

PROEM

It is Porto Alegre, Brazil. It is the second WSF in the year 2002. It is humid; there is torrential rain and relentless sun. Thirty thousand activists meet, march, sing, dance, and make music — all for another world. Theresa Wolfwood goes from Victoria, Canada to Porto Alegre to experience this, and more.

It is Florence, Italy, in the same year. It is the European Social Forum. Working class representatives brush shoulders with NGO representatives from Scandinavia. Peace activists march down the streets.

Peter Waterman — teacher, researcher and commentator, travels from The Hague in the Netherlands to Italy, a shorter journey than Wolfwood. He searches, in vain, for a bad cup of espresso, stops at the Italian bookshop chain, Feltrinelli, and attends official panels. What he enjoys most is running into people from his past. He indulges in nostalgia.

Two meetings, different in scale, but with similar goals. Both events featuring dialogue, debate, other forms of art, music, theatre, banners, flags, and tee shirts with messages. Old activists meet new activists. Like a relay race — a chance to pass the baton from one generation to the next.

For Wolfwood, it is exciting, frustrating, frightening and fun. A work in progress.

For Waterman, it is a view from the margins. After the Forum he recalls encountering a Peruvian illegal immigrant in a soup kitchen line, just across the piazza from where the Forum is being held. Do their worlds cross, he wonders ? Will they ever cross ?

The Forums are a space, a meeting ground. Speeches are made, notes taken. Sitting, standing, on the run, there is excitement in the air. The pulse quickens. People experience a natural high. Chance encounters, fleeting glances, new friendships, and re-unions. Promises are made, addresses exchanged. Each one experiences the Forum differently and takes back memories.

Whether it is Porto Alegre or Florence, globalisation from below is happening. □



SECTION 2 diaries : the experience of the WSF