

Summerhill News

A.S. Neill's Summerhill School; a co-educational boarding school in Suffolk, England, is the original alternative 'free' school. Founded in 1921, it continues to be an influential model for progressive, democratic education around the world.



Welcome to this, our fourth edition of the Summerhill School Newsletter.

Needless to say, this last term has been very busy following on from the filming during the summer holidays. No sooner than three months after the celebrity Ofsted Inspectors left the premises in mid-August, the real ones arrived for the first school inspection since 1999!

However, it all got off to a good start in October with Zoë being invited to 'Ofsted Headquarters' to meet with the Lead Inspector and to discuss arrangements etc. It was a reassuring meeting which paved the way to a positive inspection experience, albeit stressful.

"Looking back, the inspectors themselves were much more friendly than the scary actors", said Zoë. "They were keen to give us a fair chance and went out of their way to be helpful but we could never have done it without the experts and the High Court agreement, they made it all possible".

"Anyway, the final report is BRILLIANT. It is full of so many positive things about the school and the children, and even discredits the old report which the school (et al) fought so long and hard to have removed".

"At last it seems that A.S. Neill's education system has been accepted – Wow"!

Bin the 1999 Ofsted Report

Michael Newman has launched a new campaign on the BBC campaign website - it has updates from Michael and various

web links to important documents etc. It urges people to sign an online petition at the prime ministers site and to bin our old 1999 report - it is fighting to have Ofsted reports accountable to official criticism - which our report never was... Click on the link below.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/G2593>

'Summerhill' Premiere

On Wednesday 5th December, the whole school, some ex pupils, parents and journalists enjoyed a private viewing of 'Summerhill', the BBC children's drama. As you know this was filmed in the last summer holidays and a lot of the children enjoyed their first acting experience.

Leiston Film Theatre hosted the "Premiere" and we had reporters from national and local newspapers interviewing people as they arrived. The Summerhill "stars" forgot to wear their tiara's but did arrive on time and the theatre was nearly full and buzzing with anticipation.

"The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. They are confident and articulate, with a strong sense of what is right and wrong. The dedication of staff and the concern of the community as a whole ensure excellent support for all pupils". Ofsted 2007.

John East the director stood on stage and welcomed us all with a little talk about the filming (he admitted afterwards that he was a bit concerned how the whole school might react to his new creation!). Then the drama unfolded and we were introduced to the two central characters, Maddy and Ryan, both new kids arriving for their first day. The story centres around their experience of the school and the court case in 2000.

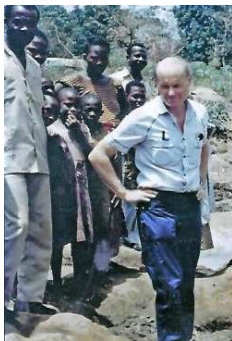
Set against the backdrop of Summerhill itself, the drama has beautifully succeeded in capturing the magic of a summer term at Summerhill. The theatre erupted with applause at the end, and talking to parents afterwards, we discovered that they were surprisingly

moved and delighted by the whole experience.

We are reliably informed that the Drama will be shown on BBC 1 during the last two weeks of January 2008. It will come out in four half hour episodes at 4.30pm. These will be on 23 & 24 Jan, then a week later on 30 & 31 Jan. It will also be shown at 6pm on CBBC, 21 & 22 Jan and 28 & 29 Jan.

There is also talk of Blue Peter and Newsround (the children's news programme) visiting the school in January prior to the broadcast. There may even be a double page spread in the Radio Times!

Obituary for Ralph Muller



In October this year, Ralph Muller died of cancer at the age of 74.

Ralph was born in London in 1933 and at the age of 5 he joined his brother Robert at Summerhill. He lived in the Cottage, bordering Westward Ho, which finally became the retirement home of Ena and Neill.

"There was a group of a similar age to Ralph who all agreed to go into Medicine in one form or another", said his brother Robert.

Ralph left Summerhill at the age of sixteen and went to Croydon Polytechnic where he studied for a BSc in Parasitology. He went on to lecture at the university of Ibadan, Nigeria, before taking up another lecturing position at the London School of Tropical Medicine. He was the author of the official text book 'Worms & Human Disease' for those studying Parasitology. During his career, Ralph also gained a DSc and a PHD.

He was a kind man and he had a great sense of family. He was very active and enjoyed playing football right into his sixties. He was also a great collector of fountain pens, gained from his travels all over the world.

He was first married to Greta and they had two children, Julian and Karen. He later married his second wife Annie and together they had two children, Harriet and Barnaby.

At the time of his death, Ralph and his daughter Harriet had been researching information to write a biography on Ben Jonson the Renaissance Dramatist. Ralph is survived by his brother Robert, sister Betty, his four children and four grand children.

Summerhill Music Scene



These past few months have brought on a whole new selection of musical achievements in and around Summerhill!

The first being the start of Unshin's Tour, which went down very well in Norwich and Halesworth, and we are now taking a break to finish the "Waltz For Broken Dolls"

album which will be released in the new year. For more info and to see some footage of the live performance, check out www.myspace.com/unshinmusic. (Picture, Henry Readhead by Tomo).

The next would be the Bamboo Bambos (Summerhill band) Being asked to Perform at the Schoolwave Festival in Athens again! I think we hit them so hard last time that there was no way they couldn't get us back! The DVD of 2006 will be released at the end of this year.

We've also been working on a compilation album which featured 10 bands from in and around Suffolk called "Sounds From The East Coast" that was recorded at Summerhill Studios and featured a Summerhill band called "Dag". The track "Creepy Obsession", written by Chae Eun Park is also featured in the BBC Drama "Summerhill". The band performed live at the album launch party alongside 7 other bands and the fast rising "We Start Fires".

In the summer, Summerhill held a music event to raise money for the Amnesty International "Unsubscribe" campaign. The event was organized completely by the kids including; advertising, equipment set up, MC'ing and performing, and it was rock hard!!

And very last of all! Earlier this year the Bamboo Bambos wrote a song that was inspired by the court case called "Here We Stand" which is to be released in the New Year at the same time as the BBC Drama. The track will be available from the Summerhill website so keep your eyes peeled! Henry Readhead.

Stressed out 7-11 year olds

National tests for seven and eleven year-olds are putting children under stress and feeding into a "pervasive anxiety" about their lives and the world they are growing up in, according to an intimate portrait of primary school life published today.

The findings echo a report from Unicef which this year placed Britain at the bottom of a league table charting the well-being of children across the developed world.

Morag Aitkenhead Remembered



Morag Aitkenhead, who died on 21 September 2007 aged 95, founded and ran, with her husband John Aitkenhead, the progressive Kilquhanity House school, in Galloway, western Scotland.

The school was established in 1940 with the motto "Liberty, Equality and Inefficiency" — because, as John Aitkenhead explained, "revolutions that are efficient always end up killing people" — and he and his wife remained the guiding hands there until its closure in 1997.

John was a schoolmaster, but he was dismayed by the system of Scottish education. Two events persuaded him and Morag to open their own school. One of those was a meeting with their fellow Scot AS Neill, headmaster of Summerhill, known as "the freest school in the world".

Unable to meet the tightened health and safety regulations, Kilquhanity closed in 1997, and John Aitkenhead died the following year. Morag — who never owned a television — remained, supported by family and carers, in a flat built as part of the refurbishment of the estate buildings by Professor Shin-Ichero Hiroko, who first visited the school in 1970 and subsequently opened five schools modelled on it in Japan.

When it appeared that the estate would have to be sold he bought it, and asked Morag to remain. The school is shortly to re-open. Daily Telegraph, Oct 2007.

