

## DON'T CRY FOR ME ARGENTINA

We are up at 4.45am! I don't get up this early to go to my Rotary Breakfast Club, indeed the last time I recall getting up this early, was to kick someone's door down and shout out "Police- where're the drugs." But this time it is to get an early plane again for we are leaving the South American Continent.

But I am getting ahead of myself. At last report we were at the Rotary Convention in Brazil. Some sources say 14,000 Rotarians are present. We head out for the afternoon opening session with Eleanor and I first spending a couple of hours working on the "Travel and Hosting Fellowship" booth. The Saturday *Official Opening* included a great summary of the Rotary year by the outgoing World President and then the somewhat usual hoopla.

The "House of Friendship" is now officially open and we can view projects and buy merchandise before there is too much of a crowd. There do not appear to be the number of stalls that we have seen at earlier conventions.

The opening is followed by what we are told is a typical Samba parade. We walk to the nearby venue, told that we must be seated by 6pm and we just make it. A few thousand don't, and drift in over the next 30 minutes. Then we sit for another 30 minutes!

The crowd is getting pretty wild and at 7pm they announce it will start in 15 minutes! It does, first a variety of samba dancing groups perform on a stage in front of us and then a parade begins before us. It is the like of which we have never seen before and our earlier unhappiness pales at the magnitude of the event

Then just as suddenly as it began, it finished - at 8.30pm, not 10pm as advertised! We make our way to the shuttle bus that will take us to the Metro. There are none!! We are angry. About 10,000 or so are in queues for their hotel shuttles (we don't have one). The taxi rank has about 1000 queued up. We walk further away and gradually commandeer enough cabs to get us back to our hotel.

Eight days out now and Sunday dawns fine (and warm – unlike Chile) Our group splits up with some heading off for local touring, meeting Rotary Exchange students and others (who will remain unnamed) deciding on visiting what is described as the largest "Gay Parade" in the world – four million are said to attend (allegedly 2.5 million are in the parade and 1.5 million watching.) I don't know who counts this!

After attending the morning session at the convention, Eleanor and I head up the street to the nearby parade as it is only a short distance from our hotel (well why else would we go?) It defies description. We had missed a lot of the action – but we could see the outcome. There were some very *sad* gay people, which my trained eye lead me to believe was due to consumption of alcohol and perhaps other mind altering substances. There do not appear to be floats as such, but about 25 vehicles, each containing musicians or "canned music" playing as loud as they could. At a hundred metres from the source, the ground vibrated! I kid you not – the ground moved for us!

The footpaths are packed with people. Most of them seemed to be dressed somewhat different to us. They all seemed to be having a great time. Well actually, some of them weren't for they had fallen over. There were ambulance people and police in abundance, to assist some of the celebrants, and a mass of city cleaners, all in green uniforms ready to

follow up the parade with mechanical sweepers, water trucks and then the men on brooms. For reasons I don't care to go into, I did not take any photos of this parade!

Back at the Anhembi Stadium, the convention continued on through Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, with the usual top rate speakers, some from Rotary and some from outside. Two that really stood out were a couple of ten year old girls! They spoke at different times and were really quite incredible. Tuesday afternoon and evening saw the final sessions and closing concert, then we hurried back to our hotel to pack for departure the next morning.

Our group flew out to a place called Iguassu Falls. I figured it must be something like the Niagara Falls, which we had visited some years back. It is not. It is on an enormous scale. Neither words nor pictures can describe this scenic attraction, surely one of the wonders of the world. We view the falls from two sides, one in Brazil and the other from Argentina. We also go to a bird park, the likes of which we have never seen before.

A power station associated with the falls has a dam some seven or eight kilometres long! We drove over it. The lake behind the dam extends for over 100 kms. Somewhat like Manapouri power scheme, this one station produces about 15% of Brazil's electricity – but that is for ten or fifteen times more people than Manapouri does!

Our final leg in the South American journey, takes us from Iguassu (the Argentinian side- which is also around there somewhere) to Buenos Aires (also in Argentina). Again a guide meets us, transfers us to our hotel and then takes us out to a classy restaurant where we get tango lessons and a fine meal. My legs seem no longer associated with the former but my stomach handles the latter very well.

We have another day of sightseeing in this grand city. (I am lucky to have "honed up" on this city by attending the show "Evita" in Napier recently) There are three million people in the inner city and a further 11 million in the outskirts! Not quite the size of Sao Paulo but seems a lot cleaner. It is very well laid out with one of the main streets having ten lanes of traffic on each side and then special bus lanes down the middle! This is some street and Eva Peron is everywhere in this city!

There is no sign of graffiti in this Buenos Aires, as there was in Santiago and Sao Paulo. There is however, a statue of Rotary Founder Paul Harris. We are told this is a socialistic country. Schooling and Education are free and the government provides well for everybody. Perhaps that is why there is an annual inflation rate of 35% and personal income tax is 45%!

Shops advertise in US dollar as well as local pesos, and a lot of trade is done in the former for it is far more stable. Our guide changes money for us and then at the last minute, when I am leaving the country early in the morning, has not brought his money belt.

I go to change the money in the airport money exchange, wait in a queue for 30 minutes, only to find that *they will not take back their own money* and give me US dollars! (Later at LAX in the US, I could not sell it either.) Now I am not at all sure about this "socialist system."

So we have leave South America and couple of big cities with 10 & 15 times the population of Auckland. I have met (or heard about) Gringos, Groucho's, Hombres (I think), a lot about Eva Peron and I am somewhat wiser. Now it is 15 hours to LAX !!!



*On stage @ convention*



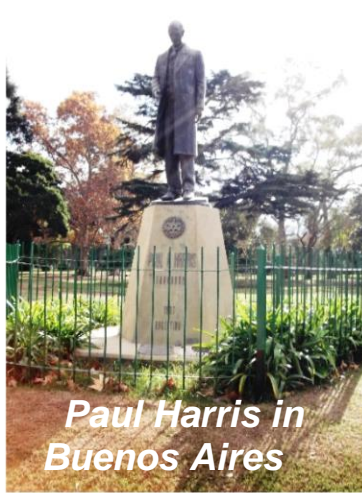
*Samba Parade*



*Iguassu Falls*



*Toucan*



*Paul Harris in Buenos Aires*



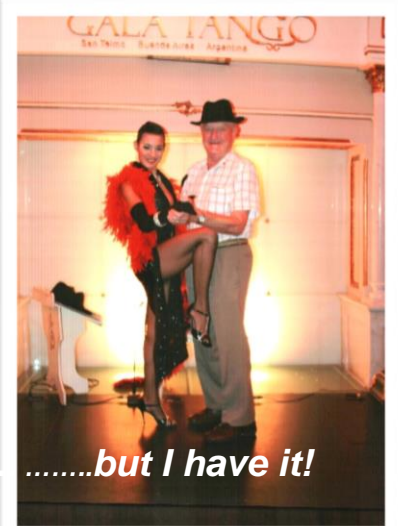
*Slums in Buenos Aires*



*Eva Peron waves*



*Getting in step is hard*



*.....but I have it!*