

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

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TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANOPAMA
CH - 1824 CAUX

Monday, 11th July, 1994

Dear friends,

As I went to bed last night, the ripe peach skin colours of the sunset were still darkening over the Jura. And this morning, the sky was brightening fast behind Caux, throwing the mountains into sharp relief, as I headed towards my word processor, and this first blank screen soon-to-become-a-letter. Long days - and short nights. A new summer season of conferences in Caux has begun.

The first session, an inter-generational dialogue, was introduced by three characters of Past, Present and Future, of three different generations who rather confusingly seem to be changing characters and styles, and breaking out of easy caricatures. There are several here in their eighties, including my parents, in fine form. There are families with very small children, and many young people. We haven't started a summer with such a bang - over 300 people - for quite a while.

But the summer season started earlier for many: we had four intensive days with a group thinking and planning for the 50th anniversary of Caux as an MRA centre in 1996 (see the enclosed letter); the International Coordination Group have been meeting; those preparing this first session were here in force. Neil Mackay and his friend Aileen Bremner were here with a group of eleven British university students. After an advertisement had been placed in university magazines, offering places working hard for nothing in Switzerland, they'd received over 600 replies. 150 filled in a form requesting further information, 60 were offered interviews (40 came), and now the group is here, their fares and stay raised by the British team, learning their way into the work of the house, and participating fully in the dialogue.

The opening meeting started on Friday evening in a darkened hall, with a rising hubbub, the usual last-minute rushes and crises, and then silence. It was almost a miniature of the summer as a whole, the intense activity, the stillness, and at last, the launching out. The evening opened with a ten-minute slide show with music but no words, on the paths, the roads, across a beautiful suffering planet that have brought us all to Caux. Then the curtains in the bay window opened, and the low-angled golden rays of the setting sun were flooding the hall with light.

Choice Okoro interviewed some of the participants to find out why they had come. There were perhaps some 300 plus reasons for coming, she noted. For herself, she commented to laughter, 'It's the only place I know where you find African men in the kitchen.' One of the young British here for the first time was struck by the experience of community living and sharing. 'I still get lost in the house,' commented another, 'but I'm finding out about MRA.' When pressed by Choice to describe what was different here, he remarked on the vista down the lake that he'd seen lit by lightning. 'You don't get this in Manchester,' he said. (Stifling hot and thundery weather has given way

to clear, cool, sunny days.) A Czech student said that what she appreciated most was the spirit of equality.

There is a healthy 'what on earth will happen next?' spirit to this session. Long, free, sit-where-you-like tables have been installed in the middle of the dining room, for cafeteria style meals. The main meetings are in the afternoon, the mornings starting with a brief 'What's Up?' introduction, and then everyone going off for a time of quiet, with a series of prepared questions before meeting with their communities. The first day we were flung in at the deep end. I may add that I've been living with Caux 1996, and not with Caux 1994, so I am coming to this session with no inside knowledge, almost as if I was here for the first time.

In my community group, after a brief 'name game' to help us get to know each other, we were invited to draw in silence a 'life picture' in answer to the questions 'What has made me who I am? Who has influenced my life? What has been difficult? If I could live my life again, how would I live it differently?' I was sceptical (and I was not alone!). We were then divided into small groups to comment and explain our pictures. To my surprise (and again, I was not alone), we found ourselves talking about the deepest things in our lives, either with total strangers, or in my case with old friends, but in a way we would never have done if we'd been asked to put our past lives into words.

Then in the afternoon session, a stream of people shared with everyone what they'd drawn. A young Pakistani British spoke of his longing to create real communication with his father whom he loved but felt he could not reach. A Sudanese young woman living in Britain talked of the pain caused by racism, and the healing that started to come when she could talk with white British about it.

Yesterday, many of us filled the Protestant chapel for a communion service taken by the Anglican Bishop of Cyprus and the Gulf, with a British Methodist and Lutheran ministers from Sweden and Germany. Bror Jonzon preached on a New Testament reading about the transfiguration, noting the importance of mountains in the life of Jesus, and recalling his own meeting with the Dalai Lama in the foothills of the Himalayas. What transformation will we find on this mountain, he asked.

Then at the 'What's Up?' session before community meetings, Hugh Williams shared a recent experience. He had been invited to climb an imaginary mountain, and on meeting Jesus at the top, been encouraged to say the first thing that came into his mind. 'I need to be healed,' he had said, thinking of painful wounds. 'Do you really want to be healed?' he'd heard. He had thought about the list of people whom he had felt hurt by. 'When you forgive, you give away your weapons,' Hugh said. He decided to let resentments go and forgive. Then he'd heard a voice, 'Then you are healed.'

The rich day closed (for me) with a classical piano concert - the eternal joys of Bach. There were glorious roses in profusion, and I think I will have to re-open the competition for the best collective noun for a mass of these lovely flowers. An abundance of roses? What about 'a whale of roses'? No, I'm not sure that that smells right. So until we meet again next week,

Warm regards from this ever-amazing place,

Andrew Stallybrass