

# Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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pour le Réarmement moral

# CAUX

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Caux, 13.08.01

Dear friends,

The patches of wild raspberries already bear the traces of walkers foraging for the first ripe fruits. The leaves are turning, falling; violent, lingering sunsets scar the eye – autumn is here. With a deep strong flow of the spirit, a breath that carries the para-gliders upwards on invisible currents. We heard in church yesterday morning God's promise: 'Call, and he will say, "I am here"... The Lord will always guide you, giving you relief in desert places... You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose waters never run dry. You will rebuild the ancient ruins, build up on the old foundations. You will be called "Breach-mender", "restorer of ruined houses", ' (Isaiah Chapter 58, v 9-12).

What a week it's been. Historic perhaps; time will tell. It feels more like a month! But it's amazing what a difference one good night's sleep can make! I'm all set for the final straight, the last week of conferences. I hope that you will all have already received the report of the Consultation, with its accompanying press release and document on *Initiatives of Change*. The first two days of my week were taken up with those intensive but rich meetings that are reported there. It's been a difficult process, and I'll not pretend that I was a partisan of the final choice taken, but without betraying the confidences required for this kind of exercise, I'd like to share some of the reflections that brought me to change my mind.

One younger person from a former communist country spoke of the way that the decades of communism have debased the currency of language. So many words have been polluted. But the word 'initiatives' was used by the regime of those who threatened it, and therefore has a rare 'perfume of freedom'. An African said that he'd translated the phrase in his head into five African languages and Arabic – and it worked in all six. And a Spanish speaker likewise noted that this was a name that had a human feel, implied a movement of people, rather than an international organization run from the top.

My week thereafter has been very full of sending out the news and reports to the *Initiatives of Change* network, and to prepare for the public and press announcement here on Thursday. Do think of us. We are hoping that a good number of journalists will make the journey up the hill. Then Tuesday evening saw the Great Hall full and expectant for the opening of the *Life, Faith and Fellowship* conference, with the theme, 'From the house of fear to the house of love – a journey of faith'. Nicci Long will give her picture of these days:

Words are not always the most effective form of communication, and many alternative forms have been powerfully used during this week. On the first evening, the girl on stage tossed her boy's heart into the air, and bounced it like a ball, before finally stamping it into the ground beneath her foot. As the boy scooped his shattered heart up off the ground, and placed it carefully back inside his chest, we laughed, but all felt the brokenness. And then the fear, when the girl asked for it again. The theme has been interpreted in many different ways this week (with the use of a thousand analogies!) but I doubt that there has been a person in the house who has not related to it somehow.

As a medical doctor, John Lester described how, so often, patients came to him with a minor problem but in fact had a different worry altogether, be it physical or psychological. Often, they remained too afraid to mention it; sometimes – perhaps only after a few visits – they plucked up enough courage, or become anxious enough, to talk about it. But why is it that we are so often afraid to be honest with one another?

Returning to non-verbal forms of communication, some interesting workshops were held. Swedish artist Gerd Ekdahl, whose own work animates the walls of Mountain House, took a group over

four days for 'Painting from Within'. The works on display at the end of the week were entrancing, but the bonds developed within the group – after shared times of quiet and of creation – were even more apparent. How refreshing it is to realise a new way of expressing ourselves, to discover parts of ourselves that have remained buried for years or decades, or that we never even knew were there within us.

Jack Lynch, of the US, was up at 7:30 every morning, leading those of us committed enough to join him in a walking meditation. And if we who didn't make it felt lazy, we only felt more so, happening to look out our bedroom windows to see one 89-year-old participating fully, in the light rain. Jack also led afternoon workshops, and I couldn't resist going to find out about movement and my 'three-dimensional self' (which has, incidentally, become even more fully three-dimensional than before, thanks to the creativity of the cooks over these weeks!). Through Jack's simple physical exercises, we discovered profound messages to help us cope better with daily life. Using long wooden sticks, we experimented with the best ways to give and to receive. We practised using our eyes not only to see straight ahead, but also peripherally, and even behind. And we learnt how we respond when the most precious gift that we feel we have to offer is rejected.

As a writer/actor/director team, Jack and his wife, Edie Campbell, presented their one-woman show, *Emily Dickinson and I*. In the play, the real lives of Edie and of the 19th Century poet Emily Dickinson, become strangely but convincingly intertwined, until we are no longer certain who is who. The production was particularly symbolic for Edie and for many in the audience, as her father, Dr Paul Campbell – who appears in the script – had played on the same stage in the Theatre many years before.

Part of the mystery of Caux is that the most unlikely people meet, and are touched by one another's experiences or efforts. We are particularly grateful for the opportunity to have had 16 Lebanese in the house this week, helping with the conference and adding another dimension to the community. A mayor from Beirut was so moved by *Emily Dickinson and I* that he said it had 'made him feel like a human being' again after 30 years. The following morning, he made a moving apology from the platform for the 'atrocities' he had committed during Lebanon's civil war. Several times during these days, I have been reminded that we never stop developing as humans – there is never a time by which we should have 'got there' – and that we may have to wait most of our lives before some fears are conquered, or before love for someone is found.

This week has been about reaching out to – or being reached out to by – that extra dimension. We have had the opportunity to study the work of Hester Mila in a magnificent backdrop created especially for this week. It depicts a figure framed, at first, by fear. He begins to discover a new dimension, which reaches out to him and begins to reside in his heart. He is able to join others and, together with the new dimension, they form a circle of energy, watched over by angels.

On the final day, we awoke to clear skies for the first time. Appropriately, the mountains revealed themselves for the session entitled, 'Towards Far Horizons'. We physically took our fears in our hands, and laid them gently aside during the afternoon reflection. Some of us then spent the precious silent time gazing at that pencil-thin line where the peaks meet the sky. I have been continually replaying in my mind the beautiful clarinet solo which accompanied a short Arabic prayer in one of the morning sessions:

'Grant us, O Lord, above every other gift/To direct our eyes up to you/Anything lower that we look for is illusion/Grant us, O Lord, the gift to see you.'

The universal dimension is one I too often forget, although with warnings of global warming and climate change – and undeniable evidence in many of our regions – it is becoming ever more apparent. A Rwandan reminded us of the interconnectedness of all life on our planet. 'If I cut my finger while working, no matter how small the wound, I stop and attend to it. For if I ignore it, the infection may spread and paralyse my whole body. This cut may be likened to those cast out of our societies.'

And on the final evening, yet another new dimension was spoken of. During a wonderful time of sharing, a Christian evangelist told how, at home, he lives his spiritual life alongside other Christians. But in Caux he has discovered how he can also live spiritually alongside 'others' – those of 'another kind', whom we so often fear. A Muslim, returning to Mountain House after many years, described how delighted she has been to find that not only is she not the only Muslim here, but that there is a Muslim Prayer Room available. The evening was not only a time when our fears evaporated, but when we were able to 'make the broken places sing'.

Grateful greetings from Caux, Nicci Long and Andrew Stallybrass