

summerhill news

No. 23: December 2016



Welcome to the In-school edition of the Summerhill newsletter edited by several members of staff. We hope you will enjoy it and hopefully we will be able to do more like this in the future.

This summer we had two school inspections, both pilots that the ISI (Independent Schools Inspectors) were running for the new regulation inspections. Neither of them has published results as yet.

The first, in June, was a compliance inspection, which means that we had 240 boxes to tick in order to pass. The inspectors were pleasant people and worked hard to understand the workings of Summerhill and our different approach to education. It felt as though it went well and we sighed with relief!

The next one, this term, was a quality inspection in which they looked at the education the children receive. With only 48 hours' notice, it was a bit of a rush but we felt ready and the whole school, both staff and pupils, did a magnificent job of proudly showing off what Summerhill has to offer. They were looking at two main aspects – the pupils' achievement and the pupils' personal development. With this aim there were many chats with different age groups – something that we have not seen on the same level before.

All in all it was a positive experience (as positive as any inspection process can be!) and though we were all exhausted, we felt that we gave it our best shot and look forward with cautious optimism to the report when it comes.

It has been a good year all in all. We are slightly low on numbers but our intake is still busy enough to maintain a thriving community. We would prefer to have more but actually some areas are full so we probably shouldn't complain.

International Schools' Week, in the summer, brought schools from Sao Paulo, New York, Netherlands and Italy. It was really enjoyable and we are planning to do another one in 2017.

The 95th birthday reunion was a great success -full of pupils from a wide span of years – such fun to meet up and to see how everybody has developed in their lives.

That all looks so positive that I had better sign off before something awful happens!

Thank you all for your support and interest in this wonderful old place.

Zoë (Readhead Neill)

Hi Everyone.

For those who don't know me, I'm Henry Readhead, grandson of A.S.Neill. I was born in Leiston on the premises of Summerhill School in 1977 and attended Summerhill from the age of three to sixteen. I then returned home in 1999 for two years, to assist the school and family during the time of threat of closure by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education). I returned again in 2003 to start Summerhill Recording Studios and start teaching Music, Singing and Sound Engineering full time. In 2012, I stopped teaching to take on the role of Assistant Principal to support Zoe and Will in running Summerhill.

As part of my Assistant Principal role at Summerhill School, I have been covering External Affairs. Over the past four years I have travelled to many countries, by invitation, to share our knowledge and experiences of Neill's education and child rearing philosophies and to support in any way possible, other people starting up their own school projects. The variety of places I have been invited to is amazing, from a small commune in Italy to the global HR forum in South Korea.



It still astounds me how much influence A.S.Neill has had and continues to have internationally in all forms of education and child rearing. It is my pleasure to be involved in this valuable work.



This has been a great year regarding my travels. After a visit to Summerhill School in February by Yaakov Hecht and his wife Sheerly, I went out to Israel to visit The Democratic School of Hadera, which was the first democratic school in Israel. Yaakov Hecht started the school in 1987 and since then has been spearheading the movement of democratic education worldwide, including starting the IDEC (International Democratic Education

Conference) which is celebrating its 20th anniversary next year in its home town of Hadera.

I spent four days in Israel and visited two democratic schools including Hadera Democratic School and Givol. Sheerly organised a discussion forum about Summerhill for a group of parents from Hadera. We enjoyed a lovely evening of stories and it was interesting speaking to them about their experiences as parents from a democratic day school.



It was a real pleasure spending the days with Yaacov and learning about his other projects including Education Cities. There are over thirty democratic schools in Israel, all of which are state funded and all of which have been influenced by Yaacov and in turn Summerhill and A.S.Neill.

In June, I was invited to be part of a university course in Madrid, Spain, created to inspire young teachers and educationalists. The year-long course is planned in such a way that the participants meet a wide range of speakers from different educational backgrounds. The first half of the day I covered the fundamentals of A.S.Neill's philosophy and the day-to-day life of Summerhill. In the afternoon I set up a workshop for the audience to experience first-hand, what it is like to be part of a Summerhill meeting.



Also in June, Zoe and I were invited to speak at the IDEC@EUDEC conference in Finland. Unfortunately, Zoe was unable to attend due to ill-health. I spoke for half an hour and my subject was Boarding at Summerhill. As most Democratic Schools in the world are day schools, it was good to be able to offer some of our experiences as a boarding school and to show how much the children benefit from being in control of and responsible for every aspect of their daily lives.



The highlight of the year was being invited to speak at the first ever APDEC conference held at the Holistic School in Taiwan, which I attended at the end of July. This meant for the first time in thirteen years I would miss a Summerhill music event, but it was worth it. APDEC is the Asian Pacific Democratic Education Conference, which was organised by Phenix Hsieh and his team. Phenix is a former pupil of the Holistic School which is one of the very few democratic boarding schools in the world. The school was also greatly influenced by A.S.Neill and

Summerhill School. It was wonderful meeting Phenix and his team and they did a great job organising the week long, festival style event.

As it was the first ever APDEC conference, all the giants of democratic education attended, so we spent many a late night chewing the fat over our experiences and interests in education. I also met Peter Gray for the first time. Peter is a researcher of teaching and child development and a writer for the magazine Psychology Today. The roots of his work and perspectives on child rearing and learning resonated strongly with my own; it was a pleasure to share a platform with him.



To finish off the year, I was invited by Jordi Mateu to speak at CAIEV Associacio d'Educacio Viva held at the University Autonomous of Barcelona. The event was set up to further spread the word of alternative and democratic education in Spain, which has seen a big movement in the past ten years. Despite the presence of many restrictions to starting alternative schools, a number have sprouted up throughout the country.

Jordi also invited me to attend his school in Sant Pol de Mar for a day, where I led a workshop about Summerhill and met with a group of teachers and parents.

As for the year ahead, I already have three conferences in Japan, including APDEC 2017, and I also plan to attend IDEC 2017 in Israel. Following the success of my last visit, I have also been invited to rejoin the university course as a speaker once again in Madrid.

This aspect of my work is a real privilege and I'm looking forward to more invites. Keep them coming!

Henry Readhead

Countdown to Summerhill's 100th Birthday 2021

With 'Summerhill 100' within arm's reach we felt that it would be a good idea to use the Newsletter as a source of preparation for this milestone.

How could/should Summerhill mark the occasion?

Have you any ideas for a one off event OR ideas for a developing theme that could run across several months?

Please let us know your suggestions.

Let's all begin a time of reflection... What does Summerhill mean to you? How has it affected your life? How does it still impact on your thinking and attitudes?

We have decided to re-publish articles from previous Newsletters hoping that it might inspire Summerhillians to write about their own experience of their time at Summerhill. We begin our journey with Brian Anscombe's account from the Friends of Summerhill Newsletter No. 1, published in 1985.

It would be wonderful if others could add to our archive of remembrances. Any offerings can be sent to the school email address, for the attention of Stephen. We would also welcome any scanned photos, ideally with captions to give the images some context. Just ponder for a moment...what might appear to you to hold some significance, is likely to inspire others.

The school holds large quantities of archive materials: books, pamphlets, articles and photographs but it would be great to receive any personal accounts relating to Summerhill's early years and in particular information about Neill and how he impacted directly upon the lives of Summerhillians.

So it's over to you... we look forward to hearing from you.

Stephen

(Summerhill's History Teacher and Trust Member)

Article reprint from edition 1 of 'Friends of Summerhill' Summer 1986
Newsletter

Written by Brian Anscombe

As 'Friends of Summerhill' is launched, it occurs to me to present some reflections and views from the long perspective of an early pupil.

Sixty years ago this summer, aged 10, I joined the small group of children at Lyme Regis. I could not possibly foresee the profound effect this event, this turning in the road, was to have on my life.

Born early in the First World War, a second son, I was a troubled child. When I was little more than a year old, my mother, intelligent, neurotic, was displaced from her home and pushed from one lodging to another while my father was in France. Her much-loved first child Roger, about a year older, was evidently quite enough. With hindsight, I have no doubt at all that I was – to put it as kindly as possible – 'surplus to requirements'. The effect of all of this was a wound which never quite healed. It is not a question of blame (a misleading and highly emotive term) but of cause. Much credit was eventually due to my mother who despite her own emotional problems had the concern and wits to realise something was wrong, and ultimately to find Summerhill.

So I started at Lyme Regis – many years too late but infinitely better than not at all. I was very shy and almost completely lacking in self-confidence (to mention just the obvious). Perhaps I was considered a 'problem'; I do not know. An unfortunate tag this: of course it is not the child but the legacy of unhappiness unwittingly bequeathed to it by the parents that is the problem. Poor parents? Poor children!



It could scarcely be expected that Summerhill would simply wipe out my difficulties – which, as I discovered much later – stemmed from severe emotional insecurity. The school is no panacea; it is no surprise that Neil took a number of 'problems' in the early years. There were some kids, I know, in a far worse state than I was.

Even without a dramatic cure, Summerhill helped me enormously and in many ways. It was a gradual process: understanding and a measure of release coming after a long time. From the beginning it felt right. I am sure that subconsciously I was immediately aware of the approval always present in the school. This instinctive feeling, supported later by an intellectual and philosophical appraisal of Neill's principles, has not altered with the passing of time. I have never seen any reason to revise my belief in them. In my opinion, the fundamental rightness and truth of Summerhill's purpose will brook no change or modification.

I believe Neill succeeded in his aims. Although Summerhill must essentially be a small community, the benefit to the pupils, and its wider influence later on, cannot be insignificant. It must be worth repeating that the children are the future parents. If they grow up in freedom, unrepressed, unregimented, free-thinking, they and their own kids in turn will be happier, and able to cope with life in a difficult world. Instead of the prevalent negative and often neurotic vicious circle, there will be a positive, expanding one.

It is unlikely that I am a typical product of Summerhill – if there can be such a person. The later generations of pupils, the hundreds who have been there, may see it a little differently. Hopefully, the majority will not have had any significant problems to start with, and so were able to flourish without need for the therapy in its environment. Certainly, I for one, have much to thank Neill and Summerhill for: not least, considerable insight and understanding of myself – and equally important – other people. I think that is worth a great deal.

Some ex-pupils have criticised Neill, perhaps never having accepted his ideas which is anyone's privilege. Or they have been influenced by their non-Summerhillian partners; even the pressure of the rat-race, and so reneged. There is also the rather common desire to be different, to refute, challenge, or improve on the achievements of others. Although no person can be beyond criticism, you surely cannot improve on a truth. To recognise and understand it does not make anyone a blind follower or a disciple.

Having re-visited Summerhill many times at irregular intervals, I know that its purpose has endured. But the school does not just roll along by itself; it takes dedication and effort to keep it going the right way in the face of many difficulties, criticism, even hostility, officialdom and so on. Someone has to be at the helm who knows what it is all about: Neill, Mrs Lins, Ena and now Zoe.

Boards, governors and employed 'heads' will not do. We have seen what can happen to so-called 'progressive' schools run that way. One-time contemporary Dartington is probably a classic example. Even in the earlier, happier days of Bill Curry, it could never really be like Summerhill. But one other long-established and enlightened school that has stayed on course is Kilquhanity, still run by its founder John Aitkenhead – equally dedicated. I think it was always the nearest approach to Summerhill.

There are inevitably the critics of Summerhill who ask 'What about progress?' They are usually the planners, improvers and innovators. What do they mean? Better facilities – always wanted – can be provided if there are sufficient funds. But if they had to be told, the real progress, and the reward too, will be found in the children themselves.

Memories of Sneaking Out

There was once a birthday, most of the house snuck out, only for BO's and co to go around stealing bedding (the lesson learned, don't sneak out when everyone is doing it) But the most important lesson, don't sneak out when you have a house parent that will interrogate you when you are just going to the bathroom.

Bonus points if you knock on the woodwork windows while someone is still working in there!

Went out in a group on the night before the E.O.T party to hang around on the hockey field when I was in the cottage, when the beddies officers came, I was the first and only one to be caught...

A couple of us had made balaclavas out of old tights to put over our heads; the house corridor had our house parent waiting for kids to come out of their rooms. We opened our door & ran for our lives down the stairs through the dining room window & ran straight for the platform on the tree with three corners near the stables. We got up there safely but then out of nowhere three torch lights coming towards us from the direction of the theatre. We lie in silence & thought we were safe but carriage kid at the time Orson had pulled me down by my hair from the tree, put my face in a puddle & dragged me back to my room. Very eventful first sneak out!!

Being chased down the hockey field by a certain BO with an air pistol zig zagging and safety rolls to avoid being hit! Also finding ourselves in the kitchen store cupboard on a string of bed sheets....

The time we were naughty cottage kids sneaking out and hiding under the gram box until someone farted and gave us all away. The lights came on and it was run for your lives.



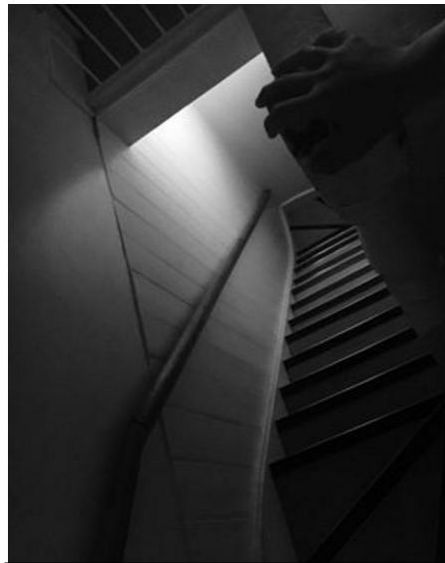
Henry Readhead

7 October · Leiston

Calling all Summerhillian's past and present!

I was having a chat with some Summerhill kids today about their amazing sneaking out experiences as house kids. Thought I'd bring it to this group to collect some stories from the different generations!

So.... Tell us your most memorable sneaking out story/stories and methods of not being caught by the Beddies Officers when you were a house kid!! xxx



Baiting BO's into the woods on a wild goose chase with only his lighter to find us

Once had the keys to the larder room off the TV room, handy for extra nibbles. Always double locked it when was in there with cohorts, best not name them. Once Ena tried to access while we were inside, probably in there for 3 good hours till we thought she had stopped waiting for us to come out.

Well there were so many it all runs together now...One time a group (of ahem...bad influences) I was hanging around with made a copy of the storeroom key during tea time duty...that night we nicked some cookies (correction biscuits) and breakfast cereal and a large tin of ravioli, we went out and made a fire to cook it and the darned thing exploded - sounded like a bomb. Nice physics lesson lol

We ran electricity wires out to a corrugated Hut on the far side of the hockey field where a large percentage of kids the Gang listened to radio Luxembourg the pirate station every week after bedtime for most of that term.

When I was in the cottage me and a bunch of people snuck out and were hiding up by the office against Zoe's office wall when we see this dark shadow sitting on the Class 2 step. We're wondering if it's a person or not, when we hear this deep laugh coming from the shadow and then we know we're fucked. We try to run in the other direction but are surrounded by carriage kids from all sides so we get into a big huddle and all at once charge to try to break through, kind of worked! Most of us got away but we all got fined anyway.

I remember my first EoT sneak out we all went to the hockey field and the carriage kids burst out and everyone scattered and I just hit the deck and watched everyone get caught and no one saw me even when they were like 5 feet away.

Me and three other kids were running around the grounds on a broom stick. The beddies offices gave up chasing us. We thought we can't get caught on a broom stick and we didn't, we were not even fined our breakfast. We were chased by Ena who was not amused!

A bunch of us sneaked out at E.O.T and were running around the school, being chased by carriages kids and beddies officers. Suddenly, you can see and hear Tertius and Hil on the carriage roof with bangers, throwing them at us while we're all on the carriage grass area near the San woods. Then a bunch of us see a banger land straight into house Philip's hood, he's screaming trying to get it out while everyone is running away from him. Most amazing memory of sneaking out, gold!

Music at Summerhill

Music at Summerhill has expanded over the last few years to become the biggest department in the school. It currently includes 1 full time member of staff and 5 part time staff teaching over 40 lessons per week, and additionally 6 sessions of open time. Lessons are individual or small groups and cover Guitar, Drums, Bass, Piano (Contemporary, Jazz and Classical), Singing, Composition and Theory. The lessons are student led: a student is free to just make sounds using the large collection of instruments, both electronic and acoustic, available in the studio and throughout the school. The school has a dozen guitars and basses, two drum kits, ukuleles, a violin, cello and double bass, three upright and one grand piano and multiple synthesisers and sound modules! Students can try out any or all of these as they wish and we have teachers who can help them advance on all. For those wishing to explore other instruments, saxophone and trumpet being recent examples, we hire in specialist teachers.

Students progress at their own pace, with the tutors there to guide them with lessons in technique, and to suggest new avenues to explore as they become more engaged with taking their learning further. Open sessions provide a space for students to try out anything they wish, be it trying out an instrument or making music using a computer. Open time is used to try out instruments, get extra help with areas covered in lessons, jam with other musicians, record tracks in the studio or just sit and chat about all aspects of music. There is a special open time for the youngest members of the community, 'Class 1 Music', which allows them a space to explore first steps in music however they wish without interruption!

The music block has a side room so students can practise or make noise whenever they want even if lessons are going on. In addition, the House music room, with the grand piano, is used at all hours of the day as a space to play or practise; the school laws protect this space as somewhere for music. There is also an extensive library of sheet music and learning resources in these two rooms.

The school features a well-equipped studio with access to a multitrack ProTools recording system, Apple Logic and everything needed to record a full band without compromise at a professional level. At times, bands visit the school and older students particularly interested in the engineering side of music take part in these real-world sessions alongside experienced members of staff.

For those older students wishing to formalise their music learning further, the school offers a host of nationally and internationally recognised qualifications. Traditional grades are offered from any of the main examining bodies, including the Trinity and ABRSM Classical/Traditional grades and the more contemporary Trinity Rock and Pop and RGT grades. We also offer the Rockscool Vocational qualifications, a course centred not around assessed levels of competence on an instrument or academic knowledge of the subject, but more focused on the process of developing skills of real use in the ever changing music industry. The Rockscool Vocational course is certified by the DfE as a Level 2 qualification. GCSE music is offered too when a particular set of learners are suited to the style and content of the course, and in recent years a number of students have made use of these qualifications to move on into further education in music.

Students use the skills they have acquired in public spaces in the school, in the form of regular gigs and events that are organised both by staff together with students and by students on their own. The Summer EOT concert is in its 13th year and regularly features

between 20 - 30 bands playing music in all styles, from all corners of the globe! Smaller events happen on a termly basis, from jazz nights in the cafe to mini arts festivals in the art room.

This year, Summerhill is putting on its first musical in several years, 'Grease', which includes a cast of around 15 and a band of 5 people, with ages ranging from 10 to 16. Scheduled for the summer half term, the rehearsals have so far covered the acting, singing and dancing for most of Act 1 and the kids and the staff alike have thrown themselves into what is quite a huge undertaking.

The music department's aim is to facilitate all music learning and development to any level required by the learners, and with this flexible approach we aim to feed the broader culture of music that exists in Summerhill, in the social times, the living areas and in students' own personal musical explorations. Always guided by one of the key points on our curriculum statement: to develop children's relationship with music into a positive outlet for their creativity, and by extension, their well-being!

Interviews with Summerhill pupils

Pauline & Tom

By Steve Fawdry



Introduction

Pauline, aged 17 from Germany has nine siblings, 5 of whom have been to Summerhill.

Tom, aged 16 from London has two brothers.

How long have you been at Summerhill?

P: 5 years, since age 12.

T: 5 years, since age 11.

Why did you come to Summerhill?

P: My three older siblings came to Summerhill so it seemed right and I wanted to find out what it was all about.

T: I always wanted to go. My dad worked here so I have always known about it. I came with him for reunions and after a brutal experience on an induction day for a secondary modern school I decided that I needed to be here instead.

How did it feel when you first started at Summerhill?

P: It was very hard as I didn't speak any English. I felt intimidated and clung to my sister but I learnt body language and then started picking up English.

T: I was scared shitless! It was also exciting and I quickly learnt how to be independent.

What makes Summerhill special?

P: Freedom to develop as an individual and no one judges you.

T: Having time to either express yourself or not. The school grounds are nice to play and chill out in. I like the Summerhill collective sense of humour.

What is your favourite Summerhill game?

P: I like kick the can and party games at half-term; in particular 'Musical Statues'.

T: Villains in the dark. Basically, you just turn the lights out and everyone beats each other up. Football and I like the idea of the Cold War Game.

How much poc (pocket money) do you get and what do you spend it on?

P: I should get £15 but decided £10 was all I needed. I mostly buy food, sometimes I go to the charity shop for clothes but I also save it for college life.

T: I get £15 which is a lot in a way. I spend it on food and useless tat and the occasional trip to the cinema.

When you leave Summerhill, what will you miss the most?

P: I'll miss the people, there's such a wide range of ages – it'll be like leaving a family behind.

T: I'll miss the people. You get to know everyone as a family. I'll miss watching little kids growing into bigger kids.

If you could change one Summerhill rule what would it be?

P: As an adult it can be annoying having to be back at a certain time. Two am would be better (not necessarily for partying) but just being able to go out at night.

T: Having to tell a house parent when you want to go out which I imagine is a safety rule for all schools. There is a law which says you can't climb trees when they're wet. I don't know why we need that – I'm capable of deciding this for myself.

If you could make one new rule, what would that rule be and why?

P: The oldest kids should be allowed to have an occasional drink with staff.

T: That you can't pester people for food because that gets on my fucking nerves.

What do you most look forward to in the school holidays?

P: I look forward to busyness and then seeing friends again.

T: After a while of being at home I look forward to going back to school where there's friends on tap.

What is the best kind of day at Summerhill?

P: After GCSEs a day with friends and laughter.

T: A sunny one with not many lessons. Two is the perfect amount in any day.

Is there anything you don't like about Summerhill?

P: There can be little privacy and personal info' gets out so quickly - it can be quite intrusive.

T: It's not easy to be alone.

Favourite meal at Summerhill?

P: Brunch.

T: Brunch (a good fry-up)

What is your most memorable meeting case so far?

P: After 3 years of not being brought up I took a grape from someone's dinner, got brought up, was given a strong warning to ask in future, and afterwards I was given a round of applause for finally being brought up!

T: I was accused of making noise in silent hour. I got very angry and in the end I didn't get fined. But everyone was really pissed off with me – they thought I'd got off with it.

Is there anything you feel you have added or given to Summerhill?

P: I'm making a dandelion in metal work with seeds flying off to symbolise people leaving and moving on. It will be put up outside.

T: I've done a lot of ombudsman cases in the last year – a lot of kids ask me to do them. I'm quite friendly with the little kids, perhaps they trust me?

What is the most important thing you have learnt at Summerhill?

P: To be confident. If you want something to happen you're the one that's going to make it happen.

T: I've learned when to follow advice, or not. How to live in a community and how to communicate with others.

What would you say was your biggest achievement, or greatest pleasure at Summerhill?

P: I did a big show of my art which showed my development.

T: Greatest pleasure. I really like the music room – it's my favourite place, along with spending time with my friends.

What will you be doing next when you leave? Home, college, job or what...?

P: I am going to college in Norwich to do A Levels; biology, psychology, art and German.

T: I'm going to music college in London to do a song writing and composition course which I'm really looking forward to. I'll be living at home – I'm not sure how it will be but it will be different!

Finally, is there anything you would like to add...your last word or thought about school?

P: I'm going to miss it!

T: You get out of Summerhill what you put in. The more you engage, the more you get out of it.

International Schools' Week 2016

Summerhill has always had visitors from all over the world, including children and teachers from other schools, but it was the enthusiasm and perseverance of our staff member Philipp Klaus, English teacher and Houseparent, that led to the creation of the International Schools' Week.

Philipp is a great outdoor enthusiast, organising camping and hiking, and with his desire to link with people internationally, he sought to organise a week for Summerhill to host children and teachers from around the world.

For some five years now, the school has hosted up to five schools, with small groups of children, for a week of camping. The idea was to respond to the numerous schools who wanted to visit or exchange, and offer them a week when the children can live as community members. In a small, private residential community with hard working staff, Philipp's charm and diplomacy helped to persuade members of staff that it was worth the extra work, hassle and disruption, to allow children to experience Summerhill's unique community. It is a legacy that has continued since he left Summerhill to work at New York's United Nations International School.

Philip's account

It did not take me very long to return to Summerhill for a visit after I had left to take up a teaching post in New York. To be exact, 8 months and 25 days. I did not return alone. In tow, I had eight pupils (members of the student council) from the United Nations International School (UNIS) in NYC. They were all nine or ten years old and none of them had ever attended, visited or heard of alternative schools before signing up for this trip. The occasion for visiting was the International Schools' Week with schools from Italy, the Netherlands and Brazil in attendance.

The first time I had mentioned the possibility of the trip to the students and explained a bit about Summerhill, one of the kids jumped up and said, "Does that mean I can just take my shirt off and do parkour?"

A few months later, and after completing countless forms, we arrived at the school gate and were greeted by an unusually shy bunch of Summerhillians that wanted to see the kids that I now spent my days with; these strangers from the Big Apple. As it turned out, it only took a few moments for some Shack kids to turn our efforts to unpack into a big rough and tumble welcome.



As the days progressed the kids became part of the community and I only now came to realize how much I had missed being part of it myself. It was strange to see these two worlds collide and my life in New York often seemed like more of a dream with Summerhill so real around me. The visceral reaction to be being back was powerful and I was filled with calm and warmth. I was home.

Time flew. The kids spent time in all the spaces of the school. They made weapons and pegs in the woodwork; concocted smoke bombs in science; had pillow fights in the Cafe (not allowed); made elderflower cordial; dissected a snake; sat and sang by the fire; played socks and capture the flag; froze at the beach; and swore. While all this was happening we were fully alive, not thinking too much and certainly not reflecting on the experiences. We were fully immersed in being there. Only later, back in NYC, did we sit together and talk about the experience. The following quotes come from a presentation the kids made to the school leadership team at UNIS.

“Each classroom of Summerhill reminded me of a bedroom or a house.”

“When they want to learn, they learn.”

“I was surprised that almost everybody knew all of the laws.”

“What surprised me at Summerhill was how much more adventurous than our school it is and kids learned less classroom subjects like math, grammar, reading, writing, etc., and more of the physical stuff like tree climbing, woodwork, etc.”

“They were all just regular kids choosing what to do.”

“The difference between UNIS kids and Summerhill kids is that most of the Summerhill kids are more disciplined than UNIS kids.”

“The kids at Summerhill were less crazy.”

“You will learn things like love and happiness which cannot be found in books.”



There is one particular memory that I want to share. A few nights in, one of the kids from my group came to my tent because he could not sleep, so we sat and talked for a while. They had been in their first Summerhill meeting that day and I asked what he had thought about it. He replied that it was ‘graceful’. I had never heard the meeting described as graceful yet it was such a fitting term. Now, when I think of the meetings, I think of them as well-choreographed dances. As graceful.

Democratic Education Outreach with Michael

Italian-Summerhill Partnership Blossoms

This year Summerhill has participated in several events involving their growing partners in Emilia Romagna, apart from the usual talks and workshops in Italy during September 2016 by Michael at the University and to co-ops and democratic schools. This relationship is over four years old.



Italian researchers meeting children and staff at George Greens School to learn about children's rights and participation in a large state school in east London. Summerhill is working with the school.

A week of research into democratic education was organised in July for thirteen Italian educationalists, teachers and the head of Education from Bologna University. They visited Summerhill, hosted by Michael in partnership with his Italian colleague Renzo Laporta, as well as other examples of children's rights in action, as part of celebrating the Dominies Log Centenary and New Ideals in Education.



Henry, with student Lasse, are interviewed by the group of Italian educationalists and teachers, in the Summerhill café.

They visited: Children's House – a freedom based east London state nursery school opened in 1923 by H.G.Wells; George Green's School – over one thousand children who are trying to make it a 'rights respecting school' and who are in partnership with Summerhill on a project looking at how the history of models of practice can affect student empowerment; Spotlight Centre – a youth creative arts centre based on children's rights; offices of the Children's Rights

Alliance of England to learn about the national politics of rights, (Summerhill has been an active member for over fifteen years); Little Bealings Primary School near to Woodbridge – a state primary school where all learning is based on drama; Professor Michael Fielding at

the Institute of Education – for a seminar on A.S.Neill’s favourite state school, St Georges-in-the-East; and three adventure playgrounds, as well as the largest city farm in Europe.

As part of this relationship Summerhill hosted the film-making family of Lucio, Anna and their daughter Gaia, who showed their first film ‘Unlearning’ about their escape from the rat race to explore alternative ways of living. In the school café a group gave their feedback to the film and then were interviewed and filmed by Lucio about their lives at Summerhill. Their new film is about the family sending their daughter to an Italian democratic day school, and trying to find out from different schools, teachers, politicians and others their advice on democratic education!

In April 2017 Michael, with a small group of Summerhill children will be taking part in a three day conference in Bologna on children’s rights, learning and play.



Lucio and Anna discuss their film ‘Unlearning’ after its showing in the café at Summerhill School.

School Council takes over Town Hall as part of UN Children's Day



Prof Michael Fielding describes A.S.Neill's favourite state school, St Georges-in-the-East (1945-55), the most democratic state school in the country, to school councillors in Tower Hamlets Town Hall.

The school council of George Green's School took over the debating chamber of Tower Hamlets town hall on November 18th interviewing the directly elected Mayor John Biggs, who presented a Children's Rights Handbook to each student. The morning started with an introduction from the organiser, Michael Newman, about A.S.Neill and the centenary of his first book 'A Dominie's Log', and Neill's favourite state school, St Georges-in-the-East. After Fairtrade refreshments there was a presentation about the way St Georges School was run by its headteacher Alex Bloom after World War II, by expert Prof Michael Fielding. The children took part in a workshop based on Fielding's research and discussing and comparing how their school is run with that of St Georges.

This was the launch of a project with George Green's School and the Town Hall. In January there will be a conference at the Town Hall of local primary school councils exploring Janus Korczak's democratic orphanage as part of Holocaust Memorial Day. The day will be run by children from George Green's who have been trained by Michael.

The aim of the ongoing work is to see how the history of the culture of liberating the child in schools, as seen in the New Ideals in Education Conferences, and then the New (International) Education Fellowship, with Neill and Summerhill as archetypal case studies, can inspire and empower children and teachers today. Next term George Greens students will be visiting Summerhill.

Southbank Children's Festival 'Why?'



The third festival celebrating children's rights organised by the Southbank Centre had a day for adults in October at which Michael represented Summerhill on a panel talking about how they have enabled young people to fulfil their potential whether creatively, through education, sport, business or in their local community. The other panellists were Vanessa Sanyauke, Founder of Girls Talk London; Ezdihar Abdulmula, a basketball player and coach; and Christine Bramwell, Founder of Youth Voice and Associate Producer, Rock the Mic.

Michael talked about the importance of culture being the expression of all members of society, and that schools like Summerhill are based on children expressing themselves through art forms and cultural ways that they enjoy and choose.

Summerhill Parents Lobby Preparation Meeting for World Forum for Democracy



Three parents from Summerhill Kim Wilson, Vladimiras Lekecinskas and Natalja Lekecinskiene and a staff member lobbied a meeting in the House of Commons that was preparing for the **2016 World Forum for Democracy**, whose focus was on schools and education. An A4 leaflet celebrating Summerhill and its work with educationalists and children on promoting democratic learning in state schools was put on every chair.

Kim Wilson in the House of Commons at a preparation meeting for the World Forum on Democracy.

Obituary

Hazel Powell (Knights as was) 26.03.1931 – 1.3.2016

It is with sadness that we write to tell you that, shortly after being diagnosed with intestinal cancer, Hazel Powell died at her daughter's home on 1st March.

Hazel knew she was ill and had contacted many people to say goodbye. We did not realise that it was going to be a matter of days rather than weeks and her health deteriorated very rapidly after the second weekend in February. Many of her family and friends had seen her in the last month of her life and she gained great comfort in the last few days from the masses of emails that were sent to her. We thank you all for the support you showed and the huge amount of help we were offered. The local doctors and NHS care services around here were amazing and ensured that the whole family were supported through the last days.

Hazel's parents were members of the Kibbo Kift, a movement based on woodcraft, ritual, handicraft and music. It is no surprise therefore that Hazel attended first the Forest School and then Summerhill School before training as a teacher. She met her husband to be (Graham, with whom she shared 59 years) through their mutual hobby of rock climbing. She joined the fledgling Forest School Camps in the early 1950s and brought her six children through the groups. She led Easter canoe camps and continued to run canoe training weekends into her 80s only missing last year's one to attend her elder brother's wedding.

Hazel found time for interests outside FSC. She was the treasurer of Hemel Hempstead Mencap for many years, chair and treasurer of horticultural societies and a WI member wherever she lived; latterly she joined several dance groups, besides hosting teas for the elderly... the list continues. Last year she laboured with the Tiddenfoot Waterside Park group in their hedge-laying project.

Hazel spent her last week with her family, travelling to Braziers Park for a conference and being interviewed by historians to preserve her childhood memories.



**SUMMERHILL
DEMOCRATICS**
your school, your way

Summerhill Democratics is the brainchild of Leonard Turton and Jason Preater. Based in Spain but with the capacity to work globally, Leonard and Jason developed Summerhill Democratics to provide a range of 'start up' consulting services to the growing number of people who would like to start their own school based on Summerhill School's democratic principles.

At the present time they are working with a school start-up in the United Arab Emirates and working to help introduce free democratic education to a progressive school in Islamabad, Pakistan.



Having both worked at Summerhill School as teachers and Education Managers, they were also involved in preparing the school for two successful OFSTED inspections. They continue to keep close links with Zoe and her children who now work at the school.

Follow the Summerhill Democratics blog on Facebook or at www.summerhilldemocratics.net, where you can also sign up for a monthly newsletter and leave a Voice Mail.

"This is a much needed project. There is a wide gap between what people WANT our kind of schools to be and the reality. It is so important that people with on-the-ground experience keep the knowledge of real Summerhill ideals alive. Jason and Leonard have that experience."

-Zoe Readhead, Principal of Summerhill