

Everybody's Free

(to Wear Comfortable Shoes)

by Susana Camargo-Pohl

The Capitol Steps did a hysterical show for us at the closing banquet in Washington. One of the skits was a parody of a mock graduation speech. Originally written by Chicago Tribune columnist Mary Schmich, it was later attributed to Kurt Vonnegut as a MIT graduation speech that never happened and finally became Baz Luhrmann's hit song "Everybody's free (to wear sunscreen)." To listen to the song or to read the original lyrics, go to <http://listen.to/sunscreen>. Many members of the audience may not have been familiar with this Internet-hoax-turned-radio-hit, but I felt compelled to do my own version with my impressions of my first AALL Annual Meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen of the 1999 AALL Annual Meeting.

Wear comfortable shoes.

If I could offer you only one tip for next year's AALL Annual Meeting, comfortable shoes would be it. The long term benefits of comfortable shoes have been proved by scientists, whereas the rest of my advice has no basis more reliable than my own, meandering inexperience. I will dispense this advice now.

Enjoy the Annual Meeting. Oh, never mind. You will not understand the joy of the Annual Meeting until it has faded. But trust me, in 20 years, you'll look back at photos of this year's Annual Meeting and recall in a way you can't grasp now, how much possibility lay before you and how fabulous the profession really is.

You were not as tired as you imagine.

Don't worry about the future meetings. Or worry, but know that worrying is as effective as trying to answer a reference question by chewing bubble gum. The real troubles of the Meeting are apt to be things that never crossed your worried mind. The kind that blindsides you at 10 a.m. Sunday when you go to buy your husband a ticket to the opening reception and learn that they just sold out.

Do one thing every day at the Meeting that makes you smile.

Read.

Don't be reckless with free time. Don't put up with broken elevators.

Learn.

Don't waste your time in long lines for the ladies room. Sometimes there is an empty ladies room around the corner that no one knows about. Sometimes you're in the front of the line, sometimes you're at the end. The line is long and in the end, it's only yourself you have to blame for drinking two cups of coffee and four bottles of water.

Remember compliments you receive; forget the insults. If you succeed in doing this, tell me how.

Keep your old programs, throw away your credit card bills.

Connect.

Don't feel guilty if you don't know what to do with your spouse. The most contented spouses I met didn't plan before the trip what they wanted to do while in D.C. Some of the most contented spouses couldn't tell you what they did after they returned from the trip.

Get plenty of sleep.

Be kind to your feet, you'll miss them when you can't feel them anymore.

Maybe you'll get lost, maybe you won't. Maybe you'll dance, maybe you won't. Maybe this is your first Meeting, maybe you danced the "Funky Chicken" at the first Meeting.

Whatever you do, don't congratulate yourself too much or berate yourself either.

Your choices of which programs to attend are half chance. So are everybody else's.

Enjoy the exhibits. Go every day you can. Don't be afraid of taking freebies but remember you are not the only one who needs something for everyone back home.

Dance. Even if you have nowhere to do it but on the edges of the dance floor.

Read the program materials even if you do not carry them around with you all day.

Do not read during the programs, it will only make you feel sleepy.

Get to know your colleagues. You never know when you'll need something from their states.

Be nice to vendors. They're your best link to products we'll need in the future.

Understand that Annual Meetings will come and go. But to the friendships, you should hold on.

Work hard to bridge the gaps in geography, because the older you get, the more you need the librarians who know their way around town without a map on the side of a bag.

Have a Meeting in New York City once, but leave before it makes you hard. Have a Meeting in northern California once, but leave before it makes you soft.

Travel.

Accept certain inalienable truths: The costs of books will rise. Lawyers will drive you crazy. You, too, will become an experienced law librarian. And when you do, you'll fantasize that when you were young, book prices were reasonable, lawyers were easy-going, and librarians were respected. Respect experience.

Don't expect anyone else to attend programs for you while you catch a nap.

Maybe you have energy, maybe you have stamina, but you'll never know when either one might run out.

Don't mess too much with your hair or worry that you brought the wrong kind of clothes.

Be careful of giving legal advice, but be helpful to your patron—I learned this at a program. Advice may be a form of practicing law. Dispensing it is a way of getting into trouble and lawyers do it for more than it's worth.

But trust me on the comfortable shoes.

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