

WESTERN PA. HOMESCHOOLERS

A Network for Sharing Local Information about Homeschooling - Newsletter #2, Summer '81

The First Annual Homeschooler's Weekend, June 11, 12, 13, at the Richman Farm was a wonderful, exhilarating time-- for sharing, discussing, questioning; and having just plain fun. Thirty-four families shared in the weekend, some camping out, others just coming for the day on Saturday. Kids were everywhere-- 86 children to be exact (with a few younger siblings close on the way). Kids helped out with registration and setting up, kids hiked, milked goats and patted baby goats, found box turtles, crayfish, tadpoles, and baby birds, kids played in sandboxes, rode big wheels and wagons, blew gigantic bubbles with yarn loops dipped in soapy water, carved in fire brick, displayed art work and writing in the barn, helped immeasurably with clean-up work, swapped information about home computers, square danced, sat in on discussions with parents, and had their own kid's discussion group. The easy-going sociability of the children-- and the important freedom to play alone-- made many of us feel less concerned that homeschooling might "damage" our children's social lives. It was especially nice to see children of many different ages being together-- how different from schools that corral same age children into only their separate groups.

After a potluck lunch feast, the parents gathered for general introductions, sharing briefly why they were choosing homeschooling, or why they were looking into the idea. Our network has a wide variety of families, each coming to homeschooling for unique and special reasons. Some felt a need for closely fostering their spiritual views with their children, others were concerned that their children not become "cookie cutter" people made from someone else's mold. Other's were appalled at the discipline situations in schools, or the contagion of compelled peer influence. Many parents were distressed that their schooled children were not allowed to learn at their own best rate, or that their children were mislabeled as "learning disabilities", or even simply ignored too much. Many felt that a wish for homeschooling grew out of their early bonding experiences with their children-- from close birthing, breastfeeding, nurturing, growing, this seemed simply the next imperative step. Parents didn't want to give up the close day to day relationship they'd formed with their child. Others had noticed negative personality changes once their children had been in school-- some even experienced physical symptoms, such as constant stomach aches, before homeschooling began. Several parents had been teachers in schools, and felt that they knew what really went on there and didn't want that for their children. They knew first-hand the difference between being a teacher facing 25-30 relative strangers, and the closeness of parenting their own children. Other parents were wondering, curious, concerned, looking for more information so that they could make their own best decisions for their children.

We then broke into smaller, more indepth discussion groups. Topics raised included: "Legal Issues", "How to Take your child out of school", "How Learning Evolves", "Evaluating Homeschooling", "Correspondence and Long-Distance Private Schools", "Spiritual Values in Education", "How Children Learn to Read", and a topic suggested by a father, "How to Tell Grandparents". (One unique approach to this was demonstrated at the weekend-- one couple simply brought Grandma along to this "picnic", telling her during the car ride what this "picnic" was really all about! Interesting to note, too, that several of the letters I've received lately have been from interested grandparents, wanting to pass on information to their sons and daughters.)

(continued →)

At the registration table in our barn, families set up displays of resource books they'd found helpful in growing with their children. A number of the books from John Holt's mail order booklist were available for browsing, as well as information on subscribing to GWS. Several resource lists and a couple of important sections of the PA School Code of 1949 were free for the taking. Andy Peterson brought along his packet of PA homeschooling information (\$5.00) Dave Porterfield had several copies of Teach Your Own, by John Holt, for sale, and also shared a taperecording of his meeting with his local superintendent-- a real help for parents wondering what to expect from such an encounter. Our file box is growing, as several families added copies of their correspondence with local school districts. These are available for parents to use as models in drafting their own letters (send SASE with request for copies).

Saturday came to a close with another delicious potluck meal and a big square dance in the barn, children and parents joining in together. For those camping out, the talking and sharing went on even longer. I think I rather reluctantly fell asleep around 1:00 am, the excitement and good friendships and good spirits of the day still glowing in my mind.

The glow still fills my days. I'm so grateful to everyone who came, shared their experiences, hopes, and wonderings. We are all looking ahead to another Homeschooler's Weekend NEXT year here at our farm, and also hope that now it will be easier to get together for small informal times in the nearer future. There's talk of museum visits, meeting in state parks and city playgrounds, visiting one another's homes, keeping up with our newly formed ties. Thank you so much for helping this past weekend become a reality.

By the way, our goat named "Blinkin" finally had her kids- Two of them!!!

Sincerely,

Susan Richman

Only P.S. - The "Donations for Western PA. Homeschoolers" can was well filled at the Weekender making it easier for our fledgling network to continue its work. As our mailing list now tops 100 names, stamps alone cost \$20.00. Thanks for the help! If you haven't had a chance to donate any \$\$\$ to our network, and think it worthwhile, \$3/per family would really be a help. THANKS so much!
Send to: Susan Richman - R.D. 2, Kittanning PA 16201 • (412)-783-6512

Bits and Pieces...

WESTERN PA CHILDREN'S MAGAZINE...

Two families have voiced interest in starting a simple magazine that our children could contribute their stories, poems, articles, letters, drawings, etc. to. Hopes are to get something out before Christmas (a perfect present for doubting Grandma's???). Contributions can be sent to Natalie White, 129 South Fairmont, Pgh, PA 15206, or to Susan Richman. Several stories have already been received, we hope LOTS more are soon to come. Will have more definite information in our early fall newsletters.

QUESTIONS ABOUT HOMESCHOOLING...

I recently received a letter from a mother interested in homeschooling her four year old. I felt she voiced many of the fears or worries of many of us. She writes in part, "...What do I say if and when she asks me why she's not going to school and her best friend is? What if she thinks she really does want to go, particularly nursery school and kindergarten?... I guess my main concern is one of time. How is it done-- with caring for tots and infants as well as housework, too?" Perhaps some readers could take time to respond to these issues. I know we've all dealt with them!