

My Fourth and First AG

By Sherilyn Lee

I admit it, I used to be an “add-on.” I have attended three Annual Gatherings since 2003 as a guest registered by my boyfriend, Grant. At last year’s Hospitality, in a public moment of bravado, I agreed to take my one and only shot at the Mensa admission test.

After passing the exam, I looked forward to the first AG as “my own Mensa.” I needed a vacation. The least favorite of my responsibilities as a proposal manager has been coordinating two meals a day, seven days a week for the last three months for 200 scientists, engineers and executives. Many gripe about this free catered food while looking me in the eye and eating mouthfuls of it. This AG would be my escape from the recreational complainers in my office who have never fed a large group or won’t own some responsibility to make things better.

I’m not the only one running away from the real world. Many Mensans tell me that the AG is the only place where they can be themselves.

The Birmingham Sheraton hotel is comfortable and located on the trolley line for which rides only cost a quarter. The hotel welcomes us with a banner over its registration desk and a snack and beverage table in the lobby.

For me, the first night of the AG is about finding out who’s here by sitting in Hospitality, catching up on the changes with my friends since last year, and, of course, meeting new people. We hug, wave, snack and chat with Scott and Michael from Oregon, Dancing Don, Skinner, and a very pregnant Zarya. Grant and I meet up with our friend, Brad, a news director we met at last year’s AG while explaining the concept and logo of the Hooters restaurant chain to a table of Finnish Mensans. I’ve learned that friendships can be made at the AG in one conversation with a stranger. Even though I have never seen an episode of “Seinfeld,” Brad’s friend, Marc, decides to hang out with us in Hospitality anyway, while the Mensans around us play games and sing along to guitarists.



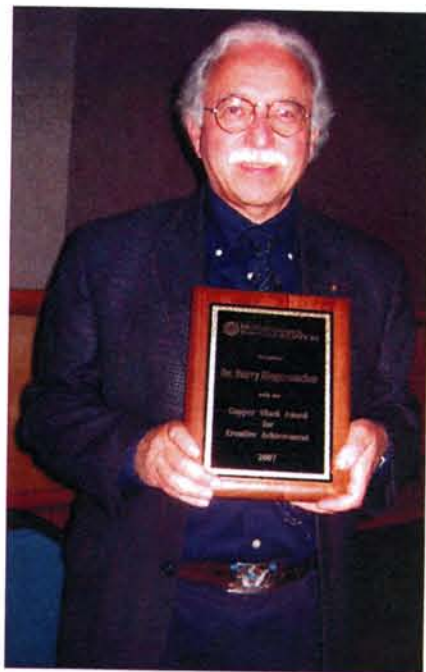
Photos by

Dave Felt

Grant Palmer

Mary Dwyer Wolfe

Dick Hodgson



The next day after breakfast, Brad, Grant, Marc and I enter the Sudoku tournament. Grant finishes first in the elimination round by completing three puzzles in eight minutes. Marc also qualifies for the finals. Later in the week, Grant wins the final round when he solves three puzzles in 20 minutes with a hangover and four hours of sleep. How do the finalists even think, let alone, solve the puzzles when Adam plays heart-pumping, stress-inducing music?

When I drink, I like to eat greasy food, but when Brad drinks, he likes

to sing, so we joined in for the Mensa Karaoke night. Grant and Brad named themselves “Ivory and Ivory” to perform Bachman Turner Overdrive’s “Takin’ Care of Business.” We meet Kenya, a singer who brings down the house down with Ike and Tina Turner’s “Proud Mary.” I join in the karaoke fun for the first time ever to sing Shania Twain’s “Man, I Feel Like a Woman!”

One evening, we snack on sandwiches in Hospitality donated by Subway. This all-night conversation marathon leaves my stomach hurting from laughing so much. The smell of



brewing coffee triggers me to look at my watch. It's 7 a.m. Grant, Brad and I decide to stay for breakfast. Brad lifts a forkful of scrambled eggs, and nods, "This is what the AG is all about."

Grant and I heard that there had been issues with organizing Hospitality before the AG began. Our solution was to help by volunteering to serve lunch one day. We report to Janet for our shift. She explains the food handling rules and doles out tasks. Our shift clears breakfast and prepares to serve lunch. While restocking sodas

with Lee, I notice a handwritten sign taped to the vending machine door, "FREE, Exact Change Required." We carry out trays of potato salad, cole slaw, cheese grits, hamburgers and hot dogs. The feeding frenzy begins and our challenge is to get into the serving line to keep the food stocked while members fill their plates. Everyone has plenty to eat and all unopened food is sent to a local homeless shelter.

On Friday night, Brad reprises his role from last year's AG as the loudest, and arguably funniest, audience par-

ticipant at *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. He's seen it more than 300 times and tells me that he's out of shape and needs to practice for next year.

Skinner welcomes us to the Hell's Mensans Hospitality. The room is well stocked with friends and food. He and Yvonne are affable hosts and give me a Moon Pie for the flight back to California. At the GenX Hospitality suite, Maria pours me an Irish Car Bomb while Jeff tells me about the beverages he plans to order for the 2011 AG in Portland. His descriptions



make me thirsty for what I will consume four years from now. Mikey The Suit and Trebor tell me the best news of the AG. Thanks to your generosity, the Joe Zanca Scholarship for the Mensa Education & Research Foundation is now fully endowed. They also share that Paul Levine, a second generation Mensan, won the Mr. Mensa pageant which raised \$2,800 towards the scholarship endowment and that amount was matched by an anonymous donor. Many thanks to all of the Mr. Mensa candidates who performed at this lively event to raise funds for a worthy cause.

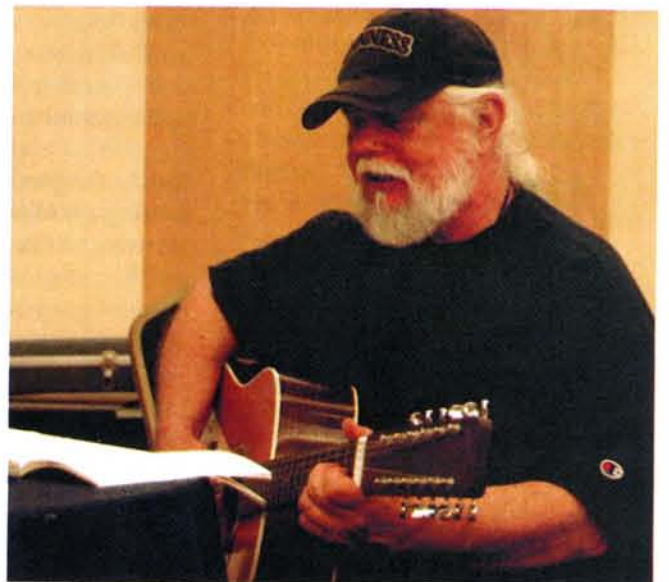
There were too many good programs and I had to make tough choices. I attended the American

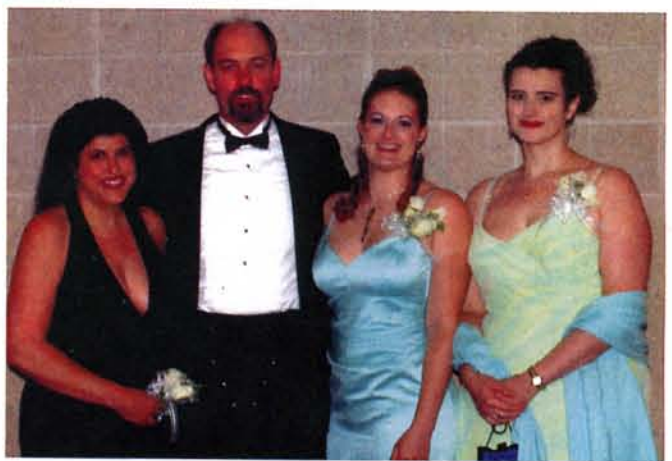
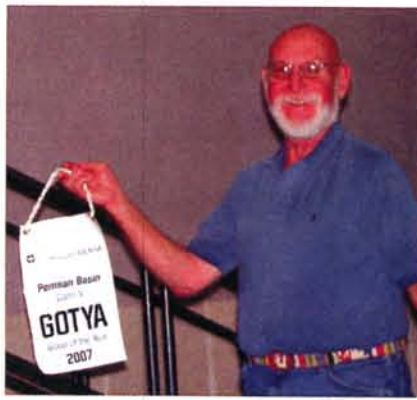
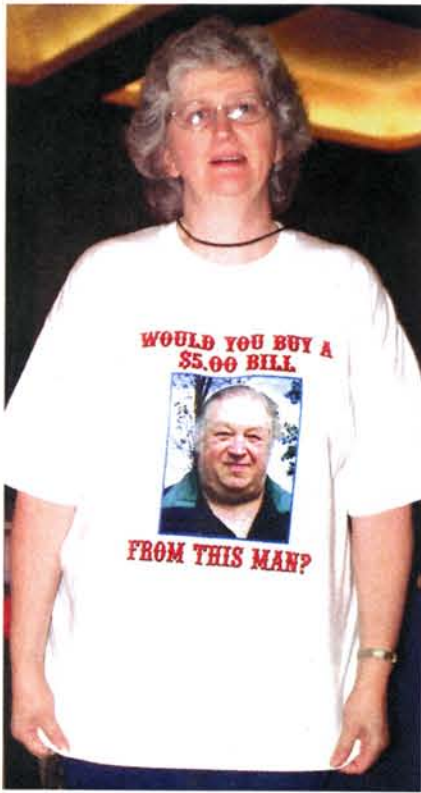
Tribal Bellydance performance by Devyani and Fat Chance Bellydance and danced in the lesson that followed. I also visited with The Smartiest of the Smart Sweet Potato Queens Tena Rena, while sipping her Slap Yo' Mama Big Ass Margarita, learned more about paranormal energy from Murray Silver, listened as Lady Shimla claimed that glass erotica is not only fun but some can be functional as a Thanksgiving dinner table decorations, and created haikus with Herb Guggenheim's poetic meter class.

I meet lots of people at AGs, but none of them look like me. It's not a big deal. However, I was pleasantly surprised in Gay SIG Hospitality when I met John whose family is from the

same small town as my father. Over handfuls of M&M's near a rainbow arrangement of Beanie Baby Teddy Bears, I learned that he's Hawaiian and Mensan, just like me. Even in Birmingham, Ala., I found the aloha spirit that means so much to me.

I return to work the day after the AG. While reviewing my e-mails from the last week, I begin to understand what other Mensans have described to me for years, I feel myself shifting back into the real world. As this other life with my extended family fades away for now, I call Grant and he says that we're already registered for next year's AG in Denver. I hope to see you all there. Thanks for making this year's AG so much fun.





CAP Award Winners

1st — Oregon Mensa Oregon Scholarship Fund

Oregon Mensa has a long-standing scholarship fund that contributes both to the Mensa Foundation scholarships, as well as awarding 2-4 additional scholarships each year. The group raises about \$2000 a year by

many creative means including an auction, a book sale, a garage sale, and a wine-makers gourmet dinner and vineyard tour.

2nd — Oregon Mensa Losing our Minds: A Workshop for parents and teachers

The group hosted a workshop for parents and teachers of gifted children. Dr. Deborah Ruf spoke at the event and a parent panel offered the chance to discuss local issues. More than 50 parents and educators attended the workshop, providing goodwill and publicity in the community.

3rd (Tie) — Piedmont Area Mensa Chicago Area Mensa

Piedmont Area Mensa provided all 16 judges for the Bethel Elementary School Science Fair. Mensa members judged 200 entries from the school's 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students.

Following their Halloween book sale, Chicago Area Mensa donated remaining books to the Arlington Heights Public Library and Books for Soldiers, a program which donates books to soldiers currently serving in Iraq. During the book sale, funds were collected to defray the cost of shipping books to soldiers in Iraq.