

Summerhill News

January 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 warm welcome to the ninth Summerhill Newsletter. In this edition you can read about Leonard Turton's work with Eudec, catch up on Zoe's recovery, find out how you can get involved in our 90th Birthday Celebrations and hear how Tiger and India got on at the Ultimate Bands Contest.

Wishing you a happy and prosperous 2010 from us all,

Steve Fawdry (Editor)

Summerhill kids in.... "Ultimate Bands Contest"

Two Summerhill pupils, Bethany (Tiger) Guinness and India Hotopf known as 'The Emotives' recently took part in the hugely popular Soundwaves ultimate bands contest.

Soundwaves is a music project for young people age 13-26 in the Suffolk Coastal area and is the brainchild of Henry Readhead, head of music at Summerhill. The project is aimed at music entertainment and opportunity, and offers workshops in pop & rock, music technology and DJ'ing, all run by a team of dedicated professional tutors.



Tiger playing the piano and singing

The Ultimate Bands Contest gives young people a chance to showcase their work as well as compete with thirty bands over 3 heats to win a day in a recording studio, a music industry master-class, a place on the Soundwaves album "Sounds of the East Coast 3", and more.

On a cold winters night in November, I joined thirty kids from school who travelled by coach to the Spa Pavillion at Felixstowe to support the girls in their attempt to win heat two of the contest.

Competition was stiff with six other bands, duos and solo performers all delivering great performances and working the audience to win support. There was an eclectic mix of rock, pop and vocals, some very well rehearsed with energetic outgoing stage performances, and others delivering beautiful melodies that touched our hearts.



India on drums

Third up on stage was Tiger (piano and vocals) and India (drums) who played three tracks, all written by Tiger during the last year, including 'reality', 'change' and 'I always seem to lose the game'. The lyrics, a reflection of the trials and tribulations of being a teenager, were both poignant and well written.

The girls delivered a great performance but with them being the youngest and perhaps the least experienced artists, they didn't quite have the X Factor to make it into the top 3 bands. Their efforts didn't go unrewarded though, as they received lots of applause from the audience who were dancing in the aisles and by the stage throughout the night.

A big thank you goes out to Henry for the great music work he is doing with young people in Suffolk. If you'd like to find out more about Suffolk Soundwaves, please visit.....

www.myspace.com/suffolksoundwavesmusic

Imagine a School...Summerhill



The documentary, 'Imagine A School ... Summerhill' has just won first prize as Best Independent Feature, ages 12-18, at the annual 'Kids First! Best Awards'. The film also received a 'Special Excellence in Filmmaking' award from Moving Pictures Magazine.

Released in April 2009 and directed by William Tyler Smith, it was filmed in

the UK and follows the dramatic story of England's only free school, as the students, staff and a few formidable barristers take on Tony Blair's Government to fight for its existence. To find out more ... <http://www.kidsfirst.org/>

Zoë's recovery

Since my two operations last February and March I am recovering well. Scans have shown that there was no spread of the tumour on my pancreas (an obscure kind of slow growing cancer called a neuroendocrine tumour) so, although I will be monitored each year for a while, everything looks very good!

It has been a huge shock to discover how slowly the recovery is taking. I thought I would be well and back to work by the September term, but I still need to rest for days at a time and potter about like an old lady – that's a very interesting thing I can tell you, and easy to get a bit low and depressed – BUT it has given me time to stand and stare instead of always being in the front line and that has been a very valuable experience for me, one that I hope will stay with me in the future. I would recommend it to you all – but there must be an easier way than the route I took!

Meanwhile Summerhill has been in the very capable hands of our eldest son, William, as well as a very good and experienced team of staff to support him. He is doing a grand job – so good, in fact, that I'm thinking I might take off to some sun-drenched shores in retirement! I know his Grandfather would be very proud of him and happy to see the school in such good shape. The recession has bitten a bit, we are low on children from Japan, Korea and Taiwan in particular, but not critically low. This year we should have the dubious honour of another OFSTED visit and we are already making preparations, particularly to provide evidence of what children are learning when they are not in class.

I have been involved in an advisory capacity with lots of things at school but Will has been very careful not to let me do too much or get over-tired. In fact, Amy, Will, Henry and Neill (not to mention Tony) have been very strict with me and look after me like a little queen. When I was being finicky about my food in the early days they even threatened to stuff me with a funnel like a Breton goose!

One of the plus factors of my surgery has been spending so much time with my family and friends, and so many kind people have made contact and supported me. What a lovely lot you are! Thank you.

xxxZoe

Summerhill School 90th Birthday Celebrations



In 2011 Summerhill School will be 90 years old!!

We are starting to plan events and for media interest to take place during the year. So far we've brainstormed some great ideas which we are now considering in detail but we'd also love to hear how you would like to get involved too.

It may be that you have some ideas of your own, or you would like to take part in organising this great event. If neither of these appeal, then please donate some money to help us get some ideas off the ground. You can do this by sending a cheque made payable to the A. S. Neill Summerhill Trust to the school office.

Taki has suggested that we should have an official blog for the event where sponsors can place their logos and we can keep people up to date with what's being organised. I really like this idea and will propose it to the organising committee at school.

To register your ideas or interest in getting involved, email Henry Readhead at Summerhill1921@googlemail.com.

Also, do check out the 90th Birthday Facebook page..... www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Leiston-Suffolk/90-years-of-Summerhill/180333881303?ref=search&sid=1505697632.180110309..1

Eudec UK is on the way



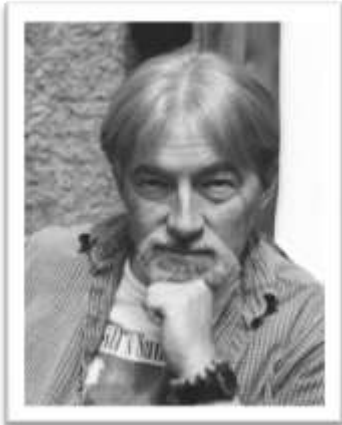
In February 2008, the European Democratic Education Community (EUDEC) was founded and is now a fast growing network of schools,

organisations and individuals dedicated to the democratisation of schooling and education in Europe.

One of its founding members and its senior statesman, Leonard Turton, has been teaching at Summerhill since September 2002. I met with Leonard in early December to discuss EUDEC for the newsletter and after just a few minutes chatting, it became very apparent that he was a 'man on a mission' to spread the word and gain support for democratic education.

Now in his early sixties, Leonard attended university in Vancouver and then a teacher training college in St. Catherines, Canada, and in 1971 set up a successful democratic day school near Toronto. Following this, he worked with children with special needs, and also with the Niagara Centre for Youth Care (small groups of children

with severe emotional problems who had been excluded from school). At the same time, he started a home schooling centre ... The Children's Learning Centre ... for his daughter and the kids of other teachers. Leonard next taught in a traditional classroom of a tough inner city state school in Canada. It was here that he introduced the democratic school practices of giving kids real authority, choices in important decision making and showed the students how to run their own democratic meetings. He called this Club House Democracy and soon there were 6 classrooms and 150 children involved. The school was transformed by these democratic methods.



In 2006, Leonard decided to network to try and set up a European democratic school organisation. He travelled for a week in Poland, and then met with other democratic educators at Sands School, Devon. Starting in Leipzig, Germany in March 2007, founding work was done over many months, ending in February 2008 (and involved several

Summerhill students). The first Eudec annual conference/general meeting was held at the University of Leipzig in July 2008 and was attended by more than 400 participants from 25 countries. Leonard has seen real interest in democratic education grow by leaps and bounds over the last few years and has recently been invited to Croatia for a full week of talks in teacher colleges, as well as Denmark for workshops, (both with Anna Ramm, a former Summerhillian) and just before Christmas to Lithuania, where the film Summerhill was shown (twice, by popular demand!) and Leonard did a talk to a large audience that included the Minister of Education. "It was a very moving experience, with people crying at the end of the film and hungry for the chance to know more about democratic education. In many respects, Eastern and Baltic Europe is very fertile ground for democratic education ... since people have so recently broken free of control themselves I think that democracy is all the more precious to them", said Leonard. (picture above)

Eudec's next step is country chapters, and Leonard and Martin Roberts from Sands School are about to begin planning for Eudec UK. "We are serious about having a profound impact upon British education in the next 10 to 15 years. We hope to do a tour with some students and talk about Summerhill, Sands and democratic education." The involvement of young people in Eudec is not unusual - one of the things that makes the organisation so unique is the active role played by school students at all levels e.g. as individual members on the Eudec Council, in conference-planning and in the organisation of programmes.

In the summer of 2011 Sands School will be hosting a combined Eudec/Idec and that will hopefully be an influential moment for an increased awareness of the new Eudec in the UK and democratic education in Britain.

Some of the many important purposes of EUDEC are

- to support and promote democratic education as a sensible choice for schools of democratic states.

- to establish in legislation the right to found and attend democratic educational institutions and to provide aid and support to democratic schools and start up groups.
- To facilitate the exchange of information between democratic educational institutions in Europe and to create connections between schools.
- to provide information and outreach programmes for colleges and training institutes to give future teachers a practical understanding of the basics of democratic education and what it can mean for teachers, pupils, educational environments and democratic states.

Written by Leonard Turton and Steve Fawdry. To find out more about EUDEC visit.... <http://www.eudec.org/home/> or e-mail Leonard at lgurton@googlemail.com.

Obituary

Peter Catchpole 1929 - 2009

Peter Catchpole died at the age of 80 in 2009, leaving his wife Jane and two grown up children. Both Peter and his brother John went to Summerhill between 1941 and 1946, during the time that Neill relocated the school to Ffestiniog, Wales.

From very early on, Peter wanted to become a solicitor. At the time, Summerhill was not able to provide the level of academia that was required to gain five matric subjects so he spent some time away studying with private tutors and later went on to realise his ambition of becoming a solicitor. The two brothers both loved Summerhill and Peter was a great advocate of the school right up until his death.

Peter married Sally Francis, an ex-summerhillian who also worked at Summerhill. They had a daughter called Polly and Sally eventually ran a school of her own. Some years later after he and Sally separated, Peter married Jane Hutchinson and they were together for about 46 years. They had two children, Mark and Annabel and lived in Edenbridge, Kent.

Peter was a real gentleman and cared about people a lot. He enjoyed country interests like bird watching, gardening and growing his own vegetables, as well as being a great fan of jazz.

Peter's brother John, became a musician and now lives in Norfolk. He still teaches music at school from time to time.

Quotes by A. S. Neill

"The difficult child is the child who is unhappy. He is at war with himself and in consequence, he is at war with the world."

"It is time that we were challenging the school's notion of work. It is taken for granted that every child should learn mathematics, history, geography, science, a little art, and certainly literature. It is time we realised that the average young child is not much interested in any of these subjects. I prove this with every new pupil. When told that the school is free, every new pupil cries, "Hurrah! You won't catch me going to lessons!"

"Free children are not easily influenced. The absence of fear accounts for this phenomenon. Indeed, the absence of fear is the finest thing that can happen to a child."

"No one is wise enough or good enough to mould the character of any child. What is wrong with our sick, neurotic world is that we have been moulded, and an adult generation that has seen two great wars and seems about to launch a third should not be trusted to mould the character of a rat."

"The function of the child is to live his own life – not the life that his anxious parents think that he should live, nor a life according to the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows what is best. All this interference and guidance on the part of adults only produces a generation of robots."

"Most of the schoolwork that adolescents do is simply a waste of time, of energy, of patience. It robs youth of its right to play and play and play - it puts old heads on young shoulders."

Fabulous B&B accommodation for parents and kids



We are Steve and Kate (Freddie's parents) and we live at Wrentham, twenty five minutes from school. We would like to offer our accommodation to Summerhill parents.

There are beautiful local walks and several beaches ten minutes drive away. Southwold, our nearest town has traditional shops, elegant Georgian architecture, and a sandy beach with beach huts and newly renovated pier. Beccles, also nearby, has shops, boats, quayside and the river Waveney. There is a good choice of pubs, hotels, cafés and restaurants in both towns. The city of Norwich is 35 minutes away and has all the usual town attractions.

Single rooms are £35 per night and large twin/double rooms are £40 p/night, or £60 for two people sharing. There are two shared bathrooms and TV's in each bedroom. Fresh linen and towels are provided. Under 5's free.

There is a big communal kitchen and lounge with large telly for watching DVDs, as well as a desk and wi-fi. It is a very relaxed and friendly environment, with no prescribed breakfast times and we will give you a key so you can come and go as you please. We like everyone to help themselves to breakfast and then if you wish to you can self-cater the rest of the time. Additional mattresses can be added to rooms if required for kids at a cost of £15 p/night.

There is a trampoline in the garden, trees to climb and a badminton net up all summer. We also have some bikes if you like cycling and there are lovely lanes to enjoy. We have a dog, cat and ducks as well as pheasants, hares and deer

nearby, so we will accept a dog as long as they don't chase things and are happy to sleep downstairs!

For further information please call us on 01502 675008.

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.

In 2009 we received £2,277 in donations made via the school website and through cheques arriving in the post.

**"A very big thank you
to everyone who donated
to such a great cause."**

Also in 2009, the trustees awarded bursaries totaling £4,500 to existing pupils. These awards help to ensure that 4 children can remain at Summerhill during difficult times.

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 1,200 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 support is very much appreciated.

Newsletter

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A.S. Neill Summerhill Trust, charity no 10898

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