



NEWSLETTER SPECIAL EDITION - April 6, 2021

A tribute to the AWCB Clubhouse!

We hope you will like this little trip down memory lane - Avenue des Erables /Ahornlaan 1 to be exact - to celebrate our lovely former home which was so integral in the history of our Club. While we are excited about the new chapter of the Club *sans* Clubhouse, we are delighted to share some of the memories which made these four walls so special to us and many members throughout the years. Read, (relate) and enjoy!





Here are some favorite Clubhouse moments from your present Board members!

President Jan Allen:

*"It was my first brocante at the Clubhouse in May 2016. I had recently moved to Overijse and had just joined the Club, not knowing anyone. Before Overijse I had been living in deep East Flanders for 18 years and had no American friends here. It's always a little awkward when you are the "new kid on the block", and that day it was busy inside the Clubhouse's big meeting room where people were setting up for the sale. Several people said hello, welcomed me to the Club, and showed me my table. Then Beth Hough-Koestal (who we tragically lost to cancer a little more than a year ago) came over from a few tables away to give me a **really big friendly welcome** and tell me what lovely skin I had! We had a really nice conversation and stayed in touch after that. I was almost bowled over by her friendliness and kindness - not to mention the huge compliment she threw at me. (Especially as in Deep East Flanders people were very reserved.) I always think about meeting Beth there, and her kindness. I'm so glad she was one of the first people I met at the Clubhouse and will always treasure having met her there in the middle of the hustle and bustle."*

Treasurer Cate Napier:

*"I spent countless hours in the Clubhouse and have many memories from the last 3+ years of being a member. **To pick a favorite is hard!** Our last Independence Day BBQ celebration at the House with the ACB is one of my most cherished times. The huge crowd of people showing their pride for the*

United States while enjoying patriotic music, American fare, and fun helped me to envision how the clubhouse was in its prime. Plus who can resist a good cheeseburger!?!?"

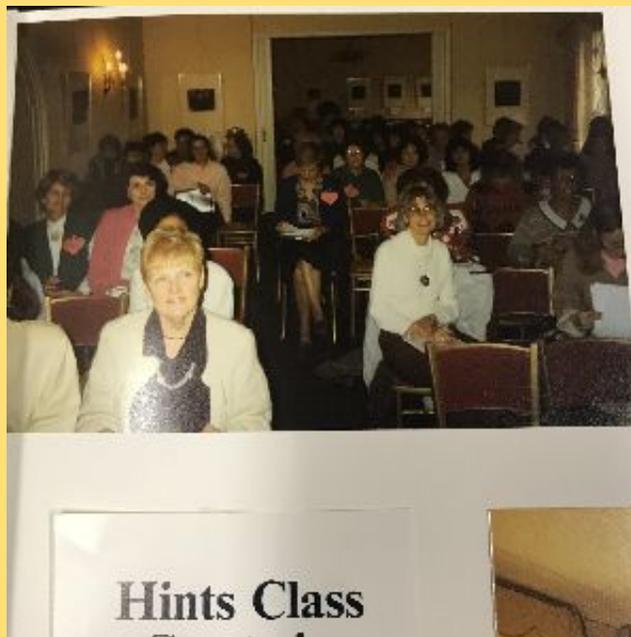
Secretary Kara Kogler:

*"Who could resist the smell of roasted turkey and all of the trimmings, tantalizingly arranged for the taking in the festively decorated big meeting room? That is my all time favorite memory of the Clubhouse: spending an **absolutely wonderful Thanksgiving dinner** in the company of my two kids, my two invited - and suitably wowed - friends, and of course, the rest of the Club "family". It felt like our true home away from home on that day, and it is a Thanksgiving - and Clubhouse - souvenir that I will truly savor forever!"*

VP2 Jennifer Constantino:

"I ran the Video Room for many years and remember the fun we had down there, especially when we re-decorated and converted from VHS to DVD. We had a grand re-opening with champagne and, of course, popcorn! It was a hive of activity back then, before TiVo and Netflix changed everything..."

...I met a friend there for lunch one day when a Hints Class was going on. The lunch room was so packed there were people eating at the bar. But there was such a great atmosphere and I met some wonderful ladies that day. Those Hints Classes were legendary in the expat community back in those pre-internet days."



Memories from other current and former Club members



From member **Sophie d'Assche:**

*"I am overwhelmed by this parting of 23 years in my life with this Clubhouse and **all the women I had the chance to meet there** during this time. I am thankful to the first president Marge who opened the Clubhouse cutting the ribbon stretched over the big arch into the main room. And that many of my friends and I would benefit from the endeavour. I'm thankful to all the presidents, boards and members for making this Clubhouse a unique, multicoloured experience. I am so grateful. Blessings and further prosperity to all!"*



From member and past President **Sue Frick**:

*"The Clubhouse has **so many fond memories** for me. I joined AWCB in January 2007 and one of the first highlights for me was the Kentucky Derby Gala! We had so much fun dancing and racing horses on a special track brought in for the occasion. The Scrapbook Group which met every Friday from 10-3 was another highlight for me at the House. And of course, the celebration for the 65th Anniversary of AWCB in April 2009 was a highlight, as I helped in the planning of that great event along with Mary Franklin, Jane Muther, Nancy Kapstein, and Gail Madigan. And then there were the Christmas Markets led by Cecile Abric which were so much fun. I experienced so many wonderful activities, parties, meetings and friendships at the Clubhouse during my time in Belgium..."*

From former member **Elaine Macko**:

"Gosh, I spent so much time at the Clubhouse in the late 80s/early 90s...Here are some of my favorite memories:

*...I was the special activities director for five years. It was the day of the **Queen's visit**. She was just a tad late and I had to use the restroom, so I ran down the hall to the restroom by the kitchen. While I was in there, the Queen arrived. When I tried to get out of the restroom, the door wouldn't budge because her security team was blocking it. They told me I had to stay in the*

restroom until she passed by. As soon as she went up the back stairs, they let me out and I hightailed it back to the main room and got in the receiving line. I almost missed the big event but made it just in time!...



*...In addition to being the special activities director and the food director for the Xmas bazaar, I also taught a **Mexican cooking class** and catered Mexican themed dinner parties. I would stand behind the counter in the kitchen, cooking, and talking, and giving tips and history talks to a room of students. I was the original Rachel Ray, just not rich and famous! When I would cater a party, I would come to the Clubhouse very early on a Saturday morning and cook until everyone arrived around 6:00 PM. It was very weird being there by myself when usually there was so much activity going on....*

*...The first thing I signed up for when I became a member was a **modern dance class** held in the late afternoon. We would move all the tables and chairs in the lunch room and the main board room out of the way and we would run and leap into the air and collapse on the floor in a puddle of laughter at how silly we must look, but we did have a lot of fun...*

*...One of the biggest events we held at the club was a **fashion night**. Local Belgian designers brought their collections and AWCB members were used as models. My hairdresser was brought in to do everyone's hair. All the women looked terrific and the Clubhouse was packed that night with good food and wine being served throughout the evening...*

...My personal story - I came to Belgium to live with a Belgian man I met while on vacation. He wanted me to assimilate into Belgian culture, but after a year of trying, I longed for a bit of America and so I joined the Club. Over

*the years I was on the board, taught several classes, was food director for the bazaar, and did a number of other volunteer activities. I loved having a place to go each day and the club became my happy place. I missed it during the summertime when it closed and always looked forward to getting back to work in September. After 12 years my relationship ended and I had to remain in Belgium until my house sold. At that point I was devastated to be leaving a country where I had a life and friends. The **Clubhouse became my refuge**. It's where I went several times a week to be with supportive friends while the rest of my life was crumbling around me. It really saved me in those last few months of my stay. Being a member of the AWCB remains one of the highlights of my life. I made friends there who are still in my life after thirty years. I will cherish all my days there forever..."*



From former Club Secretary and current member **Julie Kmet**:

*"My fondest memory of the AWCB Clubhouse was when the AWCB Board hosted a **lovely baby shower** for my daughter Mila and me. The light and floral decor brought out the magical features of the house and made all guests*

feel warm and cheerful. The food was delightful and many of the gifts were handmade and very thoughtful. It was a special party to be surrounded by the gracious and welcoming ladies to help me on my path to motherhood. Being an expat far from home, there was not much guidance on what to buy and tips and tricks of caring for babies, but these ladies sure helped me get prepared! These memories I will cherish forever with my daughter, of a house full of women, a home away from home."





From **Dorie Taylor**, former member and expat now living Cape Town, South Africa



"When my family arrived in Belgium in 2005 for our first expat experience, we moved into a beautiful house in the village of Lasne. We chose to move to a French-only village, but the Wallonian accent of our neighbours was an unexpected challenge! The first advice my husband heard at his Diegem office was for me to join the Club.

After getting my children settled into their new school (ISB), I quickly found the houseful of boxes lonely - even though we had moved our menagerie of animals from our home in Arizona. I mustered up my courage and drove over to the Club's address in Rhode-Ste-Genese. I wasn't sure if had arrived at the right place, as I parked on the street of a beautiful residential neighbourhood. The house was very American, with its grey paint and eagle/American flag crest above the front door. I had not seen one of those crests since 1970's suburbia!

I walked to the front door and rang the doorbell. When I pushed the door open, I found a smiling woman sitting behind a desk to my left and a beautiful staircase to my right. With a wonderful Midwestern accent, she greeted me with, "Hi, how are you? Can I help you?" Being originally a Cincinnati, Ohio

girl, my eyes welled up and my heart warmed in my chest. I really had no idea how much I already had missed a familiar American accent. Immediately, I felt like this stranger was a friend and I was at home.

Clutching my handbag with my American passport, proof of Belgian address and my new Belgian bank check card, I was already ready to enlist as a member - no one had to convince me. The lovely lady behind the front desk told me that she would love to walk me around the Clubhouse, but she had to "man" the front desk and phone, i.e. the "command centre of the Clubhouse" as she called it. After looking at my passport, she told me go upstairs to the membership office. There I found Aida Darby sitting behind her desk with yet again another warm, welcoming, smile and a lovely New Orleans accent offering to help. (Little had I noticed the "Membership Office" sign on the door (!), but Aida confirmed I was at the right place.) She herself was just volunteering to help organize paperwork from the previous year's board and told me that Emily the Membership Chair would be back shortly. Aida gave me the paperwork, a place to sit and I began to fill in my application form.

Emily popped in the door with a bundle of happy energy and asked if I had any questions, if I would I be available to volunteer at the house, and if I knew when when the upcoming New Arrivals meeting was. With her warm Georgia accent, Emily declared, "Don't worry, you are not alone here. You are going to meet some amazing fellow American ladies with whom you will bond in a special relationship unlike any others back home. You will have opportunities to go on trips throughout Europe with our experienced travel guides. I have had a blast since moving here as a newlywed even though I miss my family and Georgia. Just keep yourself busy. That is what I do. My parents love to come and visit us - so don't you worry, family and friends will also be coming to visit. Did you work before you moved?"

I told Emily and Aida I had my own and operated a photography business that had been very successful, I had an Art degree, a daughter and a son with Aspergers Syndrome, and I had been a former Junior League Member. Emily smiled and said that I would be perfectly comfortable here and that any help I could provide to the Club would be greatly appreciated.

Emily then walked me around the whole Clubhouse and introduced me to everyone. I met Pat Tirona (AWCB President) in her office where I was again welcomed to Belgium and the Club. Pat said, "I hope you find AWCB to be your second home here. You are coming to the Newcomers Welcome Luncheon next week, right? There will be tons of information on how to settle down here

in your new home. I look forward to seeing you next week, Dorie. Thanks for stopping by to say hi."

Emily showed me the Tea Room, the Gift Shop, the Library and the Video Store downstairs. Wow! What a huge house! I could even get something to eat here so I now knew I wouldn't starve in Belgium. (The Belgian grocery store already seemed a bit much and so unfamiliar with the aisle after aisle of wine and beers - not to mention differently labelled food I had never heard of.) I saw the expansive back gardens of the Clubhouse and the parking lot full of cars. Women were coming in and out through the back entrance after being buzzed in and greeted by fellow members. There was such an energy; so welcoming and caring. There were young mothers walking their toddlers up the garden steps to the Crèche while they attended their yoga, Dutch or French classes. Or they were just there to meet a friend for sandwiches and soup at the Tea Room. Everyone was so excited and happy to be there.

This was my first day at AWCB. I was already looking forward to meeting possible new friends the next week. What a home away from home the Club would become for me - and all of those who came after me. The experience of being in the Club and with those that served as the nuts and bolts behind the operations of the Club helped me in my future expat moves and in other women's clubs throughout the world. I was often asked in London and Surrey, UK what the AWCB was really like, as they had heard such wonderful things about the Club, the Board and the beautiful Clubhouse. Those experiences were also great. But I have to say, none were as special and with such tight friendships as those made at the AWCB. Thank you ladies of AWCB for being there for my family and I and for helping me grow in my sometimes challenging yet rewarding adventure as an expat in Belgium."



Thank you, dear Clubhouse for providing us with the real "bricks and mortar" home of the AWCB!

Have something to include in the newsletter? We love your news so just **e-mail us** with the details.
Ditto goes for your **events!** Thank you for your input!



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