



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

Article from:

International News

April 2009 – Issue No.47



Maggie Gwaze is an actuarial analyst at Sovereign, in New Zealand. She can be reached at maggie.gwaze@sovereign.co.nz.

I Survived my First Conference

By Maggie Gwaze

As a student attending my first actuarial conference, I was not sure what to expect.

My manager had hinted to me that I should perhaps submit a post-conference summary of what I had learnt. With the fear of summarising the conference looming over my head I made sure I would read the synopsis and papers for sessions I had planned to attend. Despite my diligence, I still expected the whole experience to be daunting.

Non-actuaries would probably joke that 120 actuaries in a confined space implies boringness and morbidity. However, what struck me on my arrival at Taupo was the friendliness and candid nature of the delegates I met. Being fairly new to New Zealand, it was also a great way to meet new people in the industry whilst being in Taupo compliments of the company and of course to see my workmates getting their dance groove on at the conference dinner.

The programme lived up to its promise of being both entertaining and providing a wealth of knowledge. It was a relief to know that not every presentation consisted of alphas, betas and complex ac-

tuarial theory. After the conference I knew how much gold was left in the world, how many actuarial jokes can be successfully slipped into one presentation and I'm sure after the talk on actuaries in the community, I wanted to join "Actuaries sans Frontiers."

Despite my preconceptions of everyone around me being totally engrossed in plenary sessions, actuarial papers and presentations, everyone I approached with a question, no matter how complex or trivial, gave me all the time and attention I needed in a relaxed and friendly manner. In some instances I found myself standing around people much more experienced than myself, when I wasn't asking questions I put on my intelligent look and nodded my head vigorously in an attempt to seemingly understand the conversation.

Apart from the sessions, informal discussions with actuaries and fellow students proved to be an invaluable source of information about the industry and the different areas of work.

By the end of the fourth day we had been fed and watered nicely. New friendships had formed and by then I knew the maximum number of actuarial jokes any human being should know—six (five too many). I gathered that only accountants enjoy actuarial jokes as this gave them a sense of apparent social superiority over actuaries.

DAY 1

After a four hour drive from Auckland, I only had five minutes to unpack my bags and headed straight to the AGM. After saying 'aye' a few times, we quickly moved onto the first plenary session. I was incredibly tired but found myself daydreaming about the wine tasting that was to follow.

DAY 2

A problem with hot water in the wing I was staying in meant a few actuaries went with a cold shower that morning. I chose jet boating as my social event and I recall sitting in the boat and thinking to myself, "doing wheelies in a jet boat sure does beat an afternoon in the office."

DAY 3

With six sessions in one day, this day was by far the most exhausting. By the time we got to the afternoon sessions, delegates were slumped in their chairs with eyes half-closed practicing what looked like subliminal learning. I did not have the luxury of subliminal learning as the possibility of writing a summary of the conference was still an imminent threat.

The conference dinner that evening, was yet another networking opportunity. It was an interesting evening as I danced to music older than myself and was glad that this brief retro moment in my life would remain in Taupo. I also said to one of my colleagues, "thank goodness actuaries don't have to rely on their dancing skills to make a living!"

DAY 4

I do not usually attend actuarial sessions on a Saturday morning but there is a first time for everything. In between gobbling down my brunch I found the final session more easy-going than I expected and an appropriate close to the conference.

I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and certainly look forward to the next one. □