

HELLO FROM VIDY

As a child, I immersed myself in reading "The Last of the Mohicans". Will somebody one day publish "The Last of the Volunteers" ? I would hope not, since that would lead us to expect the decline of the Olympic Games. The *Hello from Vidy* of March 1988 paid tribute to the volunteers of the Winter Games in Calgary. Those in Seoul merited a similar tribute, and what is being prepared in Albertville and Barcelona will no doubt be along similar lines.

Is this not a strange phenomenon ? The Olympic Games, which certain people regard as a gigantic commercial operation, are at the same time the setting for a prodigious demonstration of gratuitous acts in the purest sense of the term. The organization and running of the Games would now be inconceivable without the group of men and women who flock to the volunteer enrolment centres, and from whom the organizers have the luxury of employing stringent criteria in their selection.

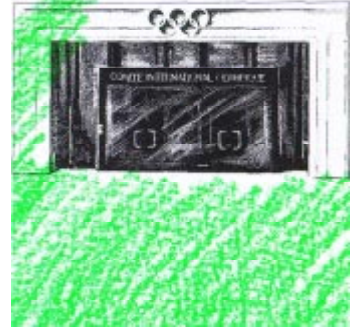
What is it that draws these tens of thousands of ordinary people, prepared to sacrifice weeks, months, years of their time to performing a service, anonymously for the most part, and which keeps them far away from the competition venues ? A need for new contacts, unexpected meetings, fruitful exchanges, the urge to discover, curiosity, unemployment ? All these, certainly and more. But what was it then, that motivated the paediatric surgeon who helped me out one evening in Calgary, and who gave up alternative evenings to serve the Games as a reserve driver? Nothing other, I am convinced, than the joy of taking part in a grand undertaking; to serve a cause no matter what the costs ; to be one of those who was involved.

I recently encountered a similar attitude amongst the people I was privileged to meet in Iceland during a study visit, the fruits of which will appear in a forthcoming issue of the *Olympic Message* devoted to the NOCs. Iceland, where the ground is lava, often inhospitable, a terribly isolated island within the confines of the Arctic Circle, whose shores are buffeted by storms and whose population (255,000 inhabi-

tants for the whole island), brought up the hard way and taught to fight, has developed, on the basis of a fierce individualism and in the face of adversity, a heightened perception of the common good, a sense of mutual help and solidarity. From this has come, in the field of sport, a voluntary commitment enabling the existence of a lively and efficient National Olympic Committee and athletes who devote their time and their own money. Take the example of the Icelandic men's handball team, crowned world champions in 1989, a scarcely believable performance if one is aware of the means enjoyed by their opponents. Thus the most apparently impossible dream can become a reality. This is the lesson we must learn from Calgary, Seoul and Iceland : If we discover in ourselves in our unity sufficient strength of enthusiasm to spread this to others, we shall be able to turn the Olympic dream into a beneficent reality.

In the area of all kinds of turbulence towards which we are heading, our contemporaries will give great credit to the Olympic adventure if they find a reason to believe and hope for a powerful cohesive factor on a world scale.

These are precious assets if we know how to use them in the general interest of the Olympic Movement, one of the great unifying forces of our time.



By Raymond Gafner
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