

Summerhill News

August 2009

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 eighth edition of the Summerhill newsletter. In this edition you can read about the parents camp over at school, the new science teacher – Adrian Husband, and you can see how the kids are getting on building the new skateboard 'half pipe'.

Have a great summer, *Steve Fawdry*

Parents camp over a success

Each year during summer half-term, the parents are invited to spend a long weekend camping at school.

This year we were joined by old staff and Summerhillian's, Catriona, Simon, Dolly and Sarah who came complete with families. Jane Wallace missed it for the first time in over 15 years - but she came at EOT to make up for it!

A combination of warm sunny weather, the opportunity to catch up with established and new parents and a chance to swim in the pool or buy home made crafts, all conspired to make this perhaps the best ever camp over yet.



(picture: Bess enjoying lots of attention from the kids)

Kate and I arrived on Friday afternoon and negotiated a spot for our tent with Max (current pupil) who was doing a great job managing the campsite. The usual frustrations of tent pitching during our 'once a year' excursion into the wilderness was made all the more easier by the afternoon sunshine and lovely cut grass. Freddie our son joined us to help put up the tent and the kids took Bess for a walk.

By early evening the campsite was full with the exception of those few parents who were enjoying luxury living in their campervans and caravans parked in the car park. Was it the previous 3am sunrises, the early dawn chorus or the need for 'a good nights sleep' that had led to this migration? Whatever it was, I was determined that I would remain a hardened camper – at least until next year!

Later that night parents, kids and staff got together around a big fire in the hockey field where we enjoyed exchanging news and cooking burgers and sausages. Later on we retired to the campsite by which time the fire had been lit and a bottle or two had been opened. We gathered around the roaring fire and chatted late into the night before retiring to our welcoming beds.



(Deon and Emile enjoy an intimate moment catching up around the fire)

After a fitful nights sleep, a new day dawned in the land of sleepy Summerhill. I poked my head through the adjoining tent compartment and was reminded why we chose to buy such a large tent, or should I say, hotel! Several small people were still fast asleep, huddled together in their sleeping bags, blissfully unaware that Saturday had arrived.

After a restful morning and a trip into Leiston for a slap up brunch at Simply Delicious, we returned to school in time for the afternoon sale and auction. There were several stalls selling handmade jewellery and clothes, as well as an opportunity to throw wet sponges at ex Summerhillian, Masato, pictured below, all in aid of the community fund.

Wearing the latest in designer bin bags, Masato was a great sport letting us throw paint covered sponges at him.





(Will Readhead, ex pupil, woodwork teacher and acting Head chats to Isabel and Jasmine who are selling hand made jewellery)



(Dan Williams (parent) parting with some cash!)

Once again, Will did a sterling job auctioning off about 20 lots comprising framed photographs, paintings, jewellery and handmade wooden swords. The parents and kids were incredibly generous with their bidding and in total over £900 was raised for the community fund. Some of this has gone towards materials needed to build the new half pipe for the skateboarders which you can read about later on.



(Picture: Will Readhead – auctioneer extraordinaire!)

In the early evening a fire was lit and the barbeq's were fired up in preparation for a feast. The kids had done a great job chopping wood (under supervision of course) so there was a plentiful supply. Everyone gathered together to enjoy an evening of char grilled cuisine, a glass of wine and good company under a starlit sky.



(Picture: Summerhill parents and kids enjoying the barbeque)



(Picture: Great tucker lovingly prepared by master chef, Deon)

At 8pm the kids party kicked off and suddenly we adults were left to our own devices. Feeling a little left out and drawn by the sound of dance anthems, a few of us decided to venture on down for a boogie. After a while of non-stop dancing it was clear we were being outclassed by the kids so we made our way back to the campsite for some much needed refreshments.



(Phil and Catherine Fox, socialites and groovy parents of River)



(Picture: Kids and staff dancing the night away)

On Sunday morning we woke to another sunny day, again after a rather disturbed sleep. A combination of kids chatting around the fire until the early hours, some very loud snoring coming from the tent next door and the intermittent sound of a car alarm in the car park going off from 3am (then every 15 minutes), all conspired to ensure that we were and truly sleep deprived by day 3!

Day 3 in the Parents camp - lots of tired looking parents. However, nothing could have prepared me for the sight that followed; there over by the fire pit, were two of the kids still fast asleep – I couldn't believe it.



(Who needs a tent?)

After a relaxing morning and a slap up lunch, the dads joined the kids for a game of soccer. Not under estimating the fitness of those who were 30 years younger, I managed to negotiate my rightful place in goal. Cheered on by the parents, we fought our way back from being 5 – 2 down and the game ended with a well deserved draw.



Ten minutes later we were in the pool cooling off whilst the kids were expertly diving to the bottom to retrieve loose change.

(Staff, parents and kids enjoying the pool)

By late Sunday afternoon I was starting to feel my age and so with the luxury of home comforts beckoning we packed up, loaded the trailer and started the very long journey home, 15 miles up the A12!

All that is left to say is a very big thank you to all the school staff for going out of their way to ensure we all had such a good time. Not forgetting the kids too, who had to put up with us lot on their turf, as well as the occasional 'uncool' parent dancing the night away at the kids party.

NEW BBC SERIES WANTS YOUR MEMORIES OF YOUR FATHER AND BEING A FATHER

Testimony Films (award winning history documentary film company – makers of BBC1's "Veterans: Last Voices of WWI", ITV's "Britain's Love Story" and Channel 4's "9/11: Ground Zero") is making a three part series which will explore what it means to be a good Father. The series will look back over the last century (1900 - 2000) to examine how war, social changes, and other elements have affected this important parental role.

If you have poignant, memorable or interesting stories to tell about your relationship with your own father, how he raised you, or if you have experiences of being a father and the challenges you have overcome to raise your own children then we would very much like to hear from you! We are particularly looking for anyone who was a father before 1939, or anyone who has an unconventional dad.

If you have a story you would like to tell please contact

Hazel Fearnley, hazel.fearnley@testimonyfilms.com
0117 925 8589
or write to Father Appeal,
Testimony Films,
12 Great George St,
Bristol, BS1 5RH

All correspondence is confidential.

Spotlight on Adrian Husband

Adrian Husband is the science teacher at Summerhill. When I met up with Adrian on a sunny day in June it was quickly apparent that he had settled well in to school. Dressed in tee-shirt, shorts and flip-flops and looking tanned and relaxed, he was clearly enjoying Summerhill life.

Having decided that he would never teach in mainstream, the thought of teaching at Summerhill appealed to Adrian. "I can express myself as an adult here and I'm enjoying having less structure which does take some getting used to", he says.

Adrian enjoys seeing how the kids cope at school and also how they are with each other. "The thing is, they've still got their childhood but they're also mature for their years so they're very easy to get along with."

What's apparent is that with the warm sunny weather, there are less kids coming to lessons this term. "Occasionally I even find myself hoping they won't turn up", says Adrian rather sheepishly, "but if they do it's fine too, because they're so eager to learn. A forty minute lesson here is the equivalent to 3 hours in state schools; it's the one to one relationship and small classrooms that make such a difference", he says.



"A forty minute lesson here is the equivalent to 3 hours in state schools"

Adrian spent his formative years growing up in St Agnes, Cornwall along with his parents and sister. He enjoyed horse riding, playing rugby and he was the youngest person in the UK to receive the bronze life saving medallion. After leaving school he worked for a company that manufactured surfboards before setting up his own business doing the same thing. "Surfing has always been a love of mine", said Adrian, "so learning how to make them seemed to be a natural progression to me".

After spending eight years in the business he decided to return to his studies and attended Plymouth university where he gained a degree in Biological science. Following this he worked as an observer for the E.U Fisheries dept during which he spent many months at sea, monitoring catches to ensure that fishing quotas were adhered too. Long periods away from home meant that he could save his earnings but this didn't replace that familiar feeling of being on dry land, so he then trained and worked as a financial adviser before his partner Weibke encouraged him to apply for a teaching job at Summerhill.

When he isn't at school, Adrian joins Weibke on their 90ft converted tug boat 'The Marsden' moored on the Hoo Peninsula on the Isle of Grain near Rochester. "It is one of two sister boats built in Devon that we brought and decommissioned in 2002", says Adrian. "We spent 4 years converting it and used salvaged and recycled materials to turn it into a lovely home – it's the love of our life."

Adrian Husband was interviewed by Steve Fawdry.

Can you help Larry?

I, Larry, once visited Summerhill in the early 60's, met Mr. Neill and spent the good part of a day mingling with some of the students. The result was both a longstanding interest in the school and a very memorable friendship with a family of one of its students. I am interested in the possibility of making contact with this family and wonder if you might be helpful to me with that. For reference, the surname, I believe, was Gladstone (maybe Goldstone), the residence was in the San Francisco, CA area and there was at least one daughter enrolled in Summerhill at some point between 1961 and 1963.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Larry Robertshaw
email: robon88@hotmail.com

Kids skateboard half-pipe

During this term Tom and James with help from a few others have been busy building a new skateboard half-pipe under the supervision of Will. With the old ramp falling apart it was decided that they apply to the school community fund for half the cost of the materials. This was agreed and the school donated the remaining £500.



Made from wood including lots of ply sheets, the half-pipe will enable the kids to keep momentum going whilst doing stunts like no stall, axle stall, tail stall, blunt, rock fakey and rock and roll!



Tom and Indigo working on one of the structural supports.

"T" doing an axle stall stunt on the new half pipe with Freddie looking on.



A. S. Neill Summerhill Trust

Since December 2008 we have received £1154 in donations made via the school website and through cheques arriving in the post. A big thank you to everyone who has generously donated.

In July 2009 the trustees met at school and agreed to make a bursary award of £1,500 to a current pupil.

We are pleased to report that there are now over 1,000 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.

Donate to the Trust

Please help to make a difference to a child's life right now. Click on the link and make a donation to the A. S. Neill Summerhill Trust via the school website <http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/store/products.php>
Thank you – your generosity is very much appreciated.

Newsletter

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A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust

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