

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 sixth edition of the Summerhill School Newsletter. In this edition, you can read about the translation of Neill's books, the Schoolwaves Festival, how the parents got a 'strong warning', and the sad loss of Olly, an ex pupil and house mother for 30 years.

Parents campover

Each year, the parents are invited to camp at school during a long weekend over summer half-term. Normally a huge success, this weekend was no exception.



It was a relaxed start with people arriving on Friday and the Pimms No1 tent being one of the first to go up.

By 10pm the campsite was full, everyone had eaten and the party was in full flow, with groups of parents chatting and the kids sat around the fire...

Saturday saw the arrival of occasional showers but this didn't dampen our spirits. After lunch, Will auctioned off £800 worth of pictures and goodies, and the sale of handmade crafts raised £200. All funds went to the community fund. (see pictures below).

Later that afternoon, the East Suffolk Morris Men, kids and parents danced together to rekindle the connection



between the Morris men and Summerhill. This came about in 1935 when George Parsons, a teacher at Summerhill made Billy - a hobby horse for the Suffolk Morris Men. Billy has since been the continuity link between Morris men during the twentieth century. (Picture, Kanon and Billy)

On Saturday evening, parents and kids were joined by Zoë and Tony and some of the school staff for a lovely bar-b-que. Later that evening a fire was lit and parents chatted into the night whilst the kids enjoyed their half-term party.

After lunch on Sunday, parents and kids had a football match. There was a lot of puffing and panting by parents as they pitched themselves against the young Summerhill pro's. Morgan, Ruby's dad, was his usual nimble self but it was Mike, Lasse and Luka's dad, who stole the show with his expert goal keeping, long kicks and good looks!

Following the big match, the swimming pool was opened and later in the afternoon there was a skateboarding and roller-skating competition which was won jointly by Tom and Hil.

After supper, Zoë ran a Mastermind competition during which the kids pitted themselves against each other to win the coveted money prizes.

On Monday, with the campsite starting to resemble the mud flats of Glastonbury, we broke camp and left for home after a very enjoyable few days at school. Our thanks go to all the school staff for making this years camp such a success.

Strong Warning to Parents!

Following the parents half-term camp over, a Carriage boy brought a case (at the school meeting) against the parents regarding the poor state of the campsite. Parents are encouraged to 'clean as they go', but if they don't, then the last to leave is left with a lot to clear up. So something needs to be put in place for next year. In the meantime, the parents were issued with a 'strong warning' for not clearing up sufficiently.



Gig in the Shed

The successful end of term music event, the 'Gig in the shed' was held in the Theatre on Saturday and featured many new Summerhill artists. It was well attended by kids, parents and ex pupils all of whom rocked together under one roof. Sadly, it was the final performance for the Bamboo Bamboos as we know them with Anna, the lead singer, making her final debut singing 'house of the rising sun'.

Daphne Oliver - Died June 2008

Of course few of us ever knew Olly as Daphne. I think the only person who called her that was Neill. He never called people by 'nick names' in case they didn't like them.



In losing dear Olly we have lost such an important part of Summerhill's history. She was a pupil in the early days of Mrs Lins – when you weren't allowed down the front stairs, on the round lawn or in the lounge and staffroom except on special occasions. She told us that she was a 'bit of a problem' and once threw a golf club at Neill's head (I presume it missed!).

Later she came back as a housemother and for over 30 years looked after the Carriage boys, cleaning for them, washing and mending their clothes.

Olly was a real Summerhillian. She was fair, honest and always on the side of the child – though not if they stepped out of line!

I always remember Olly being the one to put her hand up in Meetings and say, in no uncertain terms, exactly what she thought if somebody had been keeping others awake at night or causing some sort of kerfuffle. She didn't beat about the bush.

Olly and Ena formed a great duo. While they didn't always see eye to eye, they were partners in their jobs at Summerhill and woe betide anybody who got on the wrong side of them.

There isn't enough space here to talk about all that Olly did at Summerhill and everything that she meant to us all. She was a great Jazz player in the jazz band, she wrote masses of plays, mostly about 'Old Crot' a batty old witch. I had the honour of playing one of the 'witchlings' (young rather hip witches) and remember how strict Olly was about rehearsals but how well we all performed on the night because of it. She had no time for last minute, badly put together stuff. We are inheriting her collection of plays for our archive.

Olly put together the Wall newspaper, got up at 6:am to wash the boys socks and jumpers by hand and did a host of other things at school – but she always found time to listen to her cherished Frank Sinatra records – and of course, Kid Ory.

As well as all she did at school Olly was busy in Leiston as well. She was a member of the local communist party and co-published the 'Leiston Leader' for many years – cycling around to deliver it. For a while she left the school to work at a factory in Ipswich. When her uncle's cottage in Snape burned down she came back to school to live in an ancient caravan on the other side of the Hockey-field. She was up at 5:30 every morning to get to Ipswich on her old Moped – rain or shine. One thing you have to say about Olly – she was a hell of a worker!

When she retired from Summerhill Olly got involved in many things in Leiston – the Long Shop Museum, CYDS (a local charity supporting teenagers), the local brass band and many others.

I saw her regularly at Christmas teas at our house as well as bumping into her in the local shops. She also came to various Summerhill events. Last summer William and Anna (Red Ram Productions) approached her to ask if she would be in the film they were making, set in Summerhill. It is called 'Paper Tiger' and is a bit of a horror film. Olly was delighted and called up old Crot to give the character the required grumpiness. She was a star!

When I visited her in hospital I am glad to say she said she was comfortable and that they were looking after her very well. She was not in the least bit restless or worried. My last visit was only 20 minutes after she had died. I sat with her for a while.

Her funeral was in Leiston cemetery with the brass band that she played in for many years, playing and a number of local people, including myself, talking about her life. She was cremated in Ipswich but is to have her ashes buried at the green burial site near Saxmundham. The date is to be announced.

Zoë

Movin...on

It is with great sadness that we say goodbye (but not forever) to Alfie, Anna, Cesar, Chae Eun, Eva, Hil, Mickey, Susan, Tink, To-bee and Will, all of whom left at the end of term.

Birgit and David have also left. They both have teaching roles in Malawi (SE Africa with a nice big lake nearby).

We have offered the Science Teacher role to Tracy-Ann and hope that she will be in a position to accept our vacancy. Birgit's previous role is being replaced with an ICT + teaching vacancy - which is currently being advertised in the TES.

We wish you all the very best for this next stage of your lives and you know that the door is always open to visit.

Neill's books

The longstanding, international interest in Neill's many writings and with Summerhill School itself took a new turn recently with the announcement that the Open University Press book "Summerhill and A S Neill" is to be translated into Chinese for publication in that country in 2010.

The book has a major section by Zoë Neill Readhead, Principal of Summerhill and Neill's daughter, and was edited

