

Summerhill News

April 2010

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.



A big warm welcome to the tenth Summerhill Newsletter. In this edition you can catch up on news from last term, read about the 'Suffolk Samurai' and hear from Quincy Russell about his experiences as a pupil in the late seventies and early eighties.

Have a great summer, wherever you are.

Steve Fawdry (Editor)

News from Summerhill

Although it is difficult for Summerhill to take on students doing internships and as a general rule this is not possible, we do make exceptions from time to time and have often found good future staff from this process.

This term there were two visitors for a couple of weeks, one from Korea, who taught a bit of Asian history and calligraphy while she was here, and one from a London college studying to be a teacher. The latter, Phillip, did some film work with the kids and also helped out in class two. He is keen to take up a position at Summerhill so hopefully this will work out for us all sometime soon.

Adrian's bottle house, being built at the edge of the Hockey-field, is coming along well. We aren't sure if he is drinking extra to provide the bottles, but he certainly looks well on it if he is! Up to now there are no particular plans for it but it will definitely be a very useful and unusual space.

The new IT room, provided by Tobe, the IT teacher, is working out very well. Emphasis is very much upon the drop-in style that is found in Woodwork and the Art room. It is fascinating to watch the changes in learning that occur with the ever increasing invasion of computers and the internet. Although Summerhill kids have always accessed their learning in the same 'Hunter Gatherer' informal ways, now there is more scope for it than ever before. In Class 2 Leonard is finding the same thing and he is

presently experimenting with various layouts and age mixes in the classroom as well as the timetables. This is looking very good and the space is very busy. Next term will see Class 1 starting up again after a couple of years break. This is due to more younger children coming in which is great and really makes the school feel more like a family again. Carmel who used to be San house parent will be taking on Class 1 and is looking forward to the challenge. Andrew will be leaving us for a while but Michael Newman, who many of you will know, is taking up the post of Shack house parent in his place. Sadly Paul in the House will be leaving us too. He is off to Japan with his partner for a couple of years. He will be replaced by Andresa, a young woman from Brazil who has been working in Europe teaching primary children. Exciting times!

The interest in visiting Summerhill continues. We provide visiting days a few times each term. Enough to satisfy demand without intruding too much on community life. There are usually plenty of kids willing to show visitors and prospective parents around, and they enjoy doing it. Every time we receive emails commenting upon how wonderful they are at the job.

Media interest continues as well, though we have taken a low profile this last year or so with Zoë being out of the loop. We are also thinking that we can do more next year, our 90th birthday.

Just a few days ago Zoë gave a talk to the Aldeburgh Festival Club in Aldeburgh, rather suspecting that it might be a less than enthusiastic audience. How wrong can you be! It was greeted with great warmth and interest, and loads of questions. A complete surprise but very rewarding to find such good feeling right next door!

We are often asked for help with research projects and always try to fulfill that if we can. Some past articles are on the website in the research section and are well worth reading. It can be a bit invasive having people here but mostly we can work it so that it is good for both parties. Summerhill can contribute valuable information to a large variety of debates about education and child-rearing and it is great to be able to provide opportunities for such research.

So the spring term ends with a few days of sunshine and some mild weather. Just as we begin to despair that those children encased in their rooms doing 'indoor' stuff will ever be outside getting fit and healthy, the sun bursts out and children tumble outside like kittens out of a box to play and romp. Skateboarding, blading, running, sitting, swinging, playing football, hanging out. The buds are bursting, the birds are singing and Summerhill prepares for her Summer term . . . Never Never Land all over again . . .

Film premiere



An ex-Summerhill student, Anna-Marie Ramm currently at the City College Norwich saw her film premiered to the public in March when “Suffolk Samurai” was screened at the Forum in Norwich. The film follows the tale of heroine, Sadie, in a quest for revenge through the Suffolk countryside.

Anna is studying for a Creative & Media Advanced Diploma at City College Norwich. She shot most of the footage for the film over 2 years ago but her College course has enabled her to unearth the film, edit it and organise a pre-premier event to showcase her work. The footage was shot in Suffolk with tutor and now colleague in “RedRam” Productions, Will Redhead.

After the death of her family at the hands of a jealous admirer the heroine wanders the Suffolk countryside coming across an old samurai sword which holds memories of ancient Japan. The sword gives her the strength to explore her tangled emotions and leads her to seek revenge for her lost family.

“The plot is quite unusual” says Anna “I wanted to make a samurai film with a strong female lead for a change. I filmed a lot of the scenes at an old farmhouse in Suffolk which is full of junk. The farmhouse and the countryside made a fantastic film set. We even staged flashbacks to Japan out there. The film does have an element of violence too but I wanted it to push people.”

Anna has prepared the film as part of an Events Management module of her course. The Creative and Media Diploma enables students to work on a variety of hands-on projects and try their hand at different creative disciplines, giving them an understanding of real situations and the skills needed to succeed in the creative industry, and a strong foundation from which to progress to further study. In creating the film Anna has enlisted friends and family to play key roles and fellow City College Norwich student Terry Peng to write the musical score. (picture: Anna Ramm)



“It’s been a challenge planning the event” says Anna “I got a budget to work with and I had to find a venue, plan the event, organise advertising, design the flyers and promote it around Norwich all whilst editing the final film and getting the trailer online. I even got a Japanese lady to paint the “Suffolk Samurai” logo for me.”

CRITICS CORNER

On Friday 26th March I was lucky enough to be at the pre-premiere of the film ‘Suffolk Samurai’. On the programme were three films – ‘You Got the Time?’ By Simon Dymond, ‘Brighton Wok’ by Gabriel Howard and finally, ‘Suffolk Samurai’. There was also a short film of live music by Unshin at the Halesworth Cut and a live music set by Beth Ramm, Rachel De Pern & Terry Peng (who also wrote the music for Suffolk Samurai).

The Suffolk Samurai film was both amusing and very moving. I found the music particularly fitting and both perceptive and poignant. The young actors did so well in their parts and the film-makers have done an impressive job with the script and direction. It is a dark story that gripped from start to finish with really beautiful shots combined with the music and some exciting action as well.

This team also made ‘Paper Tiger’ in 2008. A film set in Summerhill it was about a little boy Simon who fell into the cellar . . .

Popcorn eater

See the trailers at: www.redram.biz.

Quincy Russell on the couch

Interview with Quincy Russell about his memories of Summerhill. Also included are some photographs he took.



Quincy (alias Benedict) Russell (44) is an award winning Franco-British documentary film maker (writer, director, cameraman, editor) specializing in science and wildlife. His films are aired worldwide, and regularly on National Geographic, Discovery Channel, Animal Planet, France Television, Arte (France and Germany) CBC (Canada). RTBF (Belgium). He is the author of the French

tutorial book “Profession Reporter d’Images”. His latest 2 part series – Aliens of Amazonia – takes a deep dive into the rain forest, zooming in on the highly unknown yet amazing insects that defy contemporary art, generally known as Treehoppers.

Quincy was known as Benedict Russell at Summerhill (1975 – 1982) and is married to Marie who was also at Summerhill (1976 – 1981) and is the father of 2 children who were both at Summerhill ; French Jake (2001 – 2005) and Mailys (2002 – 2007). Quincy’s brother Sebastian Gill was at Summerhill (1972 – 1975). Quincy’s brother in laws were also both at Summerhill, Philippe Bernier (1980’s) and Olivier Bernier (1990’s)! Quincy lives with his family in the Beaujolais region (near Lyon) of France.

Q. Can you remember your first day at Summerhill?

A. Having spent an entire day locked up in a car travelling from Cornwall to Summerhill, my 9 year old legs were dying to get out. Parked on the hockey field my feet took me an odd 50 meters before hitting a pothole and straining my ankle... putting "freedom" in the standby mode!

Q. How much was poc and what could you get for it?

Poc was something like 15 pence... you couldn't do much with it and the money each pupil brought at beginning of term was limited at the time to £20 – parents were not encouraged to send money to their kids during term time, except for a birthday exception.

Q. Which was your favourite meal?

A. Food was highly important in the late seventies... we all felt that there wasn't enough of it to share... and Cheese and Onion potato mash was a



thrill... and quite a lot of vegetarian food towards the early eighties thanks to the insistence of George Haskins who was fed up with having cheddar cheese on every menu. (picture, Orange peel café, 1982)

Kids would scrape the food they didn't want into a bowl that would be food for the donkey. Peter Woods (Ena Neill's son) would regularly fight against the waste of food and on one occasion entered the dining room and ate directly from the waste bowl with knife and fork! Disgusting, but we were not indifferent. (there would be all kinds of waste including tea, tea bags, orange peel, spaghetti, marmite toast, peas, potatoes...what a mix!).

Q. Were there any memorable meeting cases?

A. The hottest meeting I ever lived was when Mim Dwek yelled at a small group of us who broke into the nearby football club to help ourselves to all sorts of crisps, chocolate and candies (and perhaps some small change too)... Her intention and voice frequency sent the shivers down my young neck! "If you want to be thrown out of Summerhill then carry on..." Couldn't imagine the idea of going to another "school" and that put a stop on serious mischief. (picture below, Will Redhead and friends)

Q. Which Summerhill crime do you consider to be your best?



A. The best crime was my last term at the age of 16. As a social guy in school, I knew that Rachel, the kitchen lady, did not wear a watch. With Timothy we sneaked into the Kitchen through the window

(previously unlocked after supper) and put the clocks back one hour so that the school would have a late Sunday breakfast... before leaving we helped ourselves to a bowl of



cereal, and left through the window leaving heavy footprints behind us. Sadly Rachel was not so naïve, and the plan did not work. But the investigation committee was

launched to find the culprits, and asked if I had broken in to the kitchen, I replied "Yes". Thomas Hours (the French investigator) immediately asked to see the soles of my shoes, and upon seeing them told Ena that I was guilty! I was ready to face the charges when Ena replied with all sincerity that "Benedict is just pulling your leg Thomas"... case closed... but pretty cool story! (picture, Lyme Regis where Summerhill was first located in the UK, with Quincy in the foreground)

Q. Were you ever brought up in the meeting?

A. I don't know any Summerhillians that were NEVER brought up in a meeting! Sorry Steve!

Q. Any memorable moments with Neill, Ena or Zoe?

A. One of the keys to my professional success was a small 18 min film I made during my student years, in 1985. It was a time when Ena was principal and Zoe was learning

the tricks of the trade... I have nice memories of the two of them speaking together on the summer front lawn. (picture, Ena Neill's two dogs who went to Summerhill for over ten years!)



Q. Any funny Summerhill moment?

Looking back, one of the funniest moments at Summerhill was when François and I stood two milk bottles either side of the back door with an invisible string between them... at night. out comes Chris Holmes – the woodwork teacher – with quite some speed... the bottles fly, one breaks with a shatter... we both run for our lives... we didn't plan on the bottle exploding into pieces, and the whole do surpassed our original plans that were to scare the hell out of whoever came out! In the end I think we were just as scared as Chris!

Q. Do you remember any quote from your time at the school?

A. "Wo wo wo, now we know..." was a regular quote once the rumour was out that a couple had paired up. Other quotes were "Kings in the Tennis court" "Kiss Tag on the Hockey field" (after supper at dusk of course) "Kick the Can"... "The gram is on" "Pay on Poc"

“Strong warning not to do it again”

Q. Do you ever dream of being at Summerhill?

A. I do not dream of being at Summerhill today, it was a lovely time from my childhood, but towards the end the atmosphere was a little too constrained and I had to get out and feel the true dimension of the planet!

Q. Are you in touch with any old Summerhillians?

A. I am still in touch with many ex-Summerhillians – my wife Marie, my son Jake, my daughter Mailys, my brother Sebastian, my brothers in law Philippe and Olivier. I rarely miss the occasion to drop by on Jason Sykes or David Leroy during my London visits... and via Facebook it seems as though all generations of the Summerhill tribe are communicating! I even have occasional contact with Janet Fendley who was the great human biology and ecology teacher... her implication avoided most of us going into smoking, she was in fervent defense of animal rights, got me out of the Summerhill woods and into the classroom with her passionate approach towards the subjects... Thanks again Janet!

Today I ask myself just what is that invisible energy that makes Summerhill so special? I have never seen a man's soul, never seen an angel, never seen radio or TV waves, and never seen the energy that flows through a small tribe on an island known as Summerhill... could it be love? Respect? Justice? The question is out there... if you think you know the answer... then I'd love to see your photographs!

Quincy Russell, qrussell@club-internet.fr

PS If there is anyway you can share my friend Patrick Rouxel's film (it's free for all to view). That would be nice for mankind. <http://www.greenthefilm.com/>

The Cube

The Cube below is part of a booklet written by Leonard Turton some time ago to induct 12 year olds into a new and alternative system of teaching at a school in Canada.....

....For some reason many years ago adults decided to put children of the same age into Cubes all day for 190 days a year in order to get them ready for life. Then they put an adult into the Cube with the children and the adult's job was to try and stay alive while he got the children ready for life.

Now the adults just didn't put a few children in the Cubes, they crammed as many as forty into each. And it didn't matter that the children grew bigger ... for some reason the adults still gave the same sized Cubes to 6 year olds as they did to 14 year olds. Go figure.

Then the adults made a big list of what they thought the children should have to know to be successful when they grew up. Often the adults would discuss and argue about this. And every few years they often changed their minds.

But one thing stayed the same. The students were never asked their opinions of anything. They weren't asked if they thought the Cube was a good idea in the first place or, once there, what they thought they should do all day while they were in it.

The only thing the children could do to show how they felt about being in the Cube was to misbehave and take revenge on the adult who was crammed into the Cube with them.

Some students became very good at this. The adults called them troublemakers. Actually, they were just children who didn't like the Cube.

Some teachers invented democratic education. Adults called them a bit ... odd. Actually, they were just people who thought education, and children, deserved something better.

End of term play

Following a last minute call from my son Freddie one Wednesday afternoon, I joined staff and kids for the long awaited end of term play, Romeo and Juliet.



After a brief chat with Leonard outside we were ushered into a very dark theatre. The curtain lifted to loud dance music and the opening scene - a nightclub with girls dancing on the dance

floor and podium which then morphed into a heated exchange between two boys strutting their stuff and trading 'Your mama' insults.

This was stopped short by Will (woodwork teacher) bursting into the auditorium, gun in hand, announcing that we 'had a situation', there were zombies on the loose – “call up



the SWAT team and send them in”. Right on cue, the big screen at the back of the theatre fired in to life, introducing the 5 Summerhill SWAT team members superimposed as they fearlessly fought alongside big film actors in a raging battle to the theme tune of the A Team. We all fell about laughing, this was a real treat and a great example of the humorous creativity that Summerhill encourages. (picture, left to right; Isabel, River, Freddie, Orson, Milo)

The SWAT team were then dispatched and we watched their pre-recorded progress as they worked their way around school ruthlessly hunting down and terminating the zombies, one by one.



Two particularly memorable moments were when the Michael Jackson zombie had his head blown off and another was run over by Adrian the science teacher leaving a lot of blood and gore on the drive! Once most of the zombies had been killed the unisex SWAT team arrived in the theatre to safely usher us over to the dining room. On the way they picked up the last remaining zombie which was brought up at the meeting and his fate decided – execution at the hands of sharp shooter and Jean Claude Van Damm lookalike, Will Redhead.

Not your average Romeo and Juliet production but then there's nothing average about Summerhill!

Obituaries

Vivienne Berenice Quay, 14.4.1957 – 22.3.2009



Viv, a second-generation Summerhillian, attended the school from 1964 to 1972 and remained actively in touch with Summerhill throughout her life.

After school she studied modern dance in London. Around 1980 she went to America and lived and worked in San Francisco for a time.

Back in London she met and married Dick Gorlin. They had two children Lily and Wilfe and moved to the small Suffolk village of Playford. Whilst there Viv studied garden design at Otley College. In 2000 she designed a garden for the Suffolk Show. (picture, Vivienne and her sister Romilly above)

During the 1990's she was a mainstay of the Friends of Summerhill Trust, editing its magazine, helping to organise weekends at the school as well as organising a very successful exhibition of Old Summerhillian artists' work in the Summerhill theatre.

For a while she worked in Ipswich local radio, and in 2003 became part of the Stop the War coalition and the Colchester Socialist Alliance.

In 2004 Viv and Dick divorced but remained good friends and cooperative parents. She moved to Norwich where she worked at UEA as an administrator.

Capable, creative, with a natural flair for style and beauty, Viv could do everything she put a hand to extremely well: dance, draw, write, paint, design and decorate houses, make gardens, clothes, magazines, radio programmes. She was funny, enlightened and great to be with, an excellent cook and a wonderful mother.

Over a period of thirty years, six times in her life, Viv suffered from brief episodes of what is now termed 'bi-polar disorder'. Five times she recovered and carried on with her

life but early on Mothering Sunday in 2009 the big one got her and carried her away from herself and us forever. Over a hundred people, including many old Summerhillians, came to her funeral at Colney Woodland Burial Ground, just outside Norwich. (Hylde Sims)

Edward Flemming



Edward (Wardy) Fleming died in 2009. He was at school with Zoe during the 50's. After leaving school he joined a fishing boat at Aldeburgh, worked on the Lifeboats, ran a pub in Aldeburgh and then he and his wife Sheila ran the Parrot and Punchbowl at Aldringham. If anyone who new Wardy would like to expand on this, we would welcome your contribution for the August issue.

Memories of Summerhill between the wars.

We have been contacted by an author who is writing a history of modern childhood, and who is interested in talking to people who might have experienced progressive education before World War Two. If you were at Summerhill before 1939 and wouldn't mind sharing your memories, please contact Fran Abrams. Email Fran at fran.abrams@btinternet.com, or telephone 01728 687967.

A. S. Neill Summerhill Trust

The A.S Neill Summerhill Trust is a registered charity whose purpose is to promote the educational philosophy, ideas, life and writings of A. S. Neill, and to provide bursaries or other forms of financial assistance to school pupils.

The trustees currently have a policy of making bursaries to existing pupils only. Parents can contact either the school office or myself (Steve Fawdry) for information on how to apply for a bursary from both Summerhill and other trusts.

We are pleased to report that there are well in excess of 1,250 subscribers to the Newsletter. Those on the mailing list include ex and current pupils, parents, educationalists, trustees, teachers, politicians, kids from around the world and actors who starred in the BBC drama "Summerhill", screened in 2008.

Newsletter

Editor: Steve Fawdry Tel 01502 675008
e-mail: summerhillnews@home.greenisp.org

Summerhill School

Westward Ho, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4HY.
Tel & Fax 00 (44) 1728 830540
www.summerhillschool.co.uk
General enquiries: office@summerhillschool.co.uk
Principal: Zoë Readhead zoe@summerhillschool.co.uk

A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust, charity no 10898

For further information, or to make a donation contact Tony Readhead at Hill Farm, Theberton, Leiston, Suffolk, IP16 4TD. Tel: 01728 830030 / Fax: 01728 831689

Email: trust@summerhillschool.co.uk

