

Rudi Lissau: some reminiscences



Rudi Lissau was very instrumental in persuading me to join Wynstones School as a Class teacher. It was 1973 and, although the school had offered me Class One, I was beset by doubt as to whether I was up to the task. I met Rudi on the stairs in Rudolf Steiner House and aired my uncertainties. He fixed me with his penetrating gaze and said, simply, "There is a class of children who have come to the earth and are waiting for you to be their teacher." That did it. He appealed to my egotism, hinted at destiny and left me to make the jump. I wrote an acceptance

letter to the College of Teachers and applied to join the Anthroposophical Society.

The above instance is, for me, a not untypical example of the effect Rudi had on those around him. A meeting with him, even in the staff room or on the stairs, was a very conscious event. He was direct, sometimes confrontational, and his commitment to anthroposophy coloured his remarks and his whole demeanour. When Rudi's hand rose in a College Meeting, it went up like a flag pole and you waited for a contribution which was always strong, sometimes opinionated but, essentially, grounded in his spiritual understanding of the human being and his unwavering conviction about the rightness and potential of Waldorf Education.

When I joined the school, Dr Lissau was already part of the fabric of the institution. He became an Upper School teacher at Wynstones early in the war years, having come over from Austria to escape the rise of Nazism. He was interned on the Isle of Wight but released quickly as he had specialist training in teaching the blind to read and write. Describing his early experiences as a teacher of the blind, he told me how the teachers had the upper hand during the day but, when it came to supervising the dormitories after lights out, the children had a huge advantage over the staff.

He taught History, Geography, German and Latin together with History of Music. He was a strict disciplinarian and generations of pupils experienced confrontations on the stairs, in the classroom and at the bottom of the playing fields. As a young teacher, I recall passing many a Class Nine pupil locked in dialogue with Rudi, his strong voice with its Austrian accent contrasting with the uncertain voice of the adolescent boy or girl. He was hugely respected by some of his ex-pupils, especially for his erudition and understanding of his subject matter. "He taught me everything I know", remarked one old-scholar and, over the 35 years he taught in the school, he became an establishment.

A story was told, long before my time, of an Upper School Class who had been given a silent study task by Rudi. He sat at the front of the class, supervising. It was time when

he had had a series of broken nights at home and, as the minutes ticked by, he began to nod and his head finally sank to the desk. The class went on working. When the bell went, Rudi did not stir so the pupils, moving cautiously and silently, all tiptoed past the sleeping teacher and went out for their break. I never heard what Rudi's reaction was when he awoke!

Teachers in the early days at Wynstones lived with very simple resources and the community shared tasks in order to maintain the boarding hostel as well as the school. At that time, power for the large house at Brookthorpe was provided by an old petrol-driven generator. Not infrequently, the power belt for the generator began to slip and there was a real problem if it came completely off. The early warning signs of a slipping belt were when all the lights started flickering and this was the cue for a teacher to run, helter skelter, for the generator hut in order to push the belt back into place. Rudi was given this task as the cottage in which he lived was nearest to the hut. Pupils discovered a new evening entertainment by entering the hut, pushing a stick under the drive belt and then retiring into the bushes to watch their Geography teacher performing an Olympic run through the garden!

Rudi's subject knowledge and his ability to relate this to anthroposophy was extraordinary. On one occasion, a group of us class teachers asked him to give us a course on History. It was, for me, a life-changing experience. "Tell me about Henry the Navigator", said a Class Seven colleague. Without a pause, Rudi spoke about the Crusades, the Templars, and the deeper background to the Age of Discovery. "What about the Vikings?" said another and we were led off on a journey in which we heard about the development of the European ego, its implications for later colonization and the virtue of courage in the Fourth Culture Epoch. In three days, he provided a perspective on history which was factual but also meaningfully embedded in anthroposophical ideas of the Evolution of Consciousness.

He worked indefatigably for the Anthroposophical Society. He was a Council Member, travelling regularly to Rudolf Steiner House on Tuesdays where he organised and hosted the public lectures. He travelled regularly to Dornach and lectured in Europe. This work permeated his teaching and contributed significantly to the ethos of Wynstones.

He loved skiing and the Mountains and regular events in the School Year were the Geography field trips he organised to Snowdon and skiing trips to Austria and Switzerland. In retirement, he devoted many hours to the School Library but consciously withdrew from College and teaching when he felt the moment was right. He lived well into his nineties and few of the younger pupils or teachers in the School who saw him walking slowly around Brookthorpe knew how much this remarkable man had contributed, not only to the building up of a mature, spiritually rich Steiner School but also to Waldorf Education and the Anthroposophical movement.

John Burnett. Plymouth University

WOW day

The European Council for Steiner Education initiated WOW day 11 years ago and in the intervening time it has gone from strength to strength. So far the children in the European Waldorf schools, through their combined efforts, have raised £300,000 for deprived children in Colombia, Brazil, Thailand, Croatia, Chile and the USA. This year the projects are for war-traumatised children in Sierra Leone, eurythmy for blind children in St Petersburg, impoverished township children in South Africa and the first Steiner kindergarten and eventual school in China. As part of this October's Action Week in Germany some 40 schools raised €250,000 for our African projects and we have just delivered €8,000 so work can begin to restore the flat for eurythmy in St Petersburg. The UK schools have a good record in participating in this activity and full details can be obtained from the SWSF office or at www.ecswe.org

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Newsletter



Fire at SW London School

On Saturday, 26th June, I was working in the office when, almost simultaneously I smelt smoke and heard a neighbour screaming "Fire! Fire!" I ran out, saw the beginnings of a fire under one of the classrooms and ran back in to call the Fire Brigade. Whilst waiting for the fire engines the neighbour, her husband and I did what they could with fire extinguishers and buckets of water, but the fire had started under another classroom as well and nothing could be done. Every classroom was burnt to the ground. I telephoned every member of staff, and the ones that could be contacted started to arrive, shocked and distraught at the sight of their lost school. Gradually parents and children started to arrive - it was an immensely sad occasion. However, amidst all this, teachers were telephoning around

and, as more and more of the school community started to arrive, the mood, incredibly, became one of great strength and determination. One of the firemen brought over to us the blackened, but restorable school sign, which we felt was a good omen.

A meeting was arranged on our field the next day, Sunday 27th June - everyone was invited - to discuss our next move. The turnout on that day was huge and

heart-warming. We all gathered in a huge circle and ideas flooded in. There were offers of tents, gazebos, blankets and more - it was determined that school would begin on Monday 28th June at the usual time and that is what happened. Each morning after that, until the end of term, the children, with the help of teachers and parents, erected the various tents and got their "classrooms" ready. When that was done everyone gathered for a morning assembly. Many class/school trips were arranged with much help from parents and

some very kind donations (amongst them free coaches providing a day out for the entire school to Hever Castle, who also gave us free entry for the day). The end of term was brought forward by 2 days and we had a wonderful end of term festival (for which we were very kindly lent the hall of the large school next door to us). Our usual exciting sports day with a shared picnic by the entire school community and, finally,

our school fair on Saturday 10th July which, apart from the intermittent weather, was successful and fun. We have had a wonderful response to our appeal for help and the whole school community is grateful for all the kind words, gift and donations received, especially from Steiner schools and associations in this country, as well as some from other countries. We are now in temporary premises for all eight classes and we still have the offices and kindergarten, so all is not lost!

Sheila Campbell. SW London.



OCN Developments

Following the announcement of Government proposals for changes to the 14-19 curriculum, there has been widespread recognition for the need to reduce separation between academic and practical subjects in terms of assessment and delivery.

This offers the opportunity for more visible recognition of the integrated Steiner approach that Upper Schools in the Fellowship wish to follow. In response to this issue, and the increasing move towards adopting Open College Network accreditation in Upper Schools, albeit often as a wrap-around package alongside mainstream exams, a meeting took place at the end of June between representatives from the National OCN, SWSF and schools already involved with OCN programmes.

A variety of views were expressed, concerning the range of units already developed and being used across the Movement and the potential issues regarding wider adoption

of this type of programme. It was felt that the recent proposals would benefit our schools in terms of widening acceptance of non-GCSE/AS/A2 qualifications yet, in order to capitalise upon this opportunity, a national framework of units for Steiner Schools would give greater weight than smaller, individual impulses.

Furthermore, that a partnership with NOCN would provide a better option for approaching QCA as a unified front. As a result, it was suggested that a working group should meet to consider a possible inclusive framework to encompass accredited units, with internal moderation between schools to ensure standardised levels of attainment. It is not intended that such a national framework should stifle individuality of approach, rather that all schools would have access to the raft of existing units, and benefit from developing further units alongside those experienced in OCN / Steiner collaboration. Whilst a great deal of work will be involved in co-ordinating a OCN framework under the auspices of the SWSF, a national approach would seem to be the way forward. Any school wishing to be involved in future discussions should contact Kevin Avison K.Avison@yescomputers.co.uk

Jane Morris-Brown. Michael Hall

Political work in England

Progress towards establishing the flagship Steiner school under Academy legislation in Much Dewchurch, Hereford, continues - slowly. The frustration of slow progress, however, hopefully has not dented the enthusiasm and excitement that this opportunity presents. This Steiner Academy will be able to demonstrate not only the full Steiner curriculum, but also a Steiner appropriate and ecologically sensitive school build model. DfES pay 100% of the running costs of an Academy and for 90% of the capital costs. The Academy's sponsor has to provide the other 10%. Because the official sponsor (SWSF) has no funds, we have to find the money from elsewhere. The German Software Foundation is prepared to provide some of the finance, but they require us to find match funding from elsewhere. So, if any readers happen to have any suggestions please let me know! As soon as we are able to secure funds we can then underwrite the sponsor contribution. This will unlock the next step: the DfES funded feasibility study. This will last 9 months and will seek to find mutually agreeable solutions to issues and problems. In the meantime, as an official Academy sponsor, penniless SWSF has been invited to wine and dine in the Guildhall with the Secretary of State, alongside all the rich/corporate sponsors of other new academies.

As has been outlined before, there is an expectation that once one flagship school has been established, others will quickly follow and so schools that are keen to become publicly funded are continuing their negotiations with their LEAs.

Sylvie Sklan. SWSF.

The First Three Years - a part time course, starting 18 September 2004, at York Steiner School for Parents and Child leaders, Early Childhood Teachers, Playgroup Leaders. *'The first three years in a child's life are crucial ones. We know now that it is a time when life foundations are laid not only physically but also mentally, emotionally and spiritually. For the hope of the world, we will need individuals in the future who are whole, free, purposeful and caring toward others and the earth we depend on.'*

The course consists of 10 one day workshops based on the insights of Rudolf Steiner. Certificates are issued for full attendance. Contact 01904 612683 or dot@dmale.fsnet.co.uk

More Steiner Schools in the EU

With the accession of ten countries into the EU this May another forty-four Steiner schools have joined as well. In July there were 18 schools in Hungary, 8 in the Czech Republic, 6 in Estonia, 4 in Lithuania, 4 in Latvia, 2 in Poland, 1 in Slovenia and 1 in Slovakia. All these countries have different formula for funding their schools. In Poland they are subsidized for 25% of their costs, which means that parents have to raise 100 € a month in a country where the average salary is just 300€. In Slovakia the state pays 30€ per child, which is 30% of the costs and therefore the parents pay 71€. Average income is 250€ per month. In Hungary they receive approximately 50% of what they need, varying from school to school, and in Estonia about 66%. In Lithuania they receive the same as the maintained schools, but have to raise 32€ a month per child to pay for foreign language teaching and eurythmy etc. In the Czech Republic and Latvia they are fully subsidized. As in all the western European countries, whether funded or not, bureaucratic and politically competitive pressures are increasing and struggling for freedom in education has become a never-ceasing and increasingly complicated task. Threats arise unexpectedly, requiring an immediate reaction and within the European context we are all very much in this together. In the past year Spain, Ukraine and Romania have joined the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education so we are able to gain a more comprehensive picture of the trends in Europe and act accordingly in the spirit of solidarity.

Christopher Clouder.SWSF.

Steiner Schools in England Research Project

A team of researchers at the University of the West of England, Bristol is conducting a research project on Steiner education. The main purpose of the study, which is funded by the Department for Education and Skills, is to gain a comprehensive understanding of Steiner school education in England, from ages 5 to 18. Members of the team are hoping that it will be possible to visit each school in England during this term, at a date and time convenient to the school's staff. The intention is that the project's findings will help:

- increase knowledge and understanding of Steiner education in England;
- enhance co-operation and mutual learning between Steiner and mainstream schooling;
- inform Government policy concerning Steiner schools wishing to enter the state sector.

The project team will be contacting each school and will be grateful for any co-operation and time that schools feel able to give. A report of the research, for publication, will be produced by the end of March 2005. In reporting findings, data will be anonymised and maximum care will be taken so that views expressed to the team are not associated with particular schools and school personnel.

The project team comprises: Professor Philip Woods: Philip.Woods@uwe.ac.uk Dr Martin Ashley: Martin.Ashley@uwe.ac.uk Dr Glenys Woods: Glenys.Woods@uwe.ac.uk Centre for Research in Education and Democracy, Faculty of Education, University of the West of England, New Redland Building, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol, BS916 1QY. Tel: +44 (0) 117 328 4146/4222 Fax: +44 (0) 117 324 4123

Review from the Stourbridge Office

Of late there has been a marked expansion of administration done by Steering Group members. Our house in Stourbridge, or its two spare rooms, is in effect a second SWSF office, with all the advantages and disadvantages that come with working from home. From the Stourbridge office, financial administration, the collection and collation of school information, co-ordination of advisory services, in-service workshops and administrative support for member organisations is conducted.

During the last 3-4 years, our work has expanded substantially. The chief driving forces here have been the increased number of in-service courses we offer and demands for more, and more formalised, policies and procedures in all areas of life, especially that of education. The development of SWSF work carried mainly by the Midlands office during the last school year includes:

- Assistance for schools facing the new-style OfSTED inspections and for initiatives intending to register as schools
- The first Code of Practice workshop with the objective to revise the code with representatives of the schools
- In-service courses for teachers of Classes 2 and 5, languages, upper school teachers, combined classes as well as a second conference for those preparing to start Class 1 and the continuation of the twice termly administrators meetings
- On-going meetings with HMI responsible for inspecting SW schools which lead to an invitation from OfSTED to give a presentation to their recent bi-annual training conference
- The launch of a redesigned SWSF website, designed by Andrew Edwards of "Digital Symbiosis."

Jane and Kevin Avison.SWSF.

Life-long Waldorf Learning in Devon

When one thinks about Waldorf education in Devon, understandably and justifiably, the school at Hood Manor in Dartington springs first to mind. With the school's very first pupils now moving into their thirties and with a small number of 'second generation' pupils approaching the Manor's doors, the place of the Steiner School in the life and culture of our locality is established and flourishing. 300 children come and go to the school each day and at the beginning of this term, the Director of Education for Devon County Council, Dr. Phil Norrey, paid a two-hour visit to Hood Manor to discuss the school's plans and future.

If we move the gaze beyond the 'home-patch' and look a bit further afield, we can see other places where Waldorf education is living and growing in other parts of the County. For some years in the 1980's, a small 'school project' battled against many odds to send roots through the concrete and paving stones of the City of Plymouth. This venture had a healthy struggle and endured and achieved much before the doors closed. More recently, starting in the 1990's, the county town - Exeter - has been home to a Waldorf nursery, kindergarten and school project. In marked contrast to the bucolic setting and verdant nature of Hood Manor, the Exeter School is set in an urban area on the edge of the city, where vigorous and positive activity is on-going to enable a Waldorf 'City School' to come into being in Exeter. From Exeter, moving down the eastern

bank of the River Exe towards the sea, and just a handful of miles - as the crow flies - from Torquay, where Steiner gave some of his very last lectures on education, we drop anchor at the sea-side town of Exmouth, where the University of Plymouth has its Faculty of Education. Since 1992, the University of Plymouth, in collaboration with the SWSF, has successfully run a BA Honours Degree in Steiner Waldorf Education, the first of its kind in the UK. Over the years, successful graduates have taken teaching posts in the UK, other countries in Europe as far apart as the USA, Australia, South Africa. In August 2002 the European Commission awarded a grant of 320,000 Euros to a team of Steiner Waldorf teacher education centres to design a flexible, school-based European Masters Programme in Waldorf Education. The European Commission was enthusiastic about a project to strengthen links between school communities in different countries, and support the development of a "culture of enquiry", amongst Waldorf practitioners on a European level. The project began in November 2002 and runs for three years. The Lead Partner is the University of Plymouth. The other four partners in the project are: Solymar Institute, Budapest, Hungary; Witten-Annen Seminar, Germany; Stockholm Seminar, Sweden and Helicon Hogeschool, Zeist, Holland. The European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education is also part of this core group. In the spring of 2004, the University approved a new programme that was proposed by the SWSF: A Foundation Degree in Steiner Waldorf Early

Childhood Education. This new programme offers opportunities for Early Years Practitioners and teaching assistants to achieve a professional qualification. The first group of students began their studies in September at Exmouth. For the most part they come from the northern half of the country and will study in York and Stourbridge, as Plymouth students! This is the long arm of post-modernism. Government ministers talk a lot about life-long learning and learning communities. Such terms fit under the agenda for diversity in education. Concepts such as these have a tendency to get stuck in the 'sound-bite' phase. It's quite something to think that Steiner's ideas on education have formed a foundation for such concepts to be practically realized in Devon. At one end of this life-long learning continuum is the young child of just two or three years old, attending a parent-toddler group in Dartington or Exeter, while at the other end there is now the opportunity for adults to undertake a study of Waldorf education at degree level and for experienced, practising Waldorf teachers to undertake study at Masters level, reflecting on their work and renewing their teaching and their learning. In between these two points there are hundreds of children, parents, friends and colleagues, living and working and learning together.

Trevor Mephram. SWSF



SW London

Bicentenary of Hans Christian Andersen

Rudolf Steiner's pedagogical indications place "narrative" at the centre of the school curriculum. April 2nd 2005 is the 200th anniversary of Hans Christian Andersen's birth. Throughout the upcoming year cultural and educational events inspired by Hans Christen Andersen's life and work will honour the occasion. Fairytales and poetry of Hans Christian Andersen's oeuvre are at the heart of the celebration. Not only books and storytelling, but theatre, ballet and music reveal the influence of narrative on the performing arts. For detailed information see: www.hca2005.com & www.symphonicfairytales.com Elizabeth Carmack Cambridge Heart Conference Music of the Heart 17-21 July 2005 www.musicoftheheart.co.uk

Steering Group Trip to Sunny Devon

In September, the members of the steering group arrived, properly equipped with sun cream and umbrellas, at the South Devon School. Last year it was suggested that the regular steering group meetings could be invited to visit Steiner schools around the country so that we all had the chance to know each other better. We volunteered and they came not only to hold their meeting but also to share their presence with our school community. We were delighted to have these special visitors. Of course we had to find them a comfortable place to meet them and we had to feed them, but we made the best use we could of them too. Apart from a considerable amount of networking and ear-bending, we held two lunches, one for some of our teachers, and one for parent mandate holders and class contacts to meet our fellowship workers. This also gave us the opportunity to show off our wonderful fruit and vegetables and the cooking and catering skills of some of our pupils. We also prevented the visitors from experiencing the night life of Totnes by arranging a "talk in the tent" (the marquee that temporarily replaces our hall since the fire last term). Here teachers, parents and friends enjoyed an inspiring evening of presentations from steering group members on the theme of Waldorf in the Contemporary World. We now look forward to our steering group friends returning next year. Next time we'll make sure that we gather some head teachers from other local schools to meet them and in the meantime we will try to improve our "conference suite" facilities. If your school has not yet invited this delightful group of people to visit yet, book now and you won't be disappointed.

Jill Taplin. South Devon.