

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

TÉL. 021/9634821
TÉLÉFAX 021/9635260
TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

Monday, 12th July 1993

Dear friends,

Fortunately for my peace of mind, I never seem to find the time to re-read the previous year's letters, before starting a new series. And I hope that none of you do either? Is it possible - and even honest - to describe in fresh terms conferences that in so many ways are the same, in the same framework, and with at least some of the same participants? And yet there is so much each year that seems fresh and new, and there are so many new people, and new experiences, touches of grace. This week has brought several such touches, such moments of emotional charge. The life of this powerful river sometimes seems to flow on so fast that you don't have time to absorb, cherish, savour these instants. So perhaps an exercise like this can help? Anyway, these instants have touched me.

On Wednesday, the Kriegs from Berlin, and the Stepanas from Poland, but living in Britain, had a 'living room conversation' on the stage in the hall, sitting round a table, recalling where they were at the start of World War II, what they were doing, feeling, thinking, their experiences of healing history. As the 'meeting' went on, the door bell rang, and other friends came in to join them for a chat, to share their experiences.

Through the week, after the time of 'open forum' together, with news from the world, and the life of the house, retired German church-minister Martin-Eckart Fuchs has been taking us through 'heart of the matter' meditations on the seven cardinal virtues (test question: can you name them, without cheating? I couldn't) of prudence, temperance (balance), fortitude, justice, faith, hope and love. Joseph Bourdin, age nine, introduced one such moment with a piece on his trumpet. Martin-Eckert then had us all laughing with a story of a rough Channel crossing, and a good meal with a professor full of good advice on how to handle a queasy stomach. This led us on to the story from the Bible of Jesus in a boat with his friends in a storm, and how in every storm of life there is such a friend in our boat. Margarete Schock then spoke simply, with great faith and dignity, of her family's experience of drugs and AIDS, which have taken a son and daughter-in-law, and left them with an orphan grandson. It seemed impossible to go on, to say anything more. Yet Lisbeth Lasserre in a seamless, delicate way took us into a painting by Matisse, an archway, the link between the inner world and the outer world, in harmony. A young Russian woman sang an Orthodox prayer at the piano, and we ended with a prayer. A moment of magic.

Another such moment came yesterday. You'll catch a pale echo in the press release: a retired Serb diplomat spoke and was followed by Archie Mackenzie reading a message from Milovan Djilas. He spoke as one who knows and loves that torn and bleeding part of the Balkans, and

a Muslim young woman from Sarajevo spontaneously came up to express her own emotion and warn that we must not judge and hate a whole people, we must think of the Serbs who are standing against the war. The dream expressed of a 'cabinet of conscience' for this part of the world could become a reality this summer. A lady born in Germany of Ukrainian parents, who has lived in Brazil, told how she had been offered the possibility of coming to Caux, and had accepted, without really knowing why. Here she discovered a young Russian for whom she has been able to translate, and she had a sense that this was why she was brought here.

The theatre crew have been hard at work, with a masterly production of a play by the great Swiss writer Dürrenmatt, presented by the Leipzig theatre group. For many it was hard to follow, but there is a magic about live theatre really well done, and their professionalism shone. Another evening, David Channer presented slides of Cambodia, and of people who after 20 years' friendship with Caux and MRA are now part of the rebuilding of their country, some in positions of leadership. This experience of national healing in progress stirred those from ex-Yugoslavia. And, as so often, quality music has been speaking beyond words, with for example a Chopin concert by an old friend of some who has come back to celebrate her 50th birthday here.

Is it time for a weather report? Yesterday there was fresh snow overnight on the Grammont, the modest peak opposite Caux across the end of the lake, and we have had some memorable thunder storms, with impressive sound and lighting effects. In yesterday's meeting, there was just a glimpse of sun during the moment recounted above - a symbol? I for one have not been sad to be reminded in such a corny way of the storms of our continent and the world beyond this beautiful and peaceful place. But I am keeping a worried eye on the still-stormy sky, since I plan a day out in the mountains, starting before dawn tomorrow. Keep posted for news!

I should have mentioned it last week, I did mean to, and then I forgot, and my wife gently reminded me... One blessing of this start of a new summer is Fidelio, a powerful new friend at work at the front desk, in the accommodation office, and the secretariat. He (she?) is a new computer programme and related hardware. Lotty and Eliane have worked hard to introduce him to the ways of the house and their colleagues, and he is now quite at home, and claims to reduce their labours by about half. It is he who keeps track of all the registration forms, with all their information, offers free beds to the accommodation team, according to their criteria, types all the confirmation letters, with the right dates, names and addresses, in no time at all. He even plays a few games, to calm frayed nerves and relax his friends. As one who still tries to work with the old system - I am typing this letter on it - I can only thank God for this timely change. This old girl (after 8 years) is showing every sign of terminal old age. So keep your fingers crossed for me!

There's an open competition on to find the best collective noun for a lot of roses. Among the suggestions made so far: a cascade, an irruption, a fragrance, a cornucopia. At least they seem to be enjoying the climate!

Cold, wet and grateful greetings from Caux,

Andrew Stallybrass