At the age of nineteen, I stopped my university studies in biology to marry. Six months later, I started work in the fashion business and stopped for family reasons six years later. After two years at home and seeing my younger sister become a dentist, I decided to return to the university and start studying again, notwithstanding two children and a husband.

I obtained my dental degree with grande distinction and started work in private practice. I was very involved in my profession. I became a member, councillor, and vice president of an association that organizes continuing education for dentists. I was also involved in defending the dental professional as the first woman president of a Belgian dental association, Chambres Syndicales Dentaires.

I became president of FDI (Fédération Dentaire Internationale) World Dental Federation in 2005 after nearly twenty years of service. I served my first year as Belgian national secretary in Washington in 1987. In the beginning, people thought that I was the secretary of the Belgian representative! From 1994 to 1997, I served as chair of the Individual Members Committee and the Forum of National Secretaries and was a member of the Committee of Ethics. In the FDI European Regional Organization, I was the founder and leader of the working group on women in dentistry and a member of the working group on social security in Europe.

I became a member of the FDI Council in 1997, the second woman to be nominated to that post. I served as a member of the Committee of Developing Countries from 1998 to 2001 and a member of the group strategy. I started Women Dentists Worldwide in 2001; this group published the Kuala Lumpur declaration. In the FDI Council, I led the governance task force from 2002 to 2004 and became president-elect in 2003. In 2005 I began serving as FDI president.

How do you become FDI president? Timing, and do what you have to do well. You can be married forty years. You can have balanced children. You can have four wonderful grandchildren. There’s no need to give up your family.

When I started out in FDI, I never saw myself as president, but I believed in FDI and worked my way up because I was prepared to take on responsibility. When the council decided to appoint me president of national secretaries, I accepted . . . but I did not ask for it. It is a matter of attitude.

My speech is not a feminist outcry, although it may appear as such. Because of our generation, we have evolved in a world essentially made of and by men. We are nonmales among males. So no vengeful or moaning feminism! A responsible attitude is necessary since we represent 52 percent of the dental profession. We must work together to attain solidarity.

So let’s develop this solidarity through reunions such as ADEA’s Third International Women’s Leadership Conference.