

SUMMERHILL SCHOOL'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY

We went to Russia by way of England so we could take part in Summerhill School's 70th anniversary celebration. We arrived a couple of days early, and school was still in session. There was a lot of activity in preparation for the end of term party, to which those Summerhill graduates who could be found were invited. Albert Lamb, a current part time staff member and consultant, was himself a student at Summerhill. Roland, his 12 year old son, is now the only American born Summerhill student. His mother, Janina Lamb, also went to Summerhill. Over a third of the students there now are from Japan. Albert Lamb has edited a new book of A.S. Neill's writings, which has been published in Europe.

While we were there we sat in on democratic meetings, set up an old ping pong table and gave some lessons, shot super VHS videos of all activities. We were not the only ones using a TV camera. Two people from Channel 4, a major TV network, were also doing a documentary and were slated to spend the next term doing so.

As "end or term" neared, old students began to show up. In the end, more former students came back than ever before, perhaps more than 50. In a meeting with them in the "Orange Peel Cafe", Zoe (Neill's daughter, who now directs the school) told the group that the students were afraid that the floor would collapse under their weight. I interviewed one 74 year old furniture designer who has been a student starting in 1928, and a surgeon who had been there until 1950, who said he had been inspired to become a doctor while at Summerhill. I also saw students who had just left the school last year (Summerhill students generally leave at 16). I had tried to convince some of them to come to the US to intern at alternative schools there, but the ones I met all seemed to be working already, although some of the older current students are interested (write to Casper, if you'd like).

After the meeting with the graduates, the party began in earnest, with various events in the main house, culminating with Ena Neil, now over 80, cutting the cake. The celebration went on through the night with a Punch and Judy show, country dancing, a Summerhill rock and roll band, etc.

I've edited a video of these events, including an interview of Henry, Neill's grandson, now 14, made by another Summerhill student. In the interview, Henry admits that he doesn't go to classes, but feels that he's emotionally ready for anything, and is "ready to start thinking about my career." He then goes through a list of about fifteen books that he's just read.

WE VISIT A "CORN CIRCLE" IN ENGLAND

Noah Shankin, a 15 year old former Blue Mountain School student from Virginia, visited his grandmother in England with his family last year, and we traveled to Stonehenge and Glastonberry. We decided then that it would be fun to see a real "corn circle", those strange, perfectly shaped geometric forms in wheat fields that are attributed by some to aliens trying to communicate with us. While at Summerhill we read an article in the paper about a corn circle that had just appeared at a farm in Clackton on Sea, which was on the way back to London. We called the scientist mentioned in the article, a man named Alan Watts. He gave us the name of the farmer, whom we called. He invited us to come visit and see the circles. We took the train to Clackton and a taxi to his house. His son then took us to the circle. It was a remarkable experience, even more so when we viewed the tape later on: When we came to the edge of the circle, some kind of electrical interference almost wiped out the screen! We were allowed to video and photograph the circle and a nearby triangle as much as we wanted. The wheat was very neatly put down in a perfect circle. They also told us that there had been a similar circle the year before. They had plowed in under and planted rape seed this year. But right where the circle had been, it grew half as fast. Later in the season, there was a perfect yellow circle of late rape flowers where the circle had been. Of course, we have a short video of the "corn circle", including the enigmatic electrical interference, if you'd like to see it.