General Conference Session:
What It Means To Me
As a lifelong introvert, the thought of immersing myself in a sea of sixty thousand Adventists in an unknown city was daunting to say the least. Add to that the fact that I would be working the entire ten days with seasoned media professionals from all over the country, potentially the world, and my head was spinning.

I was thrilled at the opportunities I had been promised. You’ll get a press pass! You’ll meet so many people! You’ll see our church leadership in action and get an inside view at our processes! Yes, all these things seemed unthinkable for a mere summer intern to experience. How awesome for me to be able to tell future employers that at the age of 21, I had been privy to daily General Conference press briefings for the North American Division or had churned out as many as three news stories in a day. Such an opportunity!

The opportunities did not make me forget my nerves.

When I first got my press badge and my press box access pass, I took pictures and sent them to my whole family and some friends, a “check me out!” text. I went up to the press box and took some more pictures to help illustrate my bragging later. Those first few hours, I focused a lot on the surrealism of my situation. I’m in a press box! I’m meeting the NAD president! There is someone in a blue blazer pushing the buttons in the elevator for me! The actual working and
And the work was intense. Press briefings gave us assignments for the day and allowed me to connect with international communication professionals. My boss was “a legend,” according to a communication director from England, and I spent the rest of the week trying to soak up some of his legendary status. I was given story after story, interviewed 5K participants and Bible character re-enactors, and snuck in time to buy new shoes. No one told me about all the walking!

Sitting in the press box during the business sessions was frustrating in a few ways. I didn’t realize it would be so noisy and chaotic up there. People are constantly chatting away, asking for spelling on a delegate’s name or the location of a specific photo. The sound system already comes through jumbled in the press box and with all the other voices around, you really need laser focus to hear the session; at least I did. Apparently those with the constant voices are incredible multi-taskers because they hear every single word. It was impressive.

Maybe I had more trouble hearing because I didn’t understand. I’m a small potatoes girl. I’m from the Rocky Mountain Conference. I go to Union College. Sometimes we host events from the Mid-America Union Conference. That’s about the extent of my knowledge regarding organizational terms. Apparently I’m from NAD since that’s what my name card says but it took my pride to ask. There was a man sitting across from me in the press box with the label, EUD. I understand SSD and WAD are divisions but what’s included within those divisions? It’s so confusing! Is there a code cheat sheet someone could print for me?

Another reason it was frustrating was the conversation on the floor itself. I’ve never been to a church board meeting or a school board meeting or anything close. I wasn’t aware of the constant backtracking, the misunderstanding, the flip-flop decisions, and the amount of time it can take for a simple agenda motion. I was aware of the difficulty inherent in attempting to have multiple people agree. I do have siblings after all. The delegates were like a 2,500 sibling family. Although they all came from the same religious mindset, they had other cultural influences in their decision-making. Although they all were heading the same direction, they had varying ideas of how to get there.

Even though it was “against the rules,” I loved the moments when the delegates collectively put their hands together to applaud an especially powerful point. In my mind, it helped heal some of the division created by the comments and debates. We don’t always disagree, the applause said to me. We are one church and we will work it out.

I believed being a media representative would be the most impactful aspect of my week in San Antonio. I thought it would be the work I did and the pieces I wrote that would make the trip memorable. I realized instead that it was the people I encountered who made the week amazingly special.

One day, I was speed walking to the Alamodome, where the sessions were being held. My hotel was located 1.3 miles from the dome so I was in a hurry to arrive on time. Mysteriously I never quite managed to leave early enough, demonstrating stereotypical millennial procrastination. On my walk to the dome, a man asked me about my badge.

“Are you a delegate?” he asked. I was asked this more frequently than you’d think, despite
my face resembling that of an eighth grader.

“No, I’m actually with the media from NAD,” I replied.

He, along with his wife and son, asked me questions about my home and my job with an accent I couldn’t place. I told them about my recent relocation to Colorado and the internship I had been so lucky to receive. Being obsessed with all things international, I turned the question around to them. “Where are you from?”

“Canada,” he answered, “but I’m originally a Frenchman from Belgium.” Instantly I was captivated at this physical embodiment of culture before me. I listened as he described his journey from Europe, his impending 50-year wedding anniversary, and his apology after briefly speaking to his wife in French. “We made it a point to speak French in the home,” he explained in his charming accent. “We wanted our son to be bilingual.”

We parted ways and I kicked myself as I lost the three figures in the crowd. I hadn’t gotten their names; and that was only the first in a string of mysterious encounters with strangers I would never forget.

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