

The Beijing Conference – Fay Weber, Montana and California

Years before the Beijing Conference I was active in the American Association of University Women, International Federation of University Women, since renamed Graduate Women International, and the Pasadena United Nations Chapter where I served as a delegate to the Beijing Conference, focusing on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

During the Conference we stayed at a Beijing hotel, but each morning we arose early and traveled to Huairou. The various bus drivers weren't familiar with the rural countryside, so we were frequently lost, giving us a close and personal look at how rural families worked and lived. The Huairou Conference Center wasn't finished so women from all over the world walked on wobbly wooden planks to keep from getting muddy feet and we met in tents to keep dry during this very rainy season.

When attending various meetings, I was thrilled to see Madeleine Albright who led the US delegates, Dianne Feinstein, Barbara Boxer, Geraldine Ferraro and other US dignitaries, actively listening and working with members of various United Nations organizations to help formulate recommendations for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. I worked with the American Association of University Women and other groups concerned with equal access to and equal treatment of women in education and health care. One of the best memories was working with Mary Purcell, the President of the American Association of University Women, on the Rights of the Girl Child. It was the first time the rights of a child were recognized by "States" (countries) and we proposed that each child within their jurisdiction should be treated without discrimination of any kind from the earliest stages of life, through childhood and into adulthood.

One of my biggest disappointments was not getting into the small conference hall where Hilliary Clinton gave her speech. I stood with hundreds of women in the pouring rain with our umbrella's dripping on each other. Hillary delayed speaking until they installed an outdoor speaker so we could hear her speech, "It takes a village." She missed her plane due to the delay, but I have been forever grateful that all attendees could hear her presentation. She is still one of my heroes.



I am still active in Women Graduates-USA (WG-USA), the American Association of University Women, and Graduate Women International and CAMEUS (Canada, Mexico and the United States) where we work on gender discrimination and human rights for migrants and immigrants. For WG-USA, I have frequently attended the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW) and participated in helping write papers where occasionally some of our concerns become part of the larger UN CSW Agreed Conclusions. I still work yearly with planning committees for UN CSW presentations with Women Graduates and CAMEUS.

The Beijing Conference was a powerful influence in my life and left me feeling empowered to help make a better life, locally and globally, for women and girls. May those who follow be empowered to continue this important work.