled Journeys. We also shared the plans we are making to keep us all better connected, and about our vision for a post-pandemic Friendship Force.

In December, FFI President/CEO, Jeremi Snook, hosted two live Q&A sessions to address questions that you all submitted in response to the “Stronger Way Forward” video. Below, you can find the links to both [Session 1](#) and [Session 2](#) videos, as well as a PDF document of [Frequently Asked Questions and Answers](#).

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BOARD CONTACT INFORMATION

Standing Committee Chairs

Membership: Lise R. Skofronick 608-274-7732
liskofronick@gmail.com

Journey Manager: Stephanie Sorensen 608-819-1846
ssorensen268@gmail.com

Activities: Gail Holmes 608-249-1846 glholmes@wisc.edu

Outreach: Dorothy Baldwin 608-742-6493
janddbaldwin@gmail.com

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Program :

Mike Lambert (608)-577-1057
lambertmichaelj@gmail.com
Magdi Sebestyen (608)-213-5768
magdi.sebestyen@gmail.com

COMMITTEE MEMBERS & ACTIVITY LEADERS

Activities Committee Members:

Gail Holmes (chair) (glholmes@wisc.edu),
Audrey Liimatainen (AMCL822@yahoo.com),
Lois Schulz (loisschulz1942@gmail.com)

Leaders for specific activities are:

Adopt-A-Highway–Stephanie Vanden Bush
(sljacobs2@gmail.com)

Bike Rides – Jan Hornback (jhornback@wisc.edu)

Book Club – Reta Haring (retaharring@charter.net) and
Marian Ehrenberg (marianeh2014@gmail.com)

International Institutes–Helen Ann Rugowski
(haharrin@hotmail.com)

Let's Eat Out (LEO)–Bobbie Vrooman
(bobbiesque@gmail.com)

Dining on the 6th – Gail Holmes (glholmes@wisc.edu)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS & ACTIVITY LEADERS

Leaders for specific activities are:

Let's Hike/Let's Walk–Magdi Sebestyen
(magdi.sebestyen@gmail.com)

Second Harvest Food Bank–Lois Schulz
(loisschulz1942@gmail.com)

Travel/Day trips–Donna Hussin (djhussin@yahoo.com)

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