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COLORADO TRIP: THE NCACS CONFERENCE AND COLUMBINE, TOO

I got on the train at Penn Station in New York City on the way to the **National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools'** national conference in Evergreen, Colorado. In Albany I met up with the group from **Albany's Free School**. There were including nine students and three staff. They had raised \$4,000 for the trip with community dinners, raffles and other events. We stopped in Chicago to change trains. I was able to get the Sears Tower to let the kids go to the top of the tower for free.

When we arrived in Denver I left the group to see my niece, Jenifer Goldman, who is studying pre-veterinary medicine at Bel Rea Institute. When she was homeschooling with me she wrote **My Life As a Traveling Homeschooler** at age 11. She has been carrying a 4.0 average. We went to the Denver Zoo. It was fun going with Jenifer because she knew so much about it. When she explained things to me little crowds would gather around us. She'd eventually like to work with the big animals at a zoo.

Only when we went back to her house to set up for my weekly CRN radio show did we discover that as we were walking through the Zoo,

the Columbine massacre had taken place. All of Denver, as well as most of the rest of the nation, was in shock over this event.

I managed to reach Arnie Langberg, the founder of **Jefferson County Open School**. He came on my show to give his take on what had happened at Columbine High School. He said he believed that one of the biggest problems was the anonymity of students at big schools: "This couldn't happen at an alternative school because their small size encourages closeness between adults and children, and because the schools have conflict resolution strategies," explains Arnie (see transcript of the show in the **CHANGING SCHOOLS** section).

Ironically, by pre-arrangement, the students from the Free School group stayed overnight that very evening in the gym of the Jefferson County Open School (see following report by **Chris Mercogliano**). Security was so tight that they were locked in the building and had to call security any time they wanted to go outside.

We arrived at the conference in Evergreen, in the mountains just west of Denver, at the 8,000-foot level. It was warm and beautiful, but we heard in the weather forecast that it was going to snow. It seemed impossible to us at the time, but we did receive a foot-and-a-half of snow during the conference! The kids loved it, particularly those from California. About 15 schools came to the conference, mostly with students. Altogether there were about 200 participants from California, New Mexico, Virginia, Florida, Maine, Vermont, Washington, Colorado, Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Spain and Japan.

Alberto, a man from Spain who attended the conference with his wife and children, came with the group from California's Venice Community School. He made his first contacts to the US via e-mail through AERO. He said he wanted to start a school in Barcelona, Spain, and asked which schools he might visit and spend time with in the United States. He had first visited Albany's Free School, after which he had gone to the California school. The Japanese students came from four different schools, coordinated by a program that brings them to the US through Upattinas School in Pennsylvania.

There were many exciting workshops. Three special guests were Joseph Chilton Pearce, Rabbi Yehuda Fine and Joseph Schaefer. Pearce gave an all day workshop on new research into human learning. He said it has been discovered that sixty-five percent of the heart consists of neurons just like those found in the brain, which seem to coordinate a lot of the organs of the body, indicating another locus and type of intelligence. He also talked about the destructive effect television has on the learning process. His presentation will soon be available in its entirety on videotape from the NCACS. Rabbi Fine spoke movingly about the work he has done with runaways and "throwaways" in NYC.

On a student forum about stereotypes, prejudice and privilege, Jennifer, a Puerto Rican student from Antonia Pantoja High School in Chicago, had spoken eloquently about her own stereotypes of the white students at the conference. She said she was wrong to stereotype, and she apologized. A wonderful moment followed: A white girl in the audience admitted she had had the same kind of prejudice and that she felt like hugging Jennifer. With little encouragement, the girl in the audience did come to the front, and they

embraced. Later I did another radio show in which I interviewed Jennifer, the new NCACS directors and several others involved with the Coalition. Jennifer talked about what life is like as a minority student trying to find her own identity.

There were other major events that were a lot of fun, including a talent show, with students and teachers demonstrating their special abilities. I volunteered to be the auctioneer at the annual auction, which raised a record \$1,750. Also, at the annual Membership Meeting, we passed a resolution opposing the movement toward the standardization of curriculum (see entire document after Chris Mercogliano's article).

And while I did the radio show, one of my table tennis students, Alex Morgunov, ran the ping pong tournament for me. There were three divisions. Alex tied with Chris Mercogliano for the advanced championship.

After the conference we went to Denver, where the Free School again stayed overnight at the Jefferson County Open School.

One final, ironic footnote: At the Denver train station, one of the Clonlara School kids, dressed in a black trench coat and dark glasses, caused some of the people in the station to panic. They insisted that security search him for bombs and weapons. Security refused to search him, and we boarded the train.

The Teachings of Tragedy

**ByChris
Mercogliano** (www.chrismercogliano.com)

PHOTO

Chris Mercogliano in Albany

Chris Mercogliano was on the same train as Jerry Mintz, going to the NCACS Conference. He is the director of Albany's Free School, editor of The Journal of Family Life, and author of Making It Up As We Go Along, a portrait of the Free School's struggles and successes over the years. Look for Chris' new book, Rid-A-Him, a critical examination of the use (or rather, mis-use) of ritalin in the school system, to be published later this year.

Will we remember where we were the day the Littleton massacre went down, like those of us from a generation ago when JFK was shot? I hope so. Though it's only the latest in a string of school mass murders, we must make this tragedy the one that freezes time long enough for the information encrypted in the event to be decoded. We have got to get the message. Enough is enough.

So much has already been said and written about the tragedy. The Tom Brokaws and the *Times* and *Newsweek'* quickly

turned it into the Littleton Show. For days afterwards the Denver dailies featured entire special sections on the killers and their victims. But as the immediacy begins to fade, will the public discourse move beyond the hype, the hysteria, the scapegoating, the layers of denial into some deeper understanding that might help prevent another such disaster? If history is our guide, then there's little reason to be optimistic. How does one come to terms with the causes of such an abominable event?

There are so many areas to search for reasons and contributing factors: the psyches of the killers, their parents, the surrounding culture, the ready availability of high-powered weaponry, and always at the bottom of the list, it seems, the school. This is where my attention remains, not because I believe it is the school's fault that the blood of dozens was spilled upon its tiled floors, but because this is where no one wants to take that long, hard look. Education, you see, is our most sacred of sacred cows. The system is built upon a mountain of assumptions, notions that we don't even question any more such as compulsory attendance and learning, age segregation, rating and sorting students by performance—pitting one against another, punishment for non-compliance, exclusionary labeling for non-conformity, and a hierarchy of authority. The list could go on.

Even the students are buying into the prevailing mythology. This I discovered when I happened to catch a snippet of a talk show featuring a group of Columbine students. The subject was cliques, a very relevant topic since the killers had made it all too clear that revenge for their outcast status was one of their primary motives. Cliques, reflected each student commentator, are a natural ingredient of high school life. Everybody belongs to one.

I beg to differ. Cliques are a stress response, a symptom. When humans feel threatened, the most primitive portion of the brain (the reptilian brain) takes over. The reptilian brain concerns itself with survival, with defending its turf, with dominance over rival groups. Teenagers join cliques in school because their schools are hostile, high-pressure environments, places of overcrowded captivity, competition, judgment. Their motivation, rarely conscious, is security, and a sense of identity and belonging. Just like urban youth gangs. Cliques are anything but natural. Even if a hundred Frenchmen belong to them, it doesn't make it so.

I'LL NEVER FORGET WHERE I WAS WHEN the surreal, manic killing began. As fate would have it, I was only five miles up Wadsworth Boulevard on the outskirts of Denver, visiting the public high school in the adjacent suburban enclave known as Lakewood. We had just arrived, ten seventh and eighth grade students and three teachers from the **Albany Free School**. It was a cool late-April morning. High, wispy cirrus clouds signaled an approaching snow storm. A big one, they were saying. Our itinerary had us spending a day and a night at the **Jefferson County Open School**, a stopover on our way to the **National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools** conference being held about three thousand feet above Denver on the edge of the Continental Divide.

Just before lunch I went into the library to read over a friend's manuscript, while our kids were in the gym unwinding from the

thirty-six hour train ride. I was immediately puzzled by the number of school staff huddled around a TV set in the librarian's office. And there was a strange mood attached to the scurrying in and out, a concern so hushed that it seemed out of place even in a library. People had initially been so friendly. Now all of a sudden I seemed to be invisible. Finally, the librarian noticed me and came quietly over to the table where I was working and wondering what was going on. She diplomatically clued me in on the unfolding madness.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Not again.

As the initial media chaos slowly sorted itself out, it became clear that this was the worst ever. God help us if they ever come up with a Richter scale for school violence. By 2:00 PM the horrible news had whispered its way through Jefferson County Open. I watched teachers and students alike slide into a state of semi-shock. They all knew someone at **Columbine High**. And they must have all been thinking silently to themselves, "Could this have happened here?"

I FOUND MYSELF INWARDLY POSING THE VERY SAME question. An answer came quickly. No, I don't think the brutal attacks would have occurred at the Jefferson County Open School because it is a very different kind of school, a publicly-funded alternative founded in the early seventies on a very different set of principles. To begin with, JCOS is smaller (fewer than a thousand students) and it spans all twelve grades instead of just the usual three or four. It truly is an open space, architecturally and otherwise. While I was there I observed students strolling the halls without passes. They chatted informally with their teachers and called them by their first names. Many of them were working independently on projects, both academic and artistic. Grades didn't appear to be the prime motivator either. The students were enjoying what they were doing. And they clearly had a say in the life of the school; in fact, before the end of that awful day a senior was already busy organizing a student meeting to address the crisis at Columbine. This was her own idea. She wasn't going to get extra credit for it. Here was a spontaneous expression of ownership and responsibility—and caring.

By the way, I saw no evidence of cliques while I was there. Graduation from JCOS isn't based on the compilation of credits. Instead, students must successfully complete seven "passages," each designed to demonstrate the mastery of a skill that is integral to living a good life. Self-assessment counts as much as the teacher's. Above all, this genuine alternative to conventional schooling, which is a model based on centralized control and Skinnerian rewards and punishments, is a community of sorts. Not the euphemistic kind, like the "Italian community," or the "academic community," but a real community based on commonly held concerns. Faculty and students have a collaborative relationship. They meet together as a whole body once a week to discuss issues of relevance. This differs from most so-called "student councils," which include only a chosen few, are merely symbolic of democracy, and tend to deal in trivialities. The truth of the matter is that students in conventional high schools have no power whatsoever. And they know it.

One last, very important detail: every student at Jefferson County Open has a mentor, so that no one goes unnoticed. Each child is valued for his or her personhood. Contrast all of this with what **John Taylor Gatto** recently reported to me. Author of *Dumbing Us Down* and outspoken critic of the tyranny of compulsory education, he received several phone calls from Littleton residents in the aftermath of the tragedy. More than once he was told that students escaping the blood bath at Columbine were heard to have said when they reached safety, "We're only products there; that's all they care about." Funny, I don't remember reading that in Time magazine.

OF COURSE I CAN'T REALLY CLAIM with any authority that the massacre couldn't have occurred at Jefferson County Open. A member of the staff there shook her head from side to side when I shared this thought with her late in the day, saying, "There are a couple of students here that I worry about. They are angry and defiant a lot, and don't seem to care about anything."

"But," I responded, "you're aware of those kids. You and your colleagues are paying attention to them." This time she nodded affirmatively. "And besides," I continued, "there's an insufficient level of tension and animosity in your school to provoke such a monstrous act." Another nod.

I refuse to accept the idea that the Columbine killings were a random act, the isolated handiwork of sick individuals. The perpetrators' choice of setting in which to vent their murderous rage was thoroughly premeditated. This fact has been documented ad nauseam. They harbored deeply held grievances against their fellow students and the social climate of their school that had gone ignored for years. They left a trail of warnings that no one picked up on. God help us if we ever discover that such inhuman behavior just springs up overnight, out of nowhere. That is not a world I would want to inhabit, or raise children in.

No, I firmly believe that mass murder will never take place at Jefferson County Open School, or any school where relationships and interconnectedness are fostered, where the work is meaningful and cooperative, and where everyone feels they belong.

Here is my short-take on the Columbine murders: It's another case of "kid-on-kid" violence. Just as the killing of black males one by another in the nation's ghettos has been identified by some as "black on black"

violence, all of the school shootings are on a certain level examples of kids aiming (quite literally) their venom and frustration at each other, rather than at home, school and society where it rightfully belongs. So often the oppressed attack each other instead of joining forces against their oppressor.

WHAT ARE THE TEACHINGS OF THIS TRAGEDY? I ask the question because if we can learn enough from this one to prevent yet another,

then those young people will not have died for nothing. Consider the words of Marcy Musgrave, from a column she wrote for the May 2 edition of the Dallas Morning News. A junior at Texas A&M University, she proposes that her yet-to-be-named generation, which follows Generation X, be called Generation Why. Explains Marcy (formatting changed for this article):

After the massacre in Littleton, I realized that as a member of this generation that kills without remorse, I had a duty to challenge all of my elders to explain why they have allowed things to become so bad ...

- Why did most of you lie when you made the vow of 'til death do us part?

- Why did you fall victim to the notion that kids are just as well-off being raised by total strangers at a day care center than by their own mothers or fathers?

- Why is work more important than your own family?

- Why does the television do the most talking at family meals?

- Why is money regarded as more important than relationships?

- Why is "quality time" generally no longer than a five- to 10-minute conversation each day?

- Why do you try to make up for the lack of time you spend with us by giving us more and more material objects that we really don't need?

- Why haven't you lived moral lives that we could model our own after?

- Why do you allow us to spend unlimited amounts of time on the internet but still are shocked about our knowledge of how to build bombs?

- Why are you so afraid to tell us "no" sometimes?

- Why is it so hard for you to realize that school shootings, and other violent juvenile behavior, result from a lack of your attention more than anything else?

Rude awakenings like the Littleton massacre probably will continue until you begin to answer our questions and make the changes to put us, your kids, first. You might not think we are worth it, but I guarantee that Littleton will look like a drop in the bucket when a neglected Generation Why comes to power.

Tough insights from one so young. I am a parent of teenagers and I could feel the sting of every lash-like question. Why indeed. Perhaps Marcy was among the fortunate minority who was homeschooled or who attended schools that were on her side, so that her penetrating gaze passed over our institutions of education and the invisible ways in which they impact American youth. But mine won't because I work with children every day, many of them rejects and refugees of the system. And my eldest is just finishing her second year at our local public high school, which I suspect differs little from Columbine, except in the demographics of the students. I am one of the fortunate dads whose daughter doesn't just answer "Fine" when I ask her how things are going in school. She tells me how "stressed out" her teachers are. Only one or

two ever take the time to speak to her individually. Instead, everyone's mantra is, "You've got to hurry up and get ready for the state exams." It was my daughter's choice to go to our centralized, citywide high school. She wanted to be in a diverse setting with all different kinds of kids. And yet, despite her outgoing nature, in two years she hasn't made all that many new friends. There isn't any time or opportunity for socializing. They are kept interminably busy. The halls are crowded and under constant surveillance by hall monitors and cameras. The students are separated by rigid routine and endless competition. Nothing facilitates their getting together.

My daughter, an honor roll student, one of two sophomores in a class of over seven hundred and fifty to be nominated for a statewide award, is seriously considering quitting. She has my blessings. Inspired by Marcy Musgrave, I will leave you now to ponder my questions about schools:

- Why have we let our schools become warehouses for youthful energy, creativity and purpose—why have we so walled them off from the outside world?
- Why have we turned teachers into overwhelmed taskmasters, instead of enabling them to serve as mentors, guides and role models?
- Why have we allowed schools to become so hyped with standards that they pay no attention to the emotional well-being of our children?

•Why have we let them turn education into the regurgitation of homogenized data, rather than a search for knowledge based on experimentation and real experience?

•Why isn't learning a cooperative enterprise, and why aren't students included in the design and the maintenance of the system?

•And the corollary, why do the schools maintain internal status structures that ape the larger society and that fuel the drive to split off into separate, exclusive groups?

•Why do we accept the level of fear that surrounds the learning process?

•Why do we permit schools to corral our children into a state of sheep-like anonymity?

•Why are teenage expressions of boredom, anger and alienation only met with intensified management and control?

•Why do we go on believing that our schools just need minor tinkering, rather than a fundamental reevaluation and revisioning?

DO I THINK COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL caused the tragedy that occurred there? Or those two young men's parents? Absolutely not. This is no time for blaming. It's an occasion for deep reflection, for three- and four- and five-dimensional looks at the whole picture. For questions that don't receive fast, unilateral answers. As I consider one last time Marcy's challenge to parents and mine to schools, I think I detect a common denominator: attention. Isn't that the core of the message, that Generation Why is crying out for attention, and that the two most likely sources, home and school, are altogether too reluctant or preoccupied to provide it?

But, as Marcy warns, we'd better start paying attention soon.

(SEE MORE COLUMBINE COVERAGE IN *CHANGING SCHOOLS* SECTION)

**RESOLUTION ON NATIONAL STANDARDS PASSED BY THE
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COALITION OF ALTERNATIVE
COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS, 4/23/99**

WHEREAS: We represent alternative educators who are concerned that the imposition of federal and state standards has had a negative impact on our freedom and ability to effectively educate our children.

Whereas: Alternative education has been proven to work by every measure, and we do not want this external standardization imposed on us.

Whereas: Further we are concerned that the impact of standardization on all students is demeaning to human dignity, creates winners and losers, and takes away self-respect. Children and schools are turned into numbers and, moreover, standardization effectively destroys equal opportunity in schools.

Whereas: Our educational methods and outcomes are different from those of conventional schools. we believe in a learner-centered approach to education, empowering each student to learn, and to take responsibility for his or her own education. We measure the effectiveness of our schools by different standards.

BE IT RESOLVED: We call on other parents, students, teachers and organizations to join us in promoting real learning and opposing standardization.

Summerhill Attacked Again
We received the following distressing letter
from Zoe Readhead, Head of Summerhill School. This will undoubtable make the
International Democratic Education Conference at Summerhill, July 23-26, all
that more crucial. Contact the AERO office for more info, or e mail Zoe directly
at Zoe_Readhead@compuserve.com

Dear All,

We have now received our report from the DFEE (Ed: Government Education Department). It is appalling! Much worse than we thought. The summary which will be sent to the press (on 27th May) has been written very clearly to smear the school's image in the eyes of the media and the public. They raise points in such a way as to lead the reader to wonder if the children are safe in their beds at night!

This is all good stuff for the tabloid newspapers -
and, need I say,
untrue!

The final paragraph says: "The school fails to meet
the requirements under the Education Act 1996 in the following respects: the
instruction is not efficient or suitable; the welfare of boarders is not
adequately safeguarded and promoted; and the school does not provide suitable
accommodation".

Pretty much everything we say and everything we do
really!

What worries me about this whole thing is that not
only are they clearly hell-bent on closing the school, they are also trying hard
to discredit it in the public eye. I think it will be very hard for our friends
to stand up and support us when such a damning report has implied as many
failings as this one has- they even suggest that the school has lost its way so
that supporters who admired Neill in the past will consider it changed and
therefor no longer worth supporting.

Our solicitor has advised a campaign of support
among our friends and ex-pupils. Any help will be valuable.

I will keep you all in touch (isn't e-mail
wonderful?)

Love,

Zoe

NOTE FROM DAVID GRIBBLE, FOUNDER OF SANDS SCHOOL

kca48@dial.pipex.com

The address of the Secretary of State for Education,
who is the man ultimately responsible for sending the official notice to
Summerhill School, is The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, Sanctuary Buildings, Great
Smith Street, Westminster, London SW1P 3BT, email dfee.ministers@dfee.gov.uk

There have been a lot of pro-Summerhill articles in
the press, which have been followed up by vigorous correspondence - six letters
in The Guardian this morning, all pro-Summerhill.

I have not consulted Zoe about this yet, but it
seems to me that writing to David Blunkett to express personal views cannot do
any harm.

(FOR MORE ON THE SUMMERHILL CRISIS, SEE

CHANGING SCHOOLSSECTION)

**STUDENT JAILED IN PROTEST AGAINST STANDARDIZED
TEST**

Ed note: Massachusetts has instituted a test to be given in 10th grade to all students. Those who fail are taken out of the academic, college-bound track and cannot receive an academic diploma.

By **John Spritzler**, a Boston parent and New

Democracy editor: My 7th grade son and I attended a meeting in Danvers, MA, with four 10th graders who refused to take the MCAS high-stakes test. At the meeting were Eva and her mother Lise from Newton; Melissa and her father Ralph from Danvers; Alex and his father Eugene from Danvers, Justine, a student from Danvers, and Janice, who is the mother of Curt, another Danvers 10th grader who also refused to take the MCAS. Also at the meeting was Andy, a retired teacher who is now running for Danvers School Committee.

Before the MCAS was given, 60 Danvers students signed a petition against it and many of them refused to do a pre-test registration. Curt, Justine, Melissa, and Alex were all suspended for three days and told they would be suspended three days more each time they continued not taking the exam, which is scheduled for continuing administration in the near future.

Curt, unlike the others, was suspended separately at a different time and place. Immediately, rumors began that he had been expelled for earlier threatening violence like Littleton. Janice, Curt's mother, was called by a policeman who yelled and screamed at her. Janice brought Curt into the police station to talk to them and the policeman said they knew Curt had threatened violence and they refused to believe anything Curt said. That night, the police came to Curt's home, told Janice they had a warrant (which they never showed her), barged into the house to search for Curt (accusing Janice of hiding him), then they handcuffed him and took him to a jail cell. Bail was set at \$10,000 cash, which they couldn't raise. Curt was sent to a Lawrence Juvenile detention home where he spent the night with youths incarcerated for drugs.

The next day, in the Salem courthouse, the Judge heard the evidence and said the offense Curt was accused of was a felony, but that there was no supporting evidence and that she (the judge) questioned the entire basis of the arrest warrant. Curt was released, but the prosecutor got permission to "try again" (I don't understand the legalism) and that will happen at a future court date. By charging Curt with being a "Littleton type bomber"

the authorities are apparently trying to stigmatize students who resist the MCAS test as being dangerously violent.

Meanwhile, in Newton North High, Eva refused to take the MCAS because she thought it was unethical to do so. Her mother, Lise, wrote to the Principal that she supported her daughter in acting on her conscience and she was sure the school would likewise support children acting on their conscience. The Principal tried to convince Eva to take the test, but has not done anything punitive to Eva so far. Eva told me that while she was the only person in her school to refuse to take the test, many others protested it by answering the test questions that called for an essay with an explanation of why they opposed the test.

Since the meeting, the students and parents went to the school and confronted the Superintendent, principal and other authorities.

Early on, the authorities said the students should leave their parents and go to their classes, "so their education wouldn't be harmed." Everybody thought that was the height of hypocrisy, coming from the same people who suspended the students.

The State Dept. of Education's answer to Lise's question as to whether or not the MCAS had any validation studies or reports was "The Department has no (MCAS validation) studies or reports." Lise is working on a press release charging that the MCAS is a violation of the human rights of children to not be forced to participate in human experimentation, since there has been no "Informed Parental Consent."

It is interesting that students are starting to resist the MCAS even though the high stakes (no graduation if you fail the 10th grade MCAS) don't kick in for two years. The resistance is fueled by outrage at the harm the test will do to others, not to themselves. The authorities are more and more having to rely on pure intimidation to control people. Teachers, and even principals and superintendents, have opposed the tests privately, but fear being fired if they do so publicly. Teachers, like those in Danvers, oppose the tests, but their union, the Mass. Teachers Assoc., has radio ads endorsing the Education Reform Act that mandates the tests. With nothing to back them up except the strength of their convictions and their solidarity with each other and their parents, these kids are taking on the entire corporate elite of Massachusetts. The near hysterical reaction of the Danvers authorities indicates the elite are extremely worried. I am very optimistic about the growth of this movement. A legal defense fund for the students has been set up at: Curtis Doble Defense Fund, c/o John Spritzler, P.O. Box 427, Boston, MA 02130.

SKOLE IS NOW PATHS OF LEARNING by Ron Miller

Ed note:

Paths of Learning, a new magazine featuring educational options for families and communities, launched its first issue in June. **Paths of Learning** is the successor to **SKOLE: The Journal of Alternative Education**, which published its final issue earlier in the year. The new magazine is published by **The Foundation for Educational Renewal**, a nonprofit organization set up by **Ron Miller**

Paths of Learning is edited by **Richard Prystowsky**, a community college English professor and homeschooling parent. Assistant editors and advisory board members include people who have been active in various alternative education networks, including **Jerry Mintz** of **AERO**, **Mary Leue** (founder of **SKOLE**), **Nat Needle**, **Linda Dobson**, **Pat Farenga**, **Joe Nathan**, **Sandy Hurst**, **Dave Lehman**, and others.

Paths of Learning aims to bring alternative and progressive education ideas to the public at large. Each issue will contain articles by well known writers in the field and people describing their first hand experiences in alternative educational settings, along with interviews (**Joseph Chilton Pearce**, **Jean Liedloff**, **Grace Llewellyn** and possibly **Mr. Rogers** and **Jesse Jackson**) and a comprehensive listing

of resources. The magazine will be published three times a year at a subscription rate of \$19.95.

For a free sample issue, call (800) 639-4122, visit the Great Ideas in Education website at www.great-ideas.org, or write to P.O. Box 328, Brandon, Vermont, 05733-0328.

Mail and Communications

Allen Graubard, Allen_Graubard@uml.edu: You probably know my name from old free school days 30 years ago. I helped do the **New Schools Exchange Newsletter** when it started in Santa Barbara and I was starting the Santa Barbara Community School on my year leave from the philosophy department at MIT. Then I quit MIT and did radical school reform things, moved out to Berkeley, did different things (public health, among others). I was acquisitions editor at University of California Press and co-wrote a book called **Saving Remnants: Feeling Jewish in America**. Then I went back full time to education, and worked in various capacities for Oakland public schools. I moved back to Cambridge, and now I have this great job at Umass Lowell, as assistant to the provost for regional educational innovation, starting small school alternative programs first at Lowell High--3400 students, 40 percent Cambodian -- I send out material to all the high schools in the region and try to be the Johnny Appleseed of small school/progressive perspective programs at these depressing places. I was at MIT to see the student run High School Studies program, ran into Josh Shain, who gave me a copy of **Aero-Gramme**, so I could see how you've kept the faith. Brought back free school days memories, to read the material there. So, that was how I came to log in. I will keep checking to see how the free school spirit keeps up in its odd places. I'm amazed that you've kept this going all these years. Best wishes, (The book I'm working on now is called **Why High Schools Never Change: Forty Years of Reform**).

Robyn M. Vogel, rmvogel@mediaone.net: Hi Jerry - I just went to your site and was so happy to know that it exists! Wow. I live in Boston, have a 13 mos. old and am in a Counseling/Expressive Therapy graduate program and Lesley College. I have been exploring Waldorf, SVS and learning about a few Charter Schools in this area. In the school year 2000-2001, I will do an internship in a school and hope to find one in an alternative school. I am glad to know that you/your site will be a helpful resource. Thanks!

Claudia L'Amoreaux, <http://www.haven.net>: I have been tuned into **AERO-gramme** since my daughter, now 20, was a young child. It is great to see your work thriving. I have always admired the international scale of your vision--especially your work in Russia. A friend gave me the recent **Education Revolution** issue (winter 99). I have not yet caught your radio program-- I am looking forward to it. I am writing to let you know about an alternative program I am starting, designed with self-directed learners and alternative educators in mind. I have been deeply involved in alternative education since 1973, and for the last several years, I have been designing online learning and discovery environments. The global scale of the web caught my attention early on and drew me in to become an architect of cyberspace. Haven is a web-based resource center with a special focus on education. On June 14th, we are beginning an apprenticeship program that I'd

like to let the AERO community know about. Also, I'd love to interview you about your visions of 21st century education for the Glimpse (<http://www.haven.net/edge/glimpse.htm>) section of Haven. I hope you'll have the time to give Haven a visit. Let me know if you have any questions or feedback. I'd welcome your thoughts. I look forward to hearing from you. Best wishes.

Haven is a web-based center for global studies based on personal inquiry, dialogue, collaboration and inspired action and service. On June 14, 1999 we are beginning an apprenticeship program for young people and interested adults who would like to experience a deeper level of involvement in the Haven global studies center. We are inviting 10 young people (ages 14-21) to participate in the Haven Apprenticeship Path and 5 adults to participate in the Edge-ucator's Path (minimum 5 months each). We are seeking apprentices who are self-directed and computer savvy. Unschoolers and homeschoolers will find it especially interesting. For a full description of the Haven Apprenticeship Path, see <http://www.haven.net/edge/a-path.htm>. For a full description of the Edge-ucator's Path, see <http://www.haven.net/edge/e-path.htm>. Please email us for more information (cl@haven.net) and explore Haven (<http://www.haven.net>). We welcome and appreciate your participation.

On April 12 of this year, Schools Online, I*Earn and the World Links for Development program of the World Bank Institute have formed a strategic alliance to provide a comprehensive educational technology solution to developing countries. The partnership will be called the **Alliance for Global Learning** (AGL). The Alliance will provide the necessary technology, teacher training and support for collaborative educational projects. It aims to enhance teaching and learning, promote equal access to communication and information technologies in the developing world and foster global citizenship and understanding. Funding for the program will be provided through joint fundraising activities. The Alliance is seeking support of this effort from foundations, corporations, international agencies, and individuals. For more information, visit <http://www.global-learning.org>.

It Is Time is a project committed to the concept that exchanges between people of different cultural, economic, or racial backgrounds can lead to better understanding, less prejudice, significant personal growth, improved quality of life, and many other positive effects for both the individuals and groups involved. The vehicle for these exchanges is schools. Two schools are selected which are geographically close to each other, but whose students are from different backgrounds; groups from each school form a partnership with the other; components of the intercultural exchange partnership program are implemented. To find out more, contact PO Box 931, Cathedral Park Station, New York, NY 10025. Tel: 718-882-5258. Email: awiagina@mindspring.com.

Postcard from **John Taylor Gatto**: "Malaysia, 28 February, 1999. Dear Jerry, Thinking of you on the other side of the world where I'm trying to convince the Malaysians not to be Americans. I have this horrible premonition not to be in New York City as the millennium changes -- I mean, if you had one of the migratory Russian nukes, where would you blow it off, and when. Be good, be strong. Love, John." Hmm, we'll be sure to steer clear of Times Square this New Year's Eve (and the next, just to be sure)! Thanks, John.

You may remember in our last issue we mentioned the tragic death of **Greg Packan**, a youth advocate and founder of Children's Legal Service in Vermont. **Dr. George Brown** sent us a note that the video

of the memorial ceremony had influenced **Vermont Law School** to award Greg the **Vermont Inspiration Award** for "that member of the Vermont legal community whose dedication to the common good most inspires confidence in the students of Vermont Law School that an individual's ideals can shape the future of law and society." We have a few copies left of the video at the AERO office.

We appreciate **Deborah Crippen's** note, thanking us for all we are doing. She tells us she is still in school for alternative architecture, but hopes to some day open a school. Good luck, Deborah, we know you can do it!

Melissa Trent sent us a note, thanking us for introducing her to the book, ***Making It Up as We Go Along***, by

Chris Mercogliano of Albany's **Free School**, which she says has changed her whole approach to parenting. (This book can be ordered through AERO).

Drop out is a magazine which feature writing by students. For example the latest issue has an article by a student who successfully thwarted public schools attempts to stop him from wearing a T shirt criticising his school, citing his right to free speech. \$1 a copy. 1114 Twenty-first St., Sacramento, CA 95814. 914 441 5526. dropout@phayze.com.

The ***New York Times Education Life***

(Jan. 3, 1999) featured an article by **Ellen Pall** called "Video Verite," which describes a non-profit program in New York City that trains high school students in the art of video making. **The Educational Video Center** is located in the **School for the Physical City**, an alternative middle/high school; it accepts 25 at-risk students referred by counselors each semester. Founder **Steven Goodman** states that "video documentary enables students to bear witness to their social conditions and look for solutions. It empowers kids to see themselves in context, to communicate to others how that feels. Working together democratically [making a tape], they learn a powerful way to learn."

The center employs a holistic approach and is "committed to keep the focus on learning; instruction is given, but once the students are out in the field, they must solve problems on their own. Mistakes are considered intrinsic to learning, and the goal is the journey, not the end result." *NY Times Education Life*, 229 W. 43rd St., New York, NY 10036.

The **National Association of Therapeutic Schools**

and Programs has had an organizational meeting in Albuquerque, NM last January. . About 100 were present, according to **Lon Woodbury**, consultant, as reported in his ***Woodbury Reports***. These are alternative schools and programs working with children with behavioral/emotional problems. It grew out of a meeting of the **Independent Educational Consultants Association**. 208 267 5550, www.strugglingteens.com

Selections from articles sent by **John Loflin**

(thank you, John): "The Giants Who Almost Slipped By" by James Patterson: Walt Disney, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Edison were all failures in school, labeled and dismissed. "If Albert Einstein were living in Chicago today, he would have been placed in severe special education," said Judson Hixon, educational psychologist and behavioral consultant. "You can't build on knowledge the kids don't have. We start by viewing them with a negative expectation. It causes them to think of themselves as a deficit and causes us to think of them as non-achievers." Hixon also believes that IQ is not something you can use to measure intelligence and that ADHD exists but that "most kids diagnosed with ADHD don't have it. They are inattentive because they don't learn best in the ways that school lessons are being taught, but giving psychotropic drugs such as Ritalin to kids who need behavior counseling tends to depress them even further. Thus, more behavior problems."

"Over half of Indianapolis Public School students need some kind of alternative education choice, whether it's being able to attend school later in the day because of having worked until after midnight the night before, help with diffusing conflicts in their lives, or just learning to believe in themselves." Wanda Wallace Riesz, Director of Alternative Education, IPS.

Introduction to Alternative Schooling

by Bill J. Johnston and Karen S. Wetherill: "Four observed characteristics of schooling: 'First, the vehicle for teaching and learning is the total group. Second, the teacher is the strategic, pivotal figure in the group. Third, the norms governing the group derive primarily from what is required to maintain the teacher's strategic role. Fourth, the emotional tone is neither harsh and punitive nor warm and joyful; it might be described as emotionally flat.' When it is found that some students don't respond well to this one-size fits all mold, the initial response is to ask "What is wrong with those kids?" and then attempt to induce conformity, first through normative appeals, and later if necessary, by coercion. Within this framework, alternative schooling becomes little more than a euphemism to describe places of detention for the maladaptive and seditious." The author goes on to describe several types of alternative schools and evaluation of those types.

Why Alternative Education Works by

Dora A. De La Rosa: "One educator, Roland S. Barth, pinpoints the reason (for discouraged learners) quite accurately: The major factor in students' lives that leads to depression, dropping out, drugs, jail, and suicide appears to be the *school experience*: ability groups, grade retention, college pressures, working alone, denial of strengths and focus on weaknesses, learning that is information-rich and experience-poor, and an irrelevant curriculum that students must endure and frequently ignore."

The Center for Appropriate Transport works

with the Oregon Department of Education and local school districts to provide hands-on technical training for public school students, homeschoolers, part-time and special needs students. Their educational programs incorporate students in ongoing businesses which emphasize "sustainability, community involvement, fiscal responsibility, and a cooperative work environment." Programs offered for students aged from 12 to 18 include bicycle mechanics, photography, and computer-aided design. The program was the subject of an article by **Jan VanderTuin** entitled "Youth in the World of Learning," published in

Talking Leaves magazine, Winter 1999. Lost Valley Educational Center, 81868 Lost Valley Lane, Dexter, OR 97431.

Public Alternatives

(see additional items in **CHANGING SCHOOLS** section)

Larry Sheehy informs us that after 27 years **Mariposa School**, the last remaining independent alternative school in Mendocino County, California has now closed its doors. The school's facilities will be leased starting next fall to the new **Woodlands Charter School**. As Larry pointed out, the board hired Jerry Mintz as a consultant to help find creative ways to save the independent school, and although many good proposals were generated, the "energy just wasn't there to continue." The non-profit Mariposa Institute will explore the possibility of creating an organization that will promote progressive education in some way after a Mariposa reunion of alumni this Summer.

Blue Mountain School in Cottage Grove, Oregon, is a publicly funded, private alternative school which opened last September. Modeled after **Sudbury Valley School** in Massachusetts, curriculum is student directed, governance is by democracy, and students are given a great deal of freedom and responsibility. Jeff Wright explains in his article about the school in the *Register-Guard* that homeschoolers adapt more quickly to life at the school than do students from public schools because they are accustomed to self-directed learning and setting goals for themselves. Oregon has no charter law; it does, however, have an alternative school law that funds private schools that agree to administer state assessment tests. Under the alternative school law, teachers are not required to be certified; if a charter law is passed, they may have to be. Oregon has over 400 alternative schools, most of which are part of school districts. Over 100 of them are publicly funded private schools which provide services for at-risk or special needs kids. Organizers of Blue Mountain found a way to use the law to establish a completely different kind of school. There are no teachers, no principal, no tests, and no grades. Kids do have to sign in each day and everyone takes a turn serving on the Judicial Committee. Otherwise, students are free to discover and pursue their true interests. Email: blumtn@cco.net. Website: www.registerguard.com.

Joe Nathan's latest book, **Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity for American Education**, is now available in paperback. The book traces the origins and growth of charter schools from 1991 when the first charter legislation was passed in Minnesota through 1998. It describes the many positive ways that charter schools are changing the public school system. For people interested in creating a charter school, a section explaining just how to do that includes chapters on getting started, building support, and staying business. Appendices list current laws by state, resources for assistance, and a model charter school law. The book is available from Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome St., Fifth Floor, San Francisco, CA 94104-1342. Tel: 415-433-1740. Fax: 415-433-0499.

Speaking of **Joe Nathan**, we have a copy of his congressional testimony against the practices of the NCAA, which he deemed discriminatory against student athletes. According to ***Fairtest Examiner***, a federal judge in Philadelphia agreed and "has struck down the NCAA test score-based initial eligibility rule, Proposition 16, as racially discriminatory and not educationally necessary."

PHOTO

Joe Nathan at NY Charter School meeting

My name is **Marshall Lochridge** and I work at **Main Street Alternative High School** in Louisville, OH. I am searching for other alternative high school programs with which we could network. Specifically, I am interested in establishing a dialogue about what works and doesn't work at your school. If you have any information, policies and procedures, or anything else, such as student handbooks, that you would be willing to share I would love to receive it. Contact me at the above e-mail address or at 330-875-32676 ext.362.

A new magazine, which has been brought to our attention, is called ***Color Lines***. The latest issue contains articles on the sovereignty movement in Hawaii, the Milwaukee school voucher program, domestic violence in communities of color, and more. The magazine is available from Color Lines Applied Research Center, 4096 Piedmont Ave. # 319, Oakland, CA 94611-5221.

The 1998-1999 academic year brought several innovations to the **Endicott College Master of Education Online Program**. One of those innovations has been connecting to the Montessori education community and offering many programs for Montessori teachers. They are also offering online courses for graduate credit. Information is available on their website at www.tmn.com/ties. The Institute for Educational Studies, Endicott College, Beverly, MA 01915. Tel: 800-386-7725.

An 18-month old alternative public school program in Florida, **Eagle Academy**, has had limited success early on but is now showing signs of improvement as officials learn from their mistakes. Mike Clary described the boot-camp type program, voluntary for at-risk boys aged 13 to 16, in the February 19 issue of the ***Los Angeles Times***. Founder Robert Neumann, a former teacher and FBI agent, felt that "one of the ingredients missing from boot camps for adjudicated juveniles was that it's not voluntary. Those camps might work, but you had to commit a crime to get in." After a rocky first year, the program now includes more parental involvement and peer counseling. **Jerry Mintz** was cited, suggesting that the reason the program may work is because of small class size and individualized attention, in spite of segregating and labeling kids as problems.

SAT coaching programs produce limited results, according to two studies by the Educational Testing Service and the College Board. This contrasts with the results of over a dozen independent studies, which found that test preparation programs produced greatly increased test scores. ***FairTest Examiner*** (Winter, 98-99) suggests that the reason for the discrepancy is because the ETS-College Board studies were simply surveys sent out to students rather than a controlled experiment conducted by neutral parties. **National Center for Fair & Open Testing**, 342 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02139-1802. Tel: 617-864-4810.

Pam Autry, in an article in the *Public*

School Montessorian (Spring 1999), wrote an article called "In Baton Rouge, When Standardized Tests Loomed, the Montessori Vision Was Set Aside." The author describes the conflicts and disruption to "the flow of learning" Montessori teachers face when having to prepare students for annual tests each March. The conundrum is that in order to "succeed" on the tests, they must stifle "the creative powers of our children for one full month and we cannot know the effects" on the children such a "break with their faith with us" will have. After the tests are done, the learning journey begins once again. **Jola Publications**, 2933 N. 2nd St., Minneapolis, MN 55411.

HOME EDUCATION NEWS

Gene V Glass, Editor, <http://epaa.asu.edu>:

The Education Policy Analysis Archives is an electronic scholarly peer-reviewed journal published only on the Internet. EPAA has just published Volume 7 Number 8, "Scholastic Achievement and Demographic Characteristics of Home School Students in 1998" by **Lawrence M. Rudner** of ERIC for Assessment and Evaluation and the Univ. of Maryland. An abstract follows: This report presents the results of the largest survey and testing program for students in home schools to date. In Spring 1998, 20,760 K-12 home school students in 11,930 families were administered either the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) or the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP), depending on their current grade. Major findings include: the test scores of this group of home school students are exceptionally high--the median scores were typically in the 70th to 80th percentile, and 25% of home school students are enrolled one or more grades above their age-level public and private school peers. Because this was not a controlled experiment, the study does not demonstrate that home schooling is superior to public or private schools and the results must be interpreted with caution. The report clearly suggests, however, that home school students do quite well in that educational environment. The article can be accessed directly at <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v7n8/>.

Jerry Mintz went to a meeting of the **New York Home Education Network (NYHEN)**, in Saratoga, NY. About 20 people attended. Much of the discussion was about what the decision-making structure would be. Jerry offered the structure which evolved in the democratic school he once directed, which uses elements of voting and consensus which were learned from the Iroquois. It was decided to try that approach for that meeting. The biggest issue facing the group is whether or not to support the push to allow homeschoolers access to public school sports teams and other facilities. One group feels that it is their right to have that access as taxpayers. The other fears opening up homeschoolers to more government control by getting involved with the public schools. After the meeting Jerry went to NYHEN contact person, **Ann Hodge's** house, and did a radio interview with Ann and her son on the **Talk America Network**. The next meeting of the group was about to happen as we go to press, and will be reported on in the next issue.

Jolanda Gozani Ferguson, Jolanda_Ferguson@Brewsternet.com:

Hi! I am a regular (and GRATEFUL!) subscriber to AERO. I particularly loved your Winter 1999 edition of ***The Education Revolution***. I was especially interested in the three learning centers described. I have been playing with the idea of starting such a center sometime in the future and would love to get more information about how to begin such an endeavor. Page 3 of your magazine mentions that "AERO is developing a kind of kit for people who want to start learning centers." Is this kit now available? How may I go about purchasing it? Are there any other resources/contact people you would recommend to someone like me who is interested in starting up a learning center? There is a fairly large homeschooling contingent up here in the area of Wolfeboro, NH, and it has been interesting talking with homeschoolers. A learning center might be of value up in this area of fewer educational choices. It would be wonderful to talk with you as I am a great admirer of your tireless energy in the alternative education movement.

Jerry Mintz reply: JerryAero@aol.com: We already have some materials developed and are working on more. For people within traveling distance from AERO, I have been doing on-site consultation. I've done that for a group near Binghamton which will start a new homeschool resource center next school year. Call me at 800 769-4171 or give me your phone number and I'll call.

REPORT ON RESOURCE CENTER CONSULTATION

I did a consultation on April 11 with a group at **Laura Austin's** tutorial center at Horseheads, New York. It has been open as an after school program for 20 years, but several parents wanted to have it become a full-time school. I suggested that it could be accomplished by using current teachers and creating a homeschool resource center.

There were five of Laura's teachers, five parents, two students, plus myself and Laura at the meeting. It went so well that a couple of parents said they had only been thinking about the center for one particular child with a learning problem, but they thought it might be good for all of their children. When Laura mentioned that she really didn't think that homework was that necessary and that it was quite a burden for kids, one of the two nine-year-old kids in the meeting immediately perked up and it drew her attention.

I showed snatches from a couple of videos, asked parents and students what kind of needs they had to meet, and answered questions about college, accreditation, diplomas, social life, and equipment. I got the feeling that everybody was ready to sign up and Laura was pretty excited about it. Laura reports that the new center will open in the Fall. -JM
(SEE *CHANGING SCHOOLS* SECTION FOR ANOTHER CONSULTATION REPORT)

It looks as though **The Newtown Progressive School** (CT) is going to close its doors. BUT,...the good news is that **Progressive Learning Center** (considered a business, and not a school) is going to open.

We're signing a lease on a small building and have several homeschooling families interested and ready to go! I am still primarily targeting the middle grade students (ages 10-13), but will be able to offer enrichment type "after school" programs for all ages. I appreciate the encouragement you gave me over the phone and am in total agreement with you when you said that home-based education resource centers are where the future in education lies. I'll let you know how things progress. **Kathleen Green** KGreen9818@aol.com

Dick Kitto, who, together with **Stan Windlass**, founded **Education Otherwise** (English home education organization) at Lower Shaw Farm in the UK, died at 3:30 this afternoon (June 22) after a stroke. He had been taken to hospital in Sheffield while staying with his daughter. beverley.young@btinternet.com

The 7th edition of the **Home School Manual**, **Theodore Wade**, has recently been published. It is one of the best comprehensive books on homeschooling resources and approaches. Gazelle Publications, 11580 Red Bud trail, Berrien Springs, MI 49103, 800 650 5076, tedw@andrews.edu.

International News and Communications **GERMANY**

Robert Fishman, ecomedia@aol.com: I am preparing an international congress, Nov. 11-13, 1999, which is meant to debate theoretical and practical approaches to education for sustainability. We are planning statements of specialists, workshops, and an exhibition of international projects. We would like to gather all kinds of information and addresses of specialists working on those questions either scientifically or in practical projects. We are mainly looking for information on multinational school cooperation dealing with questions of sustainable development in social, economic and ecological dimensions. August Bebel Str. 16-18, 33602 Bielefeld, Germany.

ENGLAND

Annette Cotterill, learning_through_action@compuserve.com: Have just read about your work in the March 99 edition of the (UK) **Human Scale Education** newsletter with great interest. Please add **Learning Through Action** to the Aerolist. We are a not-for-profit established since 1983 creating interactive education projects on behavior and social themes, which we deliver in nursery, primary and secondary schools using teams of full-time, specialist-trained, teacher/presenters. We also offer one-term certificate courses and workshops in Learning Through Action's methodology. **Learning Through Action Trust**, Fair Cross, Stratfield Saye, RG7 2BT, UK. Tel: (int+44) (0)1256 883500; Fax: (0)1256 883700..

JAMAICA

Makonnen David Blake Hannah was appointed as a youth technology consultant in Jamaica's Commerce and Technology Ministry. At

only 13, Makonnen is the youngest government advisor in Jamaica's history. He has been homeschooled all his life by his mother. He has traveled to several countries with his family, living in varied situations. He hopes to play on the national soccer team in the future.

NETHERLANDS

Kent, altlearn@xs4all.nl: We are working with a researcher on establishing a homeschooling plan to ease the path for those wishing to HS in Holland, which, although legal, has so many restrictions that most people think it is not legal. We are going to put the Dutch Education code online, with special attention to the articles of the law which grant an exception, allowing homeschooling. We are attempting to create 2 HS plans, one curriculum based, the other more in the unschooling concept, though probably only the 1st will get any acceptance here in the beginning. The researcher,

Dr. Henk Blok, has an article in Dutch on the **A.L. nl site** as well as a letter in the news section in which he speaks of being impressed with the new (in English) study of HS'ers in 98. This is also reproduced in full on the website.

NIGERIA

The **Betem Christian Community Academy** was started in 1997. We are Christians and we are building a junior secondary school for orphans and needy children. We are looking for Christian teachers who can come as missionaries to teach math and English language. Those who wish to come should be able to raise their own support and would be willing to live in the community with children. They should be mature and committed Christians who love children. The students, about 90 in number, study under shed. We live in small farming village called Betem. There is no electricity and pipeborne water. From here to the state capital is 76 kilometers. Nigerians are friendly and loving people. We are having democracy from next month. **Ernest Udom**, Betem Christian Community Box 1710, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, West Africa. <erjohum@unical.anpa.net.ng> (The school also needs donations of books, funds, etc.)

NORWAY

Enok Kippersund, <enkipper@online.no>: I am the headmaster of a Junior Public School in Western Norway, 30 pupils, age 6-13, multi-aged classes, rural location. The school is not yet on the Net, but we are working on building our international contact Net, (mostly) by snailmail. We are an ordinary Norwegian school, I think, but by the last plans the Government gave us, we are all supposed to be alternative schools! We are looking for pen pals (private) for some of our pupils, but most of all we want to get into common contacts on class or school level. **Bjoerke skule**, 6190 Bjoerke, Norway - Tlf 70 04 11 22

POLAND

There are some "different" schools in Poland, but to tell you the truth I am not a fan of them: Most of them are very expensive and only kids of very rich people can profit of their benefits. The only alternativity of these schools is that there are not notes, and it is not necessary to come to the class and some other "alternative" ideas. In Wroclaw, the city I live near, there is a school called "**The School of Future**"

managed by an association "**Free Education Initiatives**". It is something different than the mentioned school. The school is based on some ecological ideas and kid aimed philosophy. The situation in official state schools is rather the same as before the government change. After the 1989 the church tries to take power over the education. Recently the education minister refused to authorize one grammar manual because of its "non Christian" content, just because inside there were some Zodiac signs and a witch that teaches grammar. Here is the School of the Future address: **Wroclawska Szkola Przyszlosci**, ul. Skwierzyńska 34a, PL 53-522 Wrocław, POLAND. Tel: + 48 - 71 - 3611221. **Piotr Smyrak**

piero@ekoidea.most.org.pl

SOUTH AFRICA

Brian Stanley is involved in a private educational institution and in literacy programs throughout Western South Africa. He tells us that resources are extremely low and that they especially need donations of educational VHS videotapes. If you would like to help, please contact him at **Helderberg College**, PO Box 22, Somerset West 7129, South Africa.

WEST BANK (ISRAEL)

Hope Flowers School was founded by **Hussein Issa** in 1984 in the West Bank of Bethlehem and is a sister school to the Democratic School of Hadera. In 1996 it began the first adult peace education workshops open to both Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinian and Israeli officials do not support the school financially and actively disapprove of it. Each attempt to close the school, which provides education in peace and democracy. "The most difficult part of teaching Palestinian children about peace is reconciling what they learn at school with what they experience in their daily lives." This information was published in LIB ED, No. 29, Phoenix House, 157 Wells Road, Bristol, BS4 2BU. Email: editors@libed.demon.co.uk.

Teachers, Jobs, and Internships

PRIVATE SCHOOL FOR SALE

The Academy of Enhanced Learning, 460 Clover Lane, Hanover, PA, is for sale. Its owner and director is retiring after 30 years of teaching. Built in 1991, the 3000 sq. ft. private school is in excellent condition. It's located on an acre of land in a rapidly growing area outside of Baltimore. This well established school is state licensed for grades K-8. Existing options include use as a primary, intermediate or special education school. It includes office and teaching supplies, an 8,000 volume children's library, a large outdoor wooden climber, a science room, and a computer center. \$275,000.00. Willing to help finance. Call Bobbie or David Hertzfeldt at (717) 632-1709.

The Renaissance Progressive School, in Lakeland Florida, between Tampa and Orlando,

is seeking teachers and a director for a second campus for their charter school. Applicants should be degreed and have experience in a progressive teaching environment (learner-directed, student-paced, authentic assessment). Contact **Mari-Jean Melissa**, The Renaissance Progressive School, 6075 S. Florida Avenue, Lakeland, FL 33813, Fax (941) 701-1046

Blue Mountain School in Floyd, VA is looking for 5 teachers from preschool to 6th grade. 540 745-4234, bms@swva.net

The Albany Free School, perhaps the oldest inner city genuinely free school in the US. (A.S. Neill told our founder, Mary Leue, that she would be "daft" to try such a thing), needs a full-time teacher for next year. Qualifications: Experience working with children in an intimate, open setting where learning is by choice and everyone is responsible for the well-being of the school community. Lots of energy and flexibility are needed to meet the ever-changing needs of our diverse student body. We also offer a limited number of apprenticeship opportunities in which you will discover the heart and the soul of the teaching/learning process and come to a deeper understanding of yourself and how you effect others. Scholarships and room and board are available on a first-come-first-served basis. Contact: Chris Mercogliano (518) 434-3072; e-mail - freskool@crisny.org.

A private teacher is needed for a ten-year old boy in Florida. The candidate should have experience and interest in alternative education and learning disabilities. The family also wants help in homeschooling and possibly starting an alternative school. Reply to **Mary Byrd**, 51 South Andalusia Ave., Santa Rosa Beach, FL 32459. Fax: 850-231-2806. Email: hpbyrd@gnt.net.

The School in Rose Valley, an independent progressive elementary school (preschool-6) is seeking an Interim Principal to begin July 1, 1999 and serve for the 1999-2000 school year. This is an independent progressive elementary school with a student body of 125. The School is committed to continuing growth and self-development and a supportive board and parent community. Candidates must have a background in education, experience in administration, knowledge about childhood development, and commitment to progressive education. Please send resume with references to Sonia C. Jaipaul, Esq., Chair, Search Committee, The School in Rose Valley, 20 School Lane, Rose Valley, PA 19063. Email: jaipaul@crafttech.com.

Kelly Patrick Gerling, ELFSYSTEM@aol.com: A public school district in the Kansas City area is establishing a new elementary school in September. The idea is to put together an extraordinary school that can effectively meet the learning needs of students, parents and faculty in a way that is flexible, enthusiastic and fun. The faculty has not been hired yet. The district is taking applications from teachers from within the district now and from teachers with non-traditional backgrounds and experiences. Our goal for this school is to open up the feedback from parents and students to the school and respond flexibly to meet their needs. We also want to respond with non-traditional methods, structures and assumptions when that is needed to

satisfy the parents and students. We seek to blend the best of a traditional school with a variety of non-traditional, alternative methods. Hiring some non-traditional teachers will add diversity to the faculty and make it easier to create an extraordinary, wonderful and enthusiastic learning atmosphere. Qualifications include Missouri certification, a background with a student-oriented approach, and experience with and willingness to use non-traditional methods, To apply please e-mail.

Charter school in central New Jersey for 100 children in grades K-7, looking for Director/"Master Teacher". We offer multi-age groupings, a constructivist philosophy, inclusive environment, and small teacher-student ratios. Experience with team/consensus building, curriculum development, authentic assessment and supportive supervision essential. Please send resume and statement of philosophy to: Hiring Committee, **Greater Brunswick Charter School**, 197 Somerset St., New Brunswick, NJ 08901 **Lori Freedman** at 732-246-5661.

Chuck Estin: Renaissance Persons wanted to teach in small democratic public high school. Certificate required. Potential openings in all curriculum areas. Send resume and cover letter to 6815 Ravenna Ave NE, Seattle, WA 98105. E-mail: clakatatham@hotmail.com

Preschool teacher and Director sought for part-time cooperative program. Parent education and administrative experience required. Co-op experience preferred. School focus is experiential, child-led play and social learning. Starting wage \$24.10/hour. Send questions to jenyoun@mindspring.com. Los Altos is located in the South Bay of San Francisco/Silicon Valley. Send resume to **Los Altos Parent Preschool**, Attention: President, 199 Almond Avenue, Los Altos, CA 94022 OR fax (650) 947-8007

Michael writes: I work at **School for the Physical City**, an Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound public school in Manhattan. It is grades 6-12. I was attracted to it because I was looking for a real alternative in the public school system. I was a little disappointed that this school turned out to be reluctant to take a stand against some institutional, Board of Ed. requirements and traditions but I believe it is possible to move for real change here. Some staff are leaving at different grade levels and in different disciplines. I would encourage anyone to submit resumes or call for an interview who would like to infuse this place with new blood. I believe there is tremendous potential here. Check out the web site for more on expeditionary learning <http://www.elob.org/about/index.html>. School for the Physical City 55 E.25th St., NY, NY 10010, 212-683-7440 Contact person: Candy Systra.

The Learning Community is a small school for Kindergarten through eighth grade. We are in our third year, and are located on the grounds of the old **Black Mountain College** in Black Mountain, NC, 20 minutes east of Asheville. We approach education with a combination of hands-on academics, outdoor education, service learning, and parent participation. We are looking for three teachers interested in developing a creative, holistic curriculum on our beautiful 600 acre campus. Modest salary with small benefit package and two afternoons off a week. Also looking for part-time development coordinator. Write to The Learning Community, PO. Box 1143, Black Mountain, NC, 28711 Call 828 686-3080 or e-mail cindyc@rockmont.com.

We recently found out that we do not need a director/principal

with an Illinois certification as long as our population of a particular category of students remains 30 or under. We are an alternative high school on the South side of Chicago serving about 75 inner city, mostly African American students, ranging in age from 14 to 24. We have on-site daycare for student-parents and confer a high school diploma. We are part of a private welfare agency which provides housing and other services to a significant proportion of our students. Janice Greer founded the school in the 1960's from which the "welfare agency" grew. We are looking to build a cooperatively-run progressive organization of teachers, counselors and administrators to work in solidarity with young people from the community who fall through the bureaucratic cracks of the CPS. Right now we are looking for someone to fill a "principal-like" position, as well as teachers/counselors who love some combination of the following areas: math, biology, environmental science/issues, health & nutrition, child development & parenting, physical fitness, computer teaching skills, and all of these interests taught within a context of student empowerment, compassion, fun and love. To apply, please e-mail **Janice Greer** at Wolfie5461@aol.com or call **Sullivan House Welfare Agency** at 773-324-5014 for application details. Janice, however, will be traveling from until 7/20. **Jacque Wurzelbacher** can be e-mailed for further information at Wafflebacon@juno.com or JDWURZ@aol.com.

TEACHERS SEEKING JOBS

Mimi Glass, inspired, dedicated, very experienced alternative teacher wishes to be part of a holistic, progressive, alternative school community dedicated to a holistic educational philosophy within a public school or with public equivalent salary. I am Montessori trained at the primary level and have taken the Montessori elementary course in the sciences. I am California credentialed and currently teaching in public school using my own Montessori materials. I would especially like to teach in a natural, woodsy setting where nature and the classroom integrate. Would relocate from California to Oregon, Washington, Colorado, and possibly other locations to follow my dreams. e-mail: bmbg20@com

My name is **April Bell** and I am a recent college graduate. I am currently employed as a Teacher Assistant at Kennedy Krieger Institute. This is a special education (level 5) school for emotionally disturbed boys age 11-17 years. old. I am relocating to Miami, Florida and seeking employment in an alternative school. I have a wealth of experience in this field and am eager to render my services to a new school or program. aprilebell@yahoo.com

Meredith Heller, mermaidmh@aol.com: I have been teaching poetry and performance at an alternative high school in Boulder, CO for the past two years. I have had great success helping teens to explore and express their feelings through poetry writing. I am just completing a Master's in Education plus teaching certificate from **Goddard College**. I am moving to California (anywhere from San Fran to San Diego) and seek employment in an alternative school environment. Any openings or ideas please contact me by email or at 1330 6th Street Boulder, CO 80302. Phone: (303) 447-3534. Much thanks!

CHANGING SCHOOLS COLUMBINE AFTERSHOCKS

In response to the Littleton tragedy Jerry Mintz, who was at a conference in Colorado at the time with a group of alternative school students and homeschoolers, called on people to report to **AERO** if similar events were happening in their communities in order get a sense of the scope of this phenomenon. The volume of what was reported is too large to report in this issue, so we will summarize it. Let us know if you'd like the whole report.

Hundreds upon hundreds of bomb threats were made throughout the country. On Long Island dozens were reported with many school closed. During finals, plans were made to seal lockers shut and lot allow students to bring book bags.

Reports were sent to the AERO office of bomb threats, violence and arrests of students from: **St. Louis, MO**, and **Clayton, MO** (a very exclusive suburb), **Lake Charles, LA** (10 students arrested), **Columbiana, OH** (including a 9 year old with a gun, **Scituate, RI**, **Kansas City, Kansas**, **Taber, Alberta, Canada** (where a 14 year old shot two 17 year olds), **Benicia, California**, **Greece, NY**, **Tucson, AZ**, **NH** ("I am considering Homeschooling now. I think that children can't possibly learn the way they should if they are afraid for their life every day."), **Vallejo, CA**

("One teacher told me she was afraid to teach at her school for the first time in her career."), **Athens, TX** ("There has been a rash of bomb scares since the Littleton tragedy...as of tomorrow morning, I will be taking my son out of public school and home schooling him. He deserves to feel safe while he is learning."), **McLean, VA**, (Hillary Rodham Clinton said Monday that schools today have gotten so big that students can get lost in the system, " So we are going to have to change the way we think about, how we build and construct and organize our schools," Mrs. Clinton said.).

One girl e mailed, "THERE IS CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE THAT MY SCHOOL WILL BE BOMBED!! I AM TERRIFIED, AND SO ARE MY FRIENDS, BUT OUR PARENTS ARE MAKING US GO TO SCHOOL!! WHAT DO I DO! SINCERELY, "LA NINIO NIKITA"

Another parent wrote: Please send me information on home schooling. I need all the information I can get, as the school my child currently attends has had one bomb threat, 4 students arrested for conspiring to recreate the Columbine Massacre, and has had one live bomb found on the school grounds, all within the last 3 days. I no longer feel safe sending my child there.

THE ANTIDOTE TO THE COLUMBINE TRAGEDY (Editorial sent to *New York Times*)

Naturalists say that the antidote to a poisonous plant is always growing nearby. For example, jewelweed can be found near where poison ivy grows. But if you don't know that jewelweed is the antidote, if you don't even know what you are looking for, then you simply suffer the effects of the poison.

At the same time as the massacre was taking place at Columbine High School, in Jefferson County, Colorado, a group of parents, teachers and students who practice educational alternatives commenced their annual get-together just a few miles away, in the mountains overlooking Denver. Within this group could be found the answer, the antidote to the poison which manifested itself in Littleton. The participants in this conference had traveled from schools, programs and homeschools from as far away as Japan. This conference of the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools is unlike any other which takes place in the United States. The majority of these educators are students. Half of the board members of the organization are students.

These representatives of small alternative schools and homeschoolers have long since solved the problems which created the Littleton shootings. For example, they all learned to be adept at conflict resolution. At the conference, itself, any problems which arose went immediately to a mediation committee of children and adults, where each point of view was heard, the problem resolved, and the anger and frustration dissipated.

Alcohol, drugs or weapons are not allowed at the conference by any participant, including adults. This was a decision made by majority vote on the initiative of students, in effect for over 15 years. The relationships between the children and adults are based on trust.

The people at this conference had some of the answers. They had the antidote, yet not one reporter made their way up the mountain to the 8000 foot level to the camp overlooking Littleton, where they were meeting. After five days the people went home, with one school group actually sleeping in the gym of a public alternative school in Jefferson County before and after the conference (certainly the only students inside a Jefferson County school those nights).

In the following weeks, politicians and professional educators have been pointing their fingers in all directions, seeking blame for the shootings. They've pointed toward violent video games, violence in the movies and television, lack of proper gun control. They've done this the way a good magician practices misdirection. They've pointed everywhere but at the schools themselves, which are the locus of the problem.

Children are natural learners. If they say they hate their schools, there is something wrong with the schools. Since Columbine, there has been almost no community unscathed by a variety of aftershocks, mostly in

the form of bomb scares, and now with another shooting in a school in Georgia. Some people have called this "copy cat." But there was no similar rash of copycat events after the tragic Oklahoma City Federal Building bomb. The fact is that the Littleton explosion unleashed a torrent of feeling on the part of sad, angry, damaged and disenfranchised children all over the country.

Parents and teachers had better wake up quickly and smell the stench. There is an antidote to this poison. People practicing educational alternatives have found some of the answers. They encompass concepts of smallness, empowerment and trust. Furthermore, I just found out that jewelweed works best on poison ivy if it is used first, as a preventative.

Radio Interview With Arnie Langberg on the Night of the Littleton Tragedy

JERRY MINTZ: Of all places in the world today I'm in Denver, CO. As you no doubt heard by now there has been an incredible tragedy in this area, in Jefferson County.

I have guests tonight who are from Jefferson County and who are involved in starting alternative schools.

ARNIE LANGBERG: Hello.

JERRY: I called you earlier today when I heard about this incredible tragedy because I was particularly interested on your take on it. I consider you one of the most important pioneers in the field of public alternative education, having started public alternative schools as long as 25 years ago.

ARNIE: Let's see, in 1970, the Great Neck Village School, so it's almost 30 thirty years now.

JERRY: Then you came out here and started Jefferson County Open School.

ARNIE: The high school portion, Mountain Open High in 1975, which is now part of the K through 12 school.

JERRY: This school where this shootings and bombings took place, how far away is that from the school that you started?

ARNIE: Well, it's all in the same school district. We have a number of students at our school who would be in the Columbine neighborhood. The geographic distance is fairly large because the county's large, but we're in the same district with a lot of the same kids. I guess you could say the cultural distance and maybe the psychological distance is very small.

JERRY: Would you have ever predicted that something like this could happen in your area?

ARNIE: How do you predict something like this? But you can, not the extent of it, but the possibility of expressions of rage, yea, that's been happening all over. Some people have the illusion that it's only an inner-city manifestation, but I think we know better than that. There are no words to describe the tragedy of it, but there are signs of these kinds of things going on throughout our society. In most cases in the last few years, we've been hearing about younger kids doing it, and now it's older kids and it's with automatic weapons and it's a mass destruction.

JERRY: When you started your public alternative schools, what would you say was your main purpose in doing that?

ARNIE: It's not unrelated to some of those today. The students themselves would tell us that they felt anonymous in their big schools, they were just a number. They wanted to be in a place where they could be themselves, where they were at least given a chance to be known as a person rather than just as a number. I think the anonymity of big institutions contributes to some of the kinds of problems we had today, and I think that was the major motivation for most of the kids who came to us.

JERRY: I heard kids interviewed on television who said that these kids were outcasts from the group, they went around in trench coats, and were really having some problems in that respect. The school they were in was a school of something like 1800 to 2000 students. How many students were in those schools you started?

ARNIE: When I was last with Open High, we had about 250 students.

JERRY: Do you think in a school of 250 students that you would know more about what kids like this were up to and maybe have a different way of dealing with it?

ARNIE: Of course. We were set up in such a way that every student had an advocate on the staff, every student had at least one member of the staff who knew him well. Every teacher or staff member had fifteen or twenty kids. If you came and wanted to know something about a particular student, and we could do it anonymously, I could pick a name at random and we could go to that person's advisor, and that person would not be anonymous. That was a key to the reason the school worked. It didn't mean we didn't have our

"outcasts"; we had some pretty unusual kids at this school, but they were never without a connection.

JERRY: Did you have problems with any serious violence?

ARNIE: The last school I worked with was an alternative school in Denver. Again, it was a small school; it had a lot of gang members, though, and they were from all over the city. Though we had occasional

problems, as one would expect, from what the kids told me, we had fewer problems than some of the other large schools because it was *their* school. So even kids from two rival gangs, when they were in the school, had a common feeling that it was their school, in part because each of them was known to somebody. A good example is there was a fight in the cafeteria; I ran down there and two kids were really flailing at each other. I grabbed one and one of the teachers grabbed the other. The kid I grabbed was really out of control, screaming, yelling, arms and legs flailing. I don't know what possessed me to say it, but I whispered in his ear, I said, "Roger, who's holding you?" He said, "Arnie," and as he said it, he relaxed. I couldn't have done that if I didn't know him, and I think for me that was a really important lesson about the importance of nobody being a number, nobody being anonymous.

JERRY: Amazing. When President Clinton spoke today about this; he talked specifically of teaching kids to learn to "resolve with their conflicts with words and not weapons." One of the things we've talked about in the past with the incidents in Jonesboro, Paducah, and Springfield, is that in a lot of alternative schools, we have methods in place for kids to resolve conflicts with words. There are democratic processes in many of them so nobody has a real reason to have to take it into their own hands and use violence. I believe this is one of the solutions but it would take an incredible overhaul of the public school system. I think that you've been out there working doing this for 29 years now, trying to show people that this approach is one that can work.

ARNIE: I think it has to start a lot earlier than high school. And I think that those methods are important, but those are almost less important than the connections, that every kid has an adult he can trust and can turn to. If we began that earlier, really young, if we thought that our purpose wasn't merely to fill people with know-how, but in addition to know why and who they are was considered equally important, it's less likely these kinds of things would occur. Though we may say, and maybe it's correct, that it should be done in the home or in the church, and those are reasonable expectations, but not for everybody. In fact, for increasing numbers of kids, neither the home nor the church are able to accomplish that, and if we as a school system have the kids for as long as we do, we have to take a larger portion of that responsibility.

What's really interesting is the role of the teachers in a lot of this. I think teachers have as much reason to be as upset, frightened by this as the students. I think that most teachers, given the support of the system, would be quite capable of helping kids if they started early enough and established trust. I think most teachers would rather have the time to get to know their kids and be able to be helpful to them. I think if we can figure out a way to stop pressuring teachers to just get higher and higher test scores and fragment their learning, and get them back to what they can do best, which is to be advocates for kids, teachers can really be an important part of the solution. But not with the expectations we keep laying on them right now.

(LATER IN THE SHOW THERE WAS THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION WITH A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT, MELANIE, CALLING IN FROM RHODE ISLAND, TALKING ABOUT HER LARGE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL)

MELANIE: The only outcasts that I could say would be the Gothic kids. But they make themselves outcasts: they always wear black and they don't like talking to people.

JERRY: What do you mean by the Gothic kids in your school?

MELANIE: There are different groups: the alternative people, the rock heads, the preppies, people who like hip-hop and rap, and then there's the gothic kids. They basically wear black clothing, they dye their hair black, they wear a lot of accessories on their faces, and they're very to themselves. Those are the most unsocial people, and that's pretty much it.

JERRY: And you feel like they ostracize themselves.

MELANIE: Yes. I have one friend that's a gothic person. I had to approach him; I was talking in the hallway and he stopped and I said oh hi, you know, being nice and all. Then he started talking to me. He's very distant; he doesn't like hanging around me; he likes hanging around his other friends.

JERRY: But he became a friend of yours, or what?

MELANIE: Yes, he's somewhat my friend right now.

JERRY: Maybe he just needed someone to reach out to him a little bit.

MELANIE: Yea. But the thing is he doesn't talk to me much. Whenever his friends come around, he doesn't like letting them know that I'm his friend.

JERRY: If you had to choose which group would be most likely to turn to violence like this, do you think that would be the group?

MELANIE: Well, it depends on the person; it's usually the more secluded people -- the more quiet and to themselves. The more you try to open up to them, the more they close up. It's usually the gothic people who do that. If that happened in my school, it would definitely be some of them I think.

JERRY: I'm going to put someone on for a minute to talk to you because my niece, Jenifer, sort of fits that description and she's right here. I'll put her on to see what kind of comments she has about this.

JENIFER: You're right, at least partially; a lot of people who consider themselves gothic are dark and secluded because they want to be. My hair dyed black, it comes down to my waist, everything that I own is black. I'm a dark person a lot of the time; I'm secluded a lot of the time. But

I think a lot of people look at people who look like that and think they want to be secluded, and they don't always. I have a pretty decent amount of friends and social activities but sometimes I would actually rather be alone.

MELANIE: The more I try to open up to people like that, the more they try to push me away. Probably in my community right now you can't say a person is in a category because everyone is always different.

JENIFER: Exactly, I think almost nobody fits into a category and people who *want* to be categorized just have a problem. I can't imagine that anybody would want to fit into a specific category and be called a specific thing, whether it's a prep, a jock, or goth, whatever. I can't imagine anyone wanting that. Wouldn't everybody want to be themselves, whatever it is that they are?

CHARTER SCHOOL NEWS

Frank Heller sent us an article from the

LA Daily News (4/8/99) by **Terri Hardy** and **Michael Coit**.

The article describes the recent vote by the California Assembly to impose collective bargaining on charter schools. If the bill is passed into law, "it would make charter schools the only public campuses in California required to have union contracts."

Charter advocates believe the law would effectively destroy the movement, forcing teachers into unions; the bill's proponents claim it will give charter staffers the same rights other teachers already have. California has 140 charter schools at the present time. Some of them now have union contracts by choice; others do not. "David Patterson, director of governmental relations for the

California Network of Educational Charters. He called the legislation a "political payback" to the California Teachers Association. "This bill will destroy our ability to be different and be a catalyst for reform," he said."

The Humanities and Sciences Institute, a charter high school in Phoenix, encourages self-motivation and self-direction in a supportive setting. Students complete their work at their own pace. Hours are flexible and students can earn college credit while at the Institute. The school offers extensive field studies and every course requires some field experience.

Arizona's charter law was passed in 1994 and soon had more charter schools than any other state in the nation. In the fall of 1998, 271 of the nation's 1207 charter schools were in Arizona. Arizona tops the Center for Education Reform's list as the best charter law in the country. The CER classifies overall state laws as stronger those "which do or are likely to support at least some significant development of autonomous charter schools,"

and weaker, those "which have not, and are unlikely to, lead to significant charter activity." According to their ratings, the top ten state laws account for almost 65 percent of the charter schools in the country, while the ten worst

state laws account for about 3 percent. Arizona's law was designed to help charter schools flourish, but to allow only those that flourish to remain open. Nationwide 2.7 percent of all charter schools have had their charter revoked, closed voluntarily, or closed because their charter was not renewed. In Arizona, 2.9 percent of charter schools have closed. This figure is so close to the national average, despite the lack of restrictions seen in so many state laws.

Scottsdale Horizon School operated as a successful private school based on an innovative, individualized program developed by founder, **Marcia Lee**. In 1995 the administrators applied for and received a charter. Arizona allows private schools to be chartered, although the majority of states with charter school legislation specifically prohibit it. In Arizona, these schools are treated like any other charter. They receive the same per-student payment as other public schools and are not permitted to charge any additional fees. Horizon has doubled in size and now operates on four campuses. The conversion of private schools to charter schools has been an area of significant growth for Arizona's charter schools movement. Allowing these conversions has enabled more parents to exercise choice and to receive the benefits of their tax dollars in an educational setting that they believe is best for their child.

CHARTER MENTORING

Bellwether Newsletter, bellwether@cmbe.org

(The): (Excerpted from Article):

Two charter schools in Mesa, AZ, have entered into a mentoring agreement in which the visionary but struggling Global Renaissance Academy of Distinguished Education (GRADE) will receive rent and administrative assistance from the successful Life Enrichment Community School. Life Enrichment Community School's four-year lease was recently terminated after only two years. At the same time, administrator Lisa Walker realized that they needed more space for their growing enrollment. A new facility will not be ready for them until next spring. The other school, GRADE, recently filed for bankruptcy protection. When Walker learned that GRADE had a surplus of space and was struggling with financial and organizational problems, she approached the founder and executive director, David Gordon. The agreement calls for Lisa Walker to provide five hours of administrative time to GRADE per week. In addition, the Life Enrichment staff will provide special education services to GRADE at a reduced rate. Other support Walker will provide includes staffing, recruitment, organizational assistance, marketing and public relations. She is very optimistic about this endeavor and believes that an added benefit of this arrangement may be that some Life Enrichment students may choose GRADE for high school. Lisa Walker believes that it is time for the charter school community to embrace the mentoring concept. She envisions a volunteer program where

"veterans" mentor new schools on a one-on-one basis. Walker believes that while charter sponsors do a good job in helping schools through the start-up process, individual attention would provide a "reality check" for new schools. She hopes to put together an evaluation of the project. In the mean time, we hope other charter school veterans will consider the benefits of mentoring.

REPORT ON FIRST NEW YORK STATE CHARTER SCHOOL MEETING

In March I went to Albany to the first charter school conference since New York State passed a new charter school law recently. Here's some quick reactions:

I'll support the charter school movement, but ultimately I'm skeptical for several reasons:

For example, in an interchange with Benno Schmidt of the Edison Project, he said that it was most important beyond anything else that the charters show academic progress. I countered that I thought it was more important that students retain confidence in their ability to learn, and openness to learning. He responded that, yes, maybe my idea was more important, but that the bottom line was still for charters to show academic progress, or they might be closed down.

Actually, it seems very clear to me that we need to revisit the question of standards to really look at what WE think OUR standards are, and turn the tables on them, showing success in the things WE think are important and challenging the people in the traditional system to measure up or at least shut up. If we don't do that, pretty soon EVERYONE will be forced to measure up to someone else's standards.

When I last saw him I asked how a for-profit organization with investors could really allow its schools--teachers and students, to be empowered. He couldn't answer that one very well, either.

I think Joe Nathan was by far the best speaker, and he was on quite a different wave length from some of the others, like Schmidt, and like Jeanne Allen of the Center for Education Reform, who believes in the idea of state and national standards. Nathan was concerned that the charter schools might go the same direction the public school have gone, creating soft jails and dumping grounds for the kids not wanted in the regular system.

The conference organizer, Gerry Vasquez, is a nice guy, but seemed a little overwhelmed by the whole thing.

Nevertheless, I think it was a very important conference, bringing into focus a real step for change in New York. Unlike the Separation of School and State people, I am an evolutionist, and see this as an important change in the--well, I almost said right direction, but there are some interesting alliances in this processes, like conservatives and radical inner city minorities. Lets just say, a good direction.

Lots of other tidbits:

*Edison runs 21 charter schools around the country, has raised \$45 million for school buildings from foundations.

*There are 7000 school buildings in NY, 3 million students in public school, 500,000 in private.

*New York State pays \$9000 per child, second only to New Jersey.

*This new law is apparently one of the ten best charter school laws in the country.

*Application forms are not done yet, and there may be different ones for different charterers.

*Private schools cannot convert to charter, but public schools can, and they are not included in the limit of 100 for the state.
-- JM

Summerhill: Possibly The Most Inspected School In The World.

By Matthew Appleton (ex-Summerhill Houseparent).

Illusions and Reality.

When a friend persuaded me to read A.S. Neill's book *Summerhill* in the mid-eighties, I was immediately captivated by his description of the school. It sounded like no school I had ever heard of, but the sort of school that any self-respecting child would love to attend. At Summerhill no child had to go to lessons if they did not want to, but could play all day if they so desired. There were no rules or regulations imposed by adults. Instead, there were weekly meetings in which adults and children alike had an equal say in deciding what laws should govern the daily life of the school. I visited the school and was impressed by the seemingly idyllic scenario of children playing freely around the school grounds. Shortly afterwards another friend, to whom I had enthused about the school, sent me an advert for Houseparents to work there, which she had seen in a newspaper. It was like having a gauntlet thrown down. I knew that I could not to continue to pontificate about Summerhill until I actually had first hand experience of living there. So, with some trepidation, I applied for one of the houseparenting jobs and got it.

Like so many love affairs, my initial relationship with Summerhill was hopelessly romantic. As far as I was concerned everything was wonderful and everyone was happy. There were some anti-social kids, who obviously weren't at peace with themselves, but no doubt in a month or two they would be playing as contentedly as all the other kids. It turned out to be not quite like that. After awhile I started to find myself feeling angry at these kids, who didn't fit into my version of Summerhill as an earthly paradise. The impression I had got from Neill's book was that a little freedom and approval would cure any child of unhappiness and anti-social behavior. I felt disillusioned with the school and angry that it did not live up to my expectations. If I had left then I would probably have continued to feel this way. But there was something about life at Summerhill which still felt very right and I decided to stay.

Over the next few years I did see changes in these difficult children. I saw shy, emotionally withdrawn children, traumatized by their experiences in other schools, turn into confident and open young people. I saw children, hardened by what life had thrown at them, soften and relax. Re-reading Neill again, a few years later, I became aware that between the stories of almost miraculous changes in children's behavior (and, yes, over the

years I did see some of these) he stressed that what Summerhill Staff needed more than anything was patience. It can be very hard work living with children who are acting out their anti-social impulses, week after week, month after month. But what Summerhill does give these children is time. It takes the pressure of them of having to go to lessons and gives them time to sort themselves out.

The Channel 4 Film.

When, several years ago, a Channel 4 film concentrated on a particularly difficult bunch of new children to the school, there was a great uproar in the media, comparing Summerhill with William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Not only was this inaccurate as the documentary did not make clear that these children were the product of the state system, who were new to the school that term, nor did it show the transformation such children undergo over the years into well balanced, responsible individuals. In a world that does not give children time to sort themselves out, but piles more and more pressure on them, seeing this side of children does make uncomfortable viewing, as the public do not have a context in which to place it. But, as someone who lived and worked at Summerhill for nine years, it makes sense when I see the way in which most schools create problems for themselves, leading to escalating anti-social behavior and exclusion, and I compare that with the defusing of such problems and the sense of belonging that such children find at Summerhill.

To become disillusioned is not, in itself, a negative thing. It is, quite simply, to give up illusion. In giving up my illusion of Summerhill as a kind of never-never land in which everyone is happy all the time, I was able to become more grounded in the reality of the place. It does take a lot of patience to give children time to sort themselves out, but if we are not patient with our children, can we then expect them to be patient with us. In fact, it is only ever a very small minority of the Summerhill community who are pushing the patience of the staff and other children. Most of the children are quite happy and getting on with life just like anyone else and therefore have ups and downs like anyone else. The fundamental difference is that they can be truly themselves, whilst being like anyone else, instead of having to surrender their emotional development to the pressures and strains of compulsory education, with it's above-the-neck only approach to learning.

Facing Closure.

An illusion that many people have about Summerhill, is that, because the lessons are not compulsory, the children do not learn and are therefore not prepared for the wider world when they leave the school. This illusion is implicit in a recent report by inspectors from the Department of Education, who visited Summerhill earlier in the year. The school now faces the threat of closure, because the inspectors want to enforce their approach to education that children should reach specific standards at specific stages. This approach does not allow for the fact that children learn at different paces and have a broad spectrum of needs to be met, other than just academic. Many teachers within the state system are well aware that this approach does not work.

During my time at Summerhill the school was inspected nearly every year. Neill once wrote "Summerhill is possibly the happiest school in the world." To this we added; "Summerhill is possibly the

most inspected school in the world." At times we accepted our lot, knowing this was simply the way education was going in this country. Other times we wondered if there was a campaign against the school being orchestrated from somewhere in the depths of the Department of Education. This suspicion was fueled by the persistence with which the inspectors dogged the school and the changing goal posts and conflicting messages that each new inspection brought. Whether or not this was unjustifiably paranoid or not, I do not know. But that same unease surfaces for me now, when I consider that only a year ago the Department of Education officially announced that they recognized Summerhill's philosophy as a valuable contribution to education. This followed an earlier damning report by the inspectors that led to an international response by respected educationalists, psychologists and academics in support of the school. Though I try to dismiss it, the thought occurs that this new attack on the school has been cynically timed to catch the school when it has exhausted its media interest. After all, how many more times will the press run the story that Summerhill is about to close.

Having been at the school during many of these past inspections, I was struck by the inability of the inspectors to grasp what Summerhill was trying to do. I remember one inspector asking me how we dealt with the problem of children not attending lessons. When I responded that it was not a problem, as the children learnt what they needed to learn in their own time, she gave me a look of utter incomprehension. The concept that children need time to play and sort themselves out, free of academic pressure, was alien to them. Nor did they seem to see the self-confidence and openness of the children as important, indeed they often seemed to feel uncomfortable with it. This discomfort may well have seemed quite justified when, for example, children told them quite openly that they were bored. Being bored sometimes is something all children go through when they have time to themselves and is a necessary part of the process of figuring out what you want to do with yourself. If the same inspectors had followed up the same children on their next visit they would most likely have found them totally absorbed in some activity with great interest. But, instead, each time they came they focused on those children, who at that time, were not attending class, complaining they were bored, or behaving in an anti-social manner. Thus the illusion that Summerhill was a place in which children were not motivated (which, in their book, was the job of the adults) became self-perpetuating.

Who Is Failing Who?

Far from being unmotivated or unable to fit into the wider world when they left Summerhill, the children that I knew went on to qualify and work in a wide variety of settings. Most went onto to further education studying in subjects as varied as biochemistry, marine biology, dentistry, medicine, art, dance, boat building, astrophysics, music, psychology, carpentry, sculpture, business studies, tourism and catering. The majority are happy, well adjusted young people. It is two years since I left Summerhill. Many of the children I was Houseparent for are now friends, who still keep in contact. I cannot think of one of them who is not upset and angry at the way that Summerhill is being judged and condemned. Far from seeing it as a place that let them down educationally, they see it as a place that supported and respected them in their growth as individual human beings. For those who have lived at Summerhill the threat of closure signifies a great personal loss. For society at large it also signifies a loss, for if we as a society cannot tolerate one small school, which draws less than seventy children from across

the world, doing things a little differently, then it is a sad reflection on the culture of mass conformity that has overtaken us.

If I had left Summerhill when I first began to question it I would probably be saying now that it doesn't work. But, just as Summerhill gives children time to understand who they are, I needed time to understand what Summerhill is. My disillusionment gave way to a deeper understanding and faith in the process. If the Department for Education were to take the time to really try and understand what Summerhill is about, they too might abandon their illusions and gain a deeper understanding.

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RADIO INTERVIEW WITH ZOE READHEAD OF SUMMERHILL,

With Ron Miller, Lisa Brick, and a Summerhill Parent and Student

Jerry: I am so pleased to have Zoe Readhead today as our special guest. She is the daughter of the founder of Summerhill School in England, A.S. Neill. Those of you who are at all in the education field will certainly know about Summerhill. It can be argued that Summerhill was the school which really led to all of the changes we've been seeing in education since the 60s. First, the Free School Movement, many of which really attributed themselves directly to having read the book Summerhill, which first came out in a popular version in the United States in the early 60s. That led to the public alternative schools and that led to homeschooling movement and charter schools.. This is a very important school in history and it is our great pleasure to be able to interview Zoë who is our guest from England, in a town called Leiston.

JERRY: Your father, AS Neill, started Summerhill in what year?

ZOE: 1921.

JERRY: That may seem difficult for people to believe. How old was he when he had you?

ZOE: He was 63 when I was conceived. He was born in 1883.

JERRY: Briefly, what was so revolutionary about his ideas, what was so different?

ZOE: Well, I guess it was just everything! It was as opposite of other schools as it could possibly have been, particularly in the early years. Other schools were saying children have to sit down and learn and my dad was saying children are people. They need to be treated with respect and given freedom.

JERRY: And that was certainly a revolutionary idea for that time, and unfortunately, kind of revolutionary for this time too.

ZOE: Yes, I think that's right.

JERRY: We're hoping that we can make a change in that. How many students are in the school now?

ZOE: Around 58.

JERRY: Where do those students come from?

ZOE: All over. We have quite a few from Japan, about 12 from Taiwan, 13 or 14 from Germany, a couple of Europeans, and a few Americans.

JERRY: After the book Summerhill came out in the United States, about half the kids going to Summerhill were American, am I right?

ZOE: Yes, I grew up talking American. I understand American now! My contemporaries were actually American when I was a pupil.

JERRY: What was it like being the daughter of the founder and going to Summerhill as a student? Was it difficult?

ZOE: Not really very different from the other kids, you know.

JERRY: Of course the school of course ran as a democracy, but did you feel like you should be treated more than equal since you were actually his daughter?

ZOE: No, not at all. I think I probably rather had more of a conscience than some of the other kids because my dad and mom were involved and I didn't want bad stuff to happen. But it didn't interfere with my fun.

JERRY: One of the most unusual aspects of Summerhill is you are not required to go to classes. When you were a student, did you go to classes?

ZOE: I went to some. I didn't take any exams. That was a conscious decision. I just didn't want to. Often I went to classes and I would have periods when I wouldn't or there were some particular classes I wouldn't go to because I didn't have any interest in those things.

JERRY: What do you think is the advantage of having a school that does not require students to go to classes?

ZOE: I think it doesn't destroy your love of learning because the things that you do you do because you want to do them. I think you can't have an equal, friendly relationship with somebody and then force them to go to a class that they don't want to go to. It's actually less about the freedom to learn and more about the relationship, that it's an equal relationship. You then don't have the right to say to someone, "We are equal people, we have equal rights, but by the way, you have to do this because I say so."

JERRY: The decisions that are made at Summerhill are made at a democratic meeting. What kind of power does that meeting have?

ZOE: It has enormous power, but it doesn't cover the financial aspects. How can I explain it? I think Neill felt that it was very very important that children were able to be children and they were not expected to make decisions about things that wouldn't interest them. So we find at Summerhill that the kids are very interested in what time they go to bed at night, but nobody's very interested in who pays the electricity. So that's a job for me, for the grownups. That's a job that kids really don't want to be bothered with.

JERRY: So what kinds of things could they decide? I've heard stories that there were times when they abolished all the rules? Is that true?

ZOE: Yea, they can abolish them. The meeting is not "they" and "us," it's the community. The community can abolish all the rules, but there would obviously be some that couldn't be abolished that would have to do with insurances and safety and so on. In this day and age, unfortunately, Summerhill is not as free as it was perhaps 30 years ago in that nowadays you have to have certain insurances in order to function as a school. So there are some things that couldn't be dropped because it couldn't function as a school if they were dropped.

JERRY: With the standards movement which I think may have started in England before the United States, and now with the national curriculum-- You said it's not as free as it used to be. How has it been affected by that?

ZOE: I think it's made our job much more difficult. "Our job" being the grownups. It's made the administration of the school much more difficult than it was because we now have to try and fit in with the requirements and not allow them to interfere with the school. So what we've been

doing in the last year is writing a lot of policy statements which we hope are going to help to protect us. Getting it written down on paper helps to give you a stronger fighting chance.

JERRY: On the other side of the coin, how do you feel the standards movement has affected schools in England? I know that one thing that has happened is that a lot of alternative schools, particularly public ones, have been forced to close.

ZOE: I'm sure this is true and I think that is one of the most horrifying things. Summerhill has been fighting hard. It has been very difficult over the last 7 or 8 eight years. The culmination of it was last year when we were threatened with closure by the government. It's difficult to keep your individuality and your independence when you have that kind of pressure.

JERRY: What was the basis of their threat with closure?

ZOE: They want all children of certain ages to reach a particular stage at a particular time. They said it was totally unacceptable for children at the age of nine not to be able to read and write. Now, we wouldn't have many children at Summerhill at the age of nine who were not able to read and write, but they have that option. If they don't want to go to class and they don't want to learn to read and write, then that's fine with us. They say that is totally unacceptable and that the children would have to be given standards throughout their school life. And we say we're not prepared to do that.

JERRY: You feel this is an individual question and different kids have their styles and times when they want to do certain things.

ZOE: We do, and of course, it's fundamental to us. You can't have a democratic, free, equal society, a community of equals and then say to the younger kids, "Oh by the way, by the time you are 7 you have to be at such and such a standard." You can't do that. So, in fact, if they were to do stick by that it means that *everything* that Summerhill stands for has to go. And we're not prepared to do that.

JERRY: I remember you saying that rather than do that you would close the school.

ZOE: Yes, we would.

JERRY: We now have on the line Ron Miller. Ron is a writer and founder of schools himself in Vermont. Ron, do you have a question for Zoë?

RON: Yes, when the book Summerhill came out in 1960, it really was the single most influential piece of writing on the development of the Free School Movement in the 60s. It was the right book at the right time. I'm curious to know your perspective on the ensuing thirty years, do you feel that the Summerhill School still has the same kind of influence that it started to have in the 1960s?

ZOE: Well, it's difficult from where we are because we're just here doing the job. I get a lot of mail and email; I still feel that Summerhill is a very respected place and that people think back to having read *Summerhill*. For us, we've been battling away with the government. It's kind of been a bit lonely. One term runs into another. We're just trying to keep the place going. So that's how it feels.

RON: You were pointing out a very important fact earlier when you were talking about how the standards, and the government desire to standardize education really works against what we're trying to do in alternative schools. The climate now is much more difficult than it was in the 60s.

JERRY: Do you think we're going in the right direction or the wrong direction, as far as that's concerned, Zoë?

ZOE: I think the world, the governments, are absolutely in the wrong direction. This is terrible. If we reach a point where all the schools are standardized, then we might as well forget it.

JERRY: Of course, we do have in the United States, this charter school movement and homeschooling, which is growing by leaps and bounds. I think this reflects people reacting against this attempt to standardize everything.

ZOE: I'm sure that's right.

JERRY: What do you think about the idea of homeschooling, Zoë?

ZOE: Well, if I didn't have Summerhill for my kids, I certainly would have homeschooled. I think that kids are very social animals and they just love to be with each other. I can see that for some families in some areas, it's quite difficult for them, particularly if they're on their own and they're homeschooling their kids and their bringing them up in a much freer, relaxed atmosphere, it's going to be really difficult for them to find a social life that their kids can really enjoy.

JERRY: Summerhill is interested in taking more students from the United States, is that right?

ZOE: Summerhill is interested in taking students from all over. It's an international school. I guess I've never actually had to turn anybody away so far because I'm too full!

JERRY: So your limit is about 60 or 65 kids.

ZOE: I guess 65 to 70. We're a little bit low at the moment. A lot of our bigger kids have matured for two summers in a row, so we've lost a lot of older ones.

JERRY: Is the school really expensive as boarding schools go?

ZOE: As boarding schools go in England, it's about half the price. It's roughly six and a quarter thousand pounds a year.

JERRY: There are several people waiting to say hello to Zoë. One I will introduce right now is Liz Rantz, who has a student at Summerhill. How are you doing, Liz?

LIZ: Stevie's on the line too.

JERRY: Oh! He's home! That's great, so we have a Summerhill student too. This is your second year at Summerhill, is that right?

STEVE: Yes, I'm going into my second year.

JERRY: How do you like it? What's your experience as an American student going to Summerhill?

STEVE: Well, it's been a little everything.

JERRY: Was it shocking to go there at first? Was it very different from any other school you've been to?

STEVE: Yes, it was different. I thought it would be a good change, and I don't regret it.

JERRY: Liz, what has it been like to be a Summerhill parent?

LIZ: Well, it's been interesting Jerry. We live on the Internet now. Stevie and I email 3 or 4 times a day and I know how he's doing and keep him up to date on what's going on here. I think basically it's been a pretty good experience for him. It's a little frustrating. I think any parent of a boarding school kid feels detached from what's going on in their student's life. In this case, probably somewhat more than a kid going to school in this country because we don't get report cards and soccer awards and all the things that kids bring home. I have to trust that Stevie's having a good experience and that they'll tell me if there's something really that I need to know.

JERRY: Steven, what do you think is the best part of being a Summerhill student?

STEVE: I think it's the freedom in going to classes. At my old school, I was ahead in some things and behind in some things, but at Summerhill I get to go to as advanced classes as I want. Now I'm really farther ahead than I would be if I had stayed here.

JERRY: How old are you now Steven?

STEVE: I'm 13.

JERRY: What are some of the classes that you choose to go to?

STEVE: My favorites are the science classes like physics. At Summerhill I can take really advanced physics classes and I really like that.

LIZ: I have to say, Jerry, Stevie is my fourth son, and he really is learning more sophisticated science than his brother did at his age by a long way. Plus, being interested in it, it's not just a matter of going to class because he has to. He comes home pretty excited about learning.

JERRY: Wow, that's quite an endorsement. Isn't that a little surprising to hear, Zoë? You wouldn't think that a small school with only 60 students would be able to do that much in science.

ZOE: We have a very good science teacher; he's very enthusiastic too. We have some kids taking A level this year which we don't normally do, just because they wanted to give it a try. Most of the teachers are really happy to go along and help the kids get as far as they want to go.

JERRY: Maybe you can explain what an A level is.

ZOE: We have two general exam standards in England. The O level is the standard exam you take when leaving school. The A level is the university entrance exam. We don't normally provide A levels at Summerhill because most of the kids leave at the age of 17 and go on to college to do the A level. Some kids said they wanted to do it, so we're going to do it.

JERRY: We are joined by Lisa Brick, who has just founded a new charter school in New Jersey. I wondered what relationship you think Summerhill might have had in your thinking about how you set up your school?

LISA: I have been familiar with Summerhill for 20 years. I was very intrigued by the philosophy as it most closely related to how I learn and how I watch my children learn. So as I set out to create a new form of education here in the United States, Summerhill was one of our models. The more I learned about what was necessary to run a charter school and the constraints and conditions to have one, it became more challenging to figure out how to have a truly free education in a system that demanded compulsory education. We're still challenged by that.

JERRY: Of course, you are a public school, so you have to somehow make this stuff fit that mold, even though you're a charter school and they waive some of the requirements.

LIZ: There is really very little waived, Jerry. That's one of the illusions about charter schools. Basically, all of the regulations are the same for charter schools and public schools. The only difference is in facility issues. Almost any district in New Jersey could do everything that we're doing. The largest difference is that we're starting a school from scratch, so we're parents and have a specific mission. We're starting out with a much more integral view of how education should be.

JERRY: It's hard when you've got the vision but you can't do it. Do you have any particular questions you'd like to ask Zoë?

LIZ: I do. First, Zoë, I want to thank you for what you're doing. I've gotten a small taste of how lonely it can be and you've been doing it for years and you are a beacon to all of us so I thank you.

ZOE: Thanks a lot. That's really kind.

LIZ: The second part is, we do have to adhere to a core curriculum. In the morning classes are mandatory, although there's a lot of flexibility in each subject, and how the children can engage with the subject matter. We've got great teachers. The second half of the day is free choice. I want to get an idea of whether you felt *half* of a free school can be effective.

ZOE: Yea, I think any part of a free school can be really effective. I think that one of the most important things to do would be to share with the kids that you don't have any choice, either. Since I've actually been running Summerhill, since 1985, there are so many times that we've had to say "Look we can't do that because our insurance company says we have to do it like this." We all, the kids and us, just shrug our shoulders and go oh my God, that's something we have to do. It's kind of us against them. You know what I mean? I think that's the way you might want to deal with it.

JERRY: So that you and the kids are at least on the same side.

ZOE: Yes, so they realize that you don't have any choice either, that it isn't *you* who's saying this has to happen. You're saying, we don't have a choice, if we want our school to run, we have to do these things.

LIZ: That is our approach and what we've been doing is saying we're partners in this. Given that these are the constraints, let's brainstorm together to see how best we can create what we feel is what we really need for optimal learning.

ZOE: Did the kids respond really well to that?

LIZ: Very, very well.

ZOE: Good luck!

LIZ: Thank you!

Ron: I was reminiscing about an article I once read where A.S. Neill was in a conversation with Mario Montessori, the son of Maria Montessori. They were speaking completely different languages. I don't mean English and Italian, but Neill was talking about complete trust in the child and complete freedom, and Montessori was talking about the need for guidance from the adults who understand child development. It just struck me how they were talking past each other, and were not finding any common ground. Is that a conversation that people at Summerhill or other free schools have been able to engage in with other kinds of alternative educators?

JERRY: Well, I think, you just heard Zoë responding to Lisa saying look, is it worthwhile doing half an alternative school, and Zoë said yes, any kind of experience that kids can have with it, as long as you understand what the constraints are. Although, that may not be a good analogy

for Montessori, where they may be looking at things in a different way that you really need to have a certain adult control of it.

Ron: I guess I'm not looking for a compromise. I'm wondering if there's a possibility of dialog among different kinds of alternative educators where we can understand each other's ideas a little better than we do, rather than just sticking to what we believe and feeling like that's the truth. That's the one path. I see a lot of that in alternative education.

JERRY: Zoë, you're going to have a conference at Summerhill this summer, is that right?

ZOE: We're hoping to, yes. We're making the plans at the moment.

JERRY: That might be a chance for some of the kind of dialog that Ron is talking about.

ZOE: I think it's important that we at least listen to other people's points of view. I have to say that at Summerhill we have tunnel vision in a way. It just seems that life is so busy and we're constantly struggling along with the daily life of the school that there really doesn't seem to be much time to be discussing education with other people. I think that's a problem for us and we need to deal with it, but it's very hard for us to get involved with what else is going on. There doesn't seem to be enough hours in the day.

JERRY: That's one of the things about our organization, AERO, that we are sometimes in the lonely position of having to try to get people to dialog with each other and get away from just their own particular school. That's one of the roles that we have. Zoë, what do you think is the future of Summerhill?

ZOE: Wow! That's a big question, Jerry! I think the future of Summerhill is good.

JERRY: What do you think about the future of education. Do you think that Summerhill can still be a leader to show people that they are going down the wrong track?

ZOE: I think it has to be. Summerhill has such a history that it needs to be here to do that. Well, sometimes I get very depressed about it. Over the last few months, I have felt a change over here, just in the kind of reaction to us. We've been getting a lot of good press in the national papers which is very unusual because we're the school they love to hate. Certainly, friends of ours in Germany say the same thing, that in Europe there's getting to be a slightly different feel. I don't know whether you're feeling that in the States as well. It's very slow, but it feels as though there's a little more friendship toward us now.

JERRY: I was reading in an English publication that the new administration is not being as rigid about the age requirements as they used to be.

ZOE: When the labor party got in, it looked as if they were behind the attack on Summerhill. Whether that was really so or not, I

don't know. I think the good press and the hard work we did at Summerhill, the last inspectors who came gave us a pretty good time. They were very polite and well behaved and they didn't put a foot wrong. They're coming again this coming term. They don't leave us alone for a minute. Certainly, they were a lot more careful than the previous groups have been.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Since this interview Summerhill was again inspected and is under attack again, as you have heard. We again interviewed Zoe.

The following are excerpts from the recent radio interview, since the report critical of Summerhill was released (full transcript and tape are available from AERO):

JERRY MINTZ: What is the basis on which Summerhill is being attacked this time?

ZOE READHEAD: Non-compulsory lessons is a big issue.

JM: I can't think of any more basic issue. Usually they try to attack you on the basis of facilities. It's unbelievable that they're making an issue of this, something that homeschoolers have discovered really works for them all over the world.

ZR: Yes, it seems crazy. They have gone most of all for the non-compulsory lessons, but they've hammered us on pretty well everything.

JM: I just put a few notices on the web about this and had homeschoolers write back to me who are very concerned that if the government attacks Summerhill on the idea of non-compulsory class attendance, they'll be next.

ZR: It's easy worldwide to think that this is Summerhill's problem and England's problem. I feel that what happens here today could happen somewhere else tomorrow. It's very worrying, the trend toward this very high powered academic education with absolutely no room for humanity.

JM: I think this is an important for people in the United States to get involved in. It may seem remote to them, but in England the whole idea of a standard curriculum has gone way beyond the talking stage, which is where it still is in the US, and what is happening to you is a consequence of this. You've had it for a while.

ZR: Summerhill is still seen as some kind of beacon since it started. One of the worrying problems about this is that the report that has been issued tries to discredit Summerhill. So not only are they going to try to close Summerhill, but they're going to try to make it look as if

Summerhill is a failing school. I think that's going to make waves throughout the world in democratic schools. If the general public, and other countries, and the media depict Summerhill as a failing school *because* it's a democratic free school, then I think it's really damaging to other countries and other schools as well.

ZR: They said that the school is not delivering, although they say the standard of teaching is fine and the standard of education also is fine. It is not being delivered to the children because the children do not have to attend classes.

JM: In other words, it wouldn't matter to them if a kid decided to catch up on all that later on; they don't have that concept in their mind.

ZR: They don't. They assume that because a nine-year-old is at a certain standard, they're never going to make it. For some reason, they refuse to take any notice of our exam results and they even more so refuse to show any interest in what happens to people when they leave. They seem to miss the whole concept that we're actually doing a different kind of education here.

PAT SEERY (Founder of Grassroots Free School, who called into the show): You know, it's just blatantly obvious that these people don't understand that one of the things Neill emphasized to me when I was there was that a program of freedom and democratic decision making and responsibility takes time. It looks to me like they're just looking at a very small moment in time based on some test standard and making a determination about a program whose efficacy for this long can be undoubted. I'm stunned.

ZR: You're absolutely right. It's was very evident when the inspectors came. There were eight people to inspect 56 children here for three days! We actually saw them expressing real anger in several moments. These people had a lot of trouble with the philosophy of the school.

We're going to organize some kind of campaign. We'll have to because, believe me, they intend us to close. They're going to give us six months to change or we're out of here. Somebody has suggested that it's a good idea for people in other countries to get in touch with their ambassador in London because foreign influence is sometimes quite important.

JM: People can stay in touch with AERO and we'll try to coordinate things at least in terms of what people can do from the United States. Summerhill has been a crucially important school in the history of alternative education.

Here's the letter Jerry Mintz wrote:

The Rt. Honorable David Blunkett
Secretary of State for Education
Dear Mr. Blunkett:

We are delighted that you have chosen to take on Summerhill School's basic philosophy as an issue. Here in the United States the phenomenon of school standardization and national curriculum is just starting to materialize. Some people believe that through this sort of standardization and national curriculum the educational level of the whole country will be raised. The fallaciousness of this idea is strongly borne out by your vicious attack on Summerhill. It should serve as a warning to those in this country who support the standardization idea that this will inevitably lead to attacks on private education, even on the educational philosophy freely chosen by the parents who send their children to those schools. The English National Curriculum has already led to the complete destruction of public or as you might say, "state" sponsored alternative schools. There are thousands now here in the United States, including over 1100 new Charter Schools. But there are no longer any true public alternatives in England. I challenge you to name any state alternatives which empower students with responsibility for their own education. I'll gladly name those which do so here. And now, unspeakably, you are after the private schools.

I have visited Summerhill School five times, and it never fails to impress me as a school which truly educates the whole child. In fact, two years ago I brought a group of American students to a Democratic Schools conference in England, visiting Summerhill on the way. One of those students liked the school so much he became a student there and has been there since.

Interviewed on my national radio show when on a home break, the boy, now 14, was asked what he liked best about Summerhill. "I think it's the freedom in going to classes. At my old school, I was ahead in some things and behind in some things, but at Summerhill I get to go to as advanced classes as I want. Now I'm really farther ahead than I would be if I had stayed at my former school. My favorites are the science classes like physics. At Summerhill I can take really advanced physics classes and I really like that."

His mother then said, "I have to say, Jerry, he is my fourth son, and he really is learning more sophisticated science than his brothers did at his age by a long way. Plus, being interested in it, it's not just a matter of going to class because he has to. He comes home pretty excited about learning."

So we are pleased that you have decided so early to show your true colors and attack this small and heroic, pioneering school. It is like the canary which miners once relied upon to test for deadly air. We are now all well warned. This will be a good test of the mental and moral health of your country, eagerly watched by us around the world.

Sincerely,
Jerry Mintz, Director
Alternative Education Resource Organization

EXAMPLES NEEDED OF DESCHOOLING

From: **Bill Ellis** <tranet@rangeley.org>

This is a request for brief 25 to 75 word descriptions of seminal and

unique services that could create a deschooled future. This book on the future of learning is being produced on-line by a group of homeschoolers, autodidacts and others interested in cooperative community life-long learning centers.

The list serv <CCL-LLCs@onelist.com> started from a comment made on home schooling in my 1998 E.F.Schumacher Society Lecture (see, <http://www.nonviolence.org/board/messages/5804.htm>) The thesis was that homeschooling is growing at a phenomenal rate (20%

annually) At that rate 25% of all American children will be homelearning within a decade. It is too significant to be ignored. Homeschool Learning Clubs emerging from this movement offer the opportunity for a radically difference learning system in which learning is learner-centered, available throughout life, and gives a new purpose for being.

The motley crew drawn to the listserv decided to write a book on line on what's happening. Its main purpose is to show examples of homeschooling clubs, folk schools, open-universities, autodidacts, and other self-learning resources that are building a future of learning. We are just now completing the outline of the book, and starting to search for examples.

We need name, address, and mission statement of organizations, net-works, and non-organization that are working to deschool society and create a global learning system.

If you'd like to join the discussion send introduction to <CCL-LLCs@onelist.com>

CONSULTATION WITH HOMESCHOOL GROUP IN QUEBEC

In May, just before I was going to leave for the board meeting of the **Shaker Mountain School** in Vermont, I had a conversation with **Melanie Witham**. She's been a long-time AERO reader. Last year she interned at the **Community School** in Maine. She found them through the Internship feature in the Almanac. One reason she has been contacting me lately is because she wants to make a directory of internships that would be available to teachers and also homeschoolers and alternative school students.

She now lives with her family in Quebec, north of the Vermont border. She's been working with a group of homeschoolers there who are thinking of setting up a homeschool resource center. She asked if it would be possible for me to go up and see them after I went to the **Shaker Mountain** board meeting.

After the meeting I drove up to the border and into Canada. It only took about an hour and a half. Melanie had arranged for me to stay at a bed and breakfast next door which was actually a beautiful apartment. They had donated the use of it to her and we stayed up quite late talking about her project and the local group.

The next morning I had an interesting conversation on the phone with one of the people who was not going to be able to attend. She was involved with an alternative school organization of Quebec, mostly public, alternatives. She said there are about thirty of these schools in the association called Goeland. The thing that unifies them is their pedagogy which essentially requires that schools be learner centered and that there be decision-making power in the hands of the students. It's interesting that this organization has grown up with apparently no contact with mainstream alternative schools, partly because of their primarily French language orientation.

We went over to an auberge nearby, which is where the meeting was planned. It started out with a light breakfast and later there was a very nice brunch. There were about 16 people attending, with about 4 or 5 kids. I had suggested that there be students attending and this was a very important aspect of this event.

I showed several videos to start off, to give a visual impression of what some of the possibilities were. The first one was of the International Democratic Education Conference in Ukraine, to give them a feeling of how widespread this movement is. Then I showed the video of a demonstration homeschool resource center on Long Island, introducing democratic process to a group of homeschool kids as we were trying to decide how the group was going to make decisions. Then I showed parts of the video on homeschool resource centers. In the first part we showed the Snakefoot Homeschool Resource Center in Virginia, with interviews with students and parents. The second part had some of Puget Sound Community School and then a segment of Clearwater School.

Throughout this time, they were asking questions, and I was telling stories. The stories are designed to be empowering, talking to them about how we've been able to accomplish many things using very little in the way of resources. I talked about how Jenifer and I had traveled to Missoula, Montana, and helped a group of people start a school there by immediately having the kids form a circle in a fishbowl situation and declaring that "This was now the new school." We then voted on its name. I said that even if the school only lasted a day or two, it would at least have been in existence. To me, one of the strongest assets that I have is the ability to help people move from words into action.

I demonstrated organic curriculum by having a couple of the students, and then eventually everybody else, brainstorm questions that might be interesting to discuss. One boy, Guillaume, was French and his English was a little limited. He is about 9 years old. I wondered how well he would understand the proceedings but when we did the "organic curriculum" question class, he participated in it and asked a very important question. After passing at first and waiting for others to put forth their questions, he finally asked,

"Why is it that sometimes people hurt themselves?" Then he put into parenthesis, "Like me." Another question asked was "What happens to people after they die?" When we started discussing that question it segued into what happened in Colorado and why some people who have anger will perhaps take it out on themselves or on other people through violence. That immediately connected to

Guillaume's question. I told them about a family meeting that Jenifer and I had when there were only two of us in the meeting, and she left angrily, only to return and find "Uncle Jerry sitting there trying to have a meeting with himself. So I figured I better help finish the meeting." Guillaume then started explaining that he was having trouble with his younger brother, that his brother would taunt him until he reacted and got in trouble. Then he'd stop and take it out on himself. He said that basically that's how he felt. I think that everyone in the room was able to understand just what this process had unleashed with Guillaume, that he was talking about things that were very important to him.

We had a lot of intense communication. One thing that we talked about was how important it was for him to work through his problems with his brother now because this was going to be his brother for the rest of his life. For example, my mother is still arguing with her older sister. Did he want to do that for the next 70 years? Now was the time to work it out. But the key is that Guillaume made the connection between the anger that he had and the fact that he keeps on hurting himself as well as the fact that his brother has hurt him too.

One of the other children who came to the meeting, Arthur, was ten years old. I sensed that he was dragged there by his mother. He was going to public school and had homeschooled in the past. I don't know why they stopped homeschooling; I think that he had wanted to be back in school with more friends. He was clearly a skeptic about the whole idea when he came in. Nevertheless, he stuck with the whole process and did not leave for any length of time. His big interest is computers. He started off the question class with one about how computers work. He said he liked his school and didn't see many problems with it and that was his general stance throughout the whole discussion. But at the end of the meeting, I asked him whether, if a homeschool resource center was set up, would he check it out as a possibility rather than just sticking with his school? He said yes. I considered that to be an important measure of our success, that he did see the possibilities in this, having started from a very skeptical point of view. He said that he didn't think that his school process itself was all that great, but it was very important to be with other kids.

The parents and other adults there all seemed to be very taken with the process and interested in setting something up and perhaps more empowered about the possibility of doing it. We talked about several steps that they needed to take:

*One was to become very familiar with the law so they would be telling authorities what the law was rather than the reverse.

*The second was to become very clear in the decision making process. We talked about the Shaker Mountain process which we had learned from the Iroquois as a very good approach to decision making. We made it clear that if you do not have a very good decision making process it could bring your organization crashing down.

*The third point was that it is very important to get students involved in every aspect of the planning. I also gave them the example of the IDEC conference which was completely organized by students two years ago in England. They liked that idea very much. Sometimes the judgment and the flexibility of students and the ability to work together is superior to that of some adults who have not experienced this process and grown up with it.

We also talked about what they could do to find a location for their center. Preferably they would want something which they don't have to take apart every time that they would leave. On the other hand, **Puget Sound Community School** does just that. They have three different borrowed spaces in three different parts of Seattle in which they meet every week. A fourth day is for internships. They don't pay for any of those spaces. So it can be done. But I think it is best that a group should try to find a place of their own. One of the parents suggested that they could even build a place that would be permanent.

It seemed that each of the people there thanked me individually when we were done. The students also thanked me individually, particularly Guillaume.

THE TRANSITION TO FREEDOM

The following article entitled was originally published in the *Fairhaven School News*, Winter 1999. It was reprinted from an article in the fall issue of *Red Cedar School News* by Deborah Lundbeck:

The purpose of writing this article is to reassure families that they are not alone in facing the challenges and upheavals of transition and that with patience and trust there is light at the end of the tunnel. Each student and family will, of course, be walking their own unique path in joining and adapting to a Sudbury-type school. Whether the following examples will reflect a given family's experience or not, perhaps the difficulty will be comparable and, therefore, reassuring.

Typically, students entering the school appear happy and excited to have joined up. Initially they seem almost euphoric the weight of their former schooling has been cast off and they feel free and unburdened. Students during these first few weeks often will make a point of connecting with staff, sharing stories, showing things they've worked on, etc.

Frequently in these first weeks, the parents will comment on how surprisingly eager their son or daughter is to come to school and how happy and relaxed they seem. At this stage, parents usually feel great about taking the risk of enrolling their kids and reassured by the ease of the transition. In short, everybody's happy.

During the next phase, however, it's often as though students shut down. Many begin to avoid staff, and if they do happen to cross our path or have to talk to us, they keep it as brief and cool as possible. They assiduously avoid eye contact. They will frequently choose to engage in one activity exclusively (boys have often chosen the computer, girls have sometimes

chosen to read), but without any seeming sense of passion that true connection evokes. Parents view this as the difficult transition time we warned them about and are okay, but they become increasingly anxious as time passes.

The next phase is hardly designed to reassure parents. In fact, this is often where the real challenge comes. Students who, in my view, are undergoing a heroic struggle and reassessment of themselves begin to wander aimlessly. They don't engage in anything, but rather drift from room to room, constantly on the periphery of things. A frequent comment from students at this time is, "I'm bored. It's boring here." They appear uncentered, uninvolved and sometimes angry. They avoid anything that is structured or that involves staff, and they continue to avoid adult eye contact and any type of real relationship with staff.

It is not uncommon at this point for students to act out at school with repeated rule breaking and a testing of limits that results in numerous complaints to the Judicial Committee. Parents frequently tell us at this time that their child has become very rude at home and that they are complaining that school bores them.

This period can go on for a long time. It takes a tremendous amount of courage for parents (who are usually questioning the philosophy themselves) to support their kids through this. It's very hard to see your child struggle, be unhappy and complain of boredom and, yet, give them the message, "You'll make it through, I know you can."

We can only guess what each student is going through, but certainly they are grappling with some fundamental questions of "Who am I? What do I want to do? What is this all about?"

Sometimes at this point students who are anxious or students with parents who are anxious will request a class or tutorial. It's very clear to the staff that the class is a reflection of worry and not the true interest and that it only serves to prolong the pain of answering to others' agendas. Nonetheless, we hold the classes because the students insist, though the classes seldom last more than a few sessions.

Parents are often tremendously anxious at this point, not only because they see their child as unmotivated academically, but also because they see their child drifting and are worried about them socially. This stage can severely test a parent's trust in their child's ability to determine their own education.

In the next phase, a remarkable transformation occurs. Sometimes this transformation is gradual and occurs so incrementally that as staff we have to think back months to remember the dramatic difference in a student. At other times, we have been amazed at the rapidity of the change.

Either way, students begin to exude self-confidence. Where before they felt tenuous and lost, now they seem to come from a place of increasing strength and calm. Their restlessness disappears, and they appear to be drawn into things in a new and focused way.

As staff, we begin to feel the student coming to terms with the equality of power in the school. There is generally a falling off of Judicial Committee complaints and a sense of clarity from the student about

what we as staff will and will not do, and what they as members of this community and as autonomous individuals are free to do. They begin looking staff in the eye and developing a genuine and interested relationship with us.

To see kids emerging as strong and centered after such struggle is incredibly moving. It illustrates beautifully the courage and fierce drive of human beings who, when they are free to do so, will challenge themselves unceasingly to become the best they can be.

For parents, though, this stage is often still uncomfortable. Students are not necessarily academically engaged or they are not spending their time in ways their parents feel they should. Tragically, the school loses kids at this stage for a variety of reasons. It's always immensely sad to see the great struggle they've gone through go unrecognized.

In the final stage, students appear completely comfortable in what they choose to pursue. There's a depth of engagement and confidence that imbues with worth all they take on. Students immerse themselves in a great variety of pursuits. But what is notably similar is a striking absence of the hunger for adult approval that is so frequently seen in the traditionally schooled student. Some students become very involved in the running of the school. Others not at all. But they all seem to have a great respect and high regard for the place that allowed them to rediscover their own paths.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that all students are different. Some come to us greatly damaged by other people's agendas, others marginally so. But all students will need time - from several weeks to several years - to adapt to this type of school. This time is a gift to them, and the result of that gift is remarkable, self-assured human beings.

And a final footnote:

We received an article about a battle lost in Littleton, Colorado that was in the **June 1, 1994** issue of ***Education Week***, by **Ann Bradley**. It was entitled "Requiem For A Reform." We don't have room to reproduce the entire article here, but it describes a takeover of the school board by "back to basics" members who dismantled performance-based graduation requirements and other reforms, and returned to the "decades old Carnegie units." It described Littleton as "a town torn apart by a raging argument over its schools."

It went on, "Now, after what many refer to as a grieving period marked by anger and tears, teachers are coming to grips with what they had and lost." after having worked for eight years with Superintendent **Cile Chavez** to create the new approach, called "Directions 2000." The new board also forced Superintendent Chavez to resign in what came to be called "The Sunday-afternoon massacre."

The article concludes, "people in Littleton try to sound hopeful that compromise can be reached and that the wounds inflicted

during and after the election can heal. **"I don't think we're going to end up killing each other off,"** (Board President) Cisney says.

Conferences

July 14-18, Celo, NC,

Arthur Morgan Schooland **Community Service, Inc.**, "Reflection on Arthur E. Morgan's Educational Ideas at the Millennium." Joyce Johnson, Registrar, Arthur Morgan Conference, Arthur Morgan School, 1901 Hannah Branch Rd., Burnsville, NC 28714 828 675-4262.

July 23-25, St. Vincent Marten House,
Indianapolis, IN. **The 2000 Education Workshop Series for Alternative Educators.** "Resources for Schooling in the 21st Century."

3480 Lauren Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46235. Call 317-891-1184 or email chalk@iquest.net.

July 23-26, Summerhill
School, Leiston, England, **7th International Democratic Education Conference**
(contact AERO office for details, 800 769-4171)

July 29-August 1, Washington
Hilton, DC, Frontiers of the 21st Century, **World Future Society**, 7910
Woodmont Ave Suite 450, Bethesda, MD 20814, 800 989 8274 wfinfo@wfs.org

August 6-7, Doubletree Hotel, Detroit, MI.
Michigan Homeschool & Family Learning Conference. PO Box 1056, Gray, ME
04039. Call 207-657-2800.

August 20-22, Radisson Hotel, Sacramento,
California Home Education Conference. For more information: Barbara David,
tel: 916-391-4942, www.homeedconference.com.

August 27-29, Louisa, VA. **Twin Oaks Women's
Gathering.** 138 Twin Oaks Road, Louisa, VA 23093. Call 540-894-5126 or email
conference@twinoaks.org.

September 3-5, Louisa, VA. **Twin Oaks
Communities Conference.** 138 Twin Oaks Road, Louisa, VA 23093. Call
540-894-5126 or email conference@twinoaks.org.

September 25, Rutgers University, **Modern School Reunion**, 11 AM. Paul Avrich and Kevin Van Meter, speakers. For more info, Jon Scott, 200 Sumac Ridge La, Altamont, NY 12009, Ph: 518 861 5544, jscott@atmos.albany.edu

December 21-December 28, Benson, AZ. **World University International Conference**. Desert Sanctuary Campus, PO Box 2470, Benson, AZ 85602. Web: <http://www.worlduniversity.org>. Email: desertsanctuary@theriver.com.

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