

Newsletter

No. 1—Advent 2004

Young people's work camp in Bosnia

An "experience of a lifetime" was the description of one of the young adults who took part in last summer's work camp trip to Bosnia. A group of fourteen people, of 17 years and upwards, from around Britain, gathered in Stroud to travel together by minibus, kindly lent by the Ruskin Mill Education Trust, to help prepare a new home for the Waldorf kindergarten in Sarajevo. Having explored various possibilities of work in the Balkan region without success, we were very encouraged in late spring to hear of this need, just as we were thinking we might have to shelve the plan.

The kindergarten, the only anthroposophical initiative in Bosnia, had managed to acquire bigger premises on the war torn outskirts of the city, a stone's throw from the border to the Republika Srpska, having outgrown its previous rooms. Renovation work and decorating in the house, as well as creating and landscaping the children's garden, were to be the tasks.

We travelled overland, with stops at centres in Eindhoven, Nurnberg, and Graz in Austria, returning via Antwerp. These welcome breaks also gave us the feeling that our journey into what for almost all of us was unknown territory was being carried and supported by the wider community. For the last leg of the journey we left the minibus in Graz and took an overnight

coach, along with many homeward-bound Bosnians, to the capital, where we would live and work for the next two weeks. Staying in a family-run hostel in the Muslim old-town of Bistrik, with the minarets of the many mosques all around us, we had entered, and were warmly received into, a culture that was new to all of us. And nevertheless, not completely new: Bosnia's proximity to central Europe and the centuries of living alongside Orthodox and Catholic Christians, as well as a small Jewish population, made for a very special blend of culture not altogether unfamiliar. We certainly felt quickly at home.

Our time at the kindergarten overlapped with a group of German school pupils, so a lot could be achieved in the two weeks: building treehouses and swings, laying mosaics, making garden paths and landscaping an old well, creating wooden sculptures and wall paintings. There was also time to shown around the city by a young journalist who had experienced the war firsthand, as well as a meeting with a member of the NATO staff, who still have a 'stabilizing presence' there. On our free day we headed south to a spectacular valley to go white water rafting, the only access to this remote area. There we could wash off the dust and mud of the working week.

This was a first encounter with the language, the culture and people of a land which we are very keen to return to next

year. There is still much work to be done, nine years after the war and the siege of Sarajevo, and in a small way it is a contribution towards re-establishing the interfaith tolerance which was there in the past and which many say was a characteristic of the Balkans.

For further information, see:
www.geocities.com/sarajevocc2004/

Malcolm Allsop

'Blue Helmets' in Cali

Our construction has already reached the beams which are the basis for the second floor over the ground floor. This will be the last week when we will be able to see scattered all over the place, in every corner and nook blue helmets working together with yellow helmets. As of next week, the workers will be many fewer! The blue helmets are the skilled workmen, the "officers"; the yellow helmets are unskilled, they are learning their job. Here one learns this way...someone teaches the job working together, like mules in a team, pulling and sweating it out together. Each blue helmet has one or two learners or helpers. They work together minimum 8 hours a day, when not more, when a job cannot be interrupted. These men, supervised by an orange helmet, the already named in a preceding article, the "master" Eli-el (twice God), are leaving their sap behind: their sweat and sometimes blood, which has flowed into the structure, wall and beams of this building. They are of different ages: some are incredibly young (though already with large scars in arms and hands), some are middle aged and some are older. They are of

mixed races: Mestizos, Indian, Afro-American, white. Many arrive pedaling their bikes so as to save bus fare; many pedal an hour to get there.

The blue helmets, the "officers" know how to work; they are the Master's trustworthy men. It is not necessary in this construction to have a person destined to watch over the tools. Each officer is completely responsible for the tool entrusted to his care and nothing gets lost. These people, which we had the opportunity to meet personally as we celebrated the construction of the first cement plate which was also the roof of the basement and ground floor of the church, have left their substance engraved in the building and in our hearts. Their photos will be on the walls of the basement.

But...how much does a blue helmet earn? It is really ridiculous, considering all the hard and rough work: 350 dollars a month. If that is what a blue helmet earns, who is a skilled worker, how much, then a yellow helm? 150 dollars less. We aren't bad employers, on the contrary. They are happy to work for us because of the just treatment, the medical service and the retirement pension which they receive. There is so much unemployment that many offer much less and they take it. But so are the labor laws: manual labor is seriously underpaid.

For these people also, to elevate their condition, to help change the consciousness of the social and labor laws, to offer to whomever wants and searches for a radical change in their lives, do we build the church of the Community of Christians and our neighbors, the Seat of Anthroposophical Activities. We are also a team of mules working together, helping

each other to offer all those silent social workers a cult and a spiritual ground where they can recharge their batteries and understand what it is they are doing. Many suffer from burn out because of a lack of spiritual nourishment. This beautiful and wounded land needs and deserves all the help it can get!

With many thanks for your attention and good will!

Emilia Hosmann

Little Gidding—An English Pilgrimage



'If you came th...ay...'

The introductory lines of the second stanza of Little Gidding, final part of T. S. Eliot's Four Quartets, refer to the place called Little Gidding in the point where flat open fen land meets the open deserted arable lands of the East Midlands of England.

We were eleven from The Christian Community congregation of Stourbridge. Amongst us a speech person with a love for the poem, a priest with a deep interest in Eliot and a person who had lived at the Little Gidding site where in the 1970s a community had been attempted which grew into the community of Christ the Sower.

We were introduced to the place by Canon Girard, the resident priest-bursar, who with a warm and practical interest in the site talked about the story of Little Gidding and of Nicolas Ferrar. This was the 17th century London merchant who left the city with his parents, brothers and sisters to found a community, to teach, live and work together. The church was their focus for the saying of the Psalms and the reading of the Gospels. They were misun-

derstood by both the Catholic and Protestant sides of the divided Anglican Church. "I use candles so I can see to read the Bible!" Nicolas said to his anti Papist critics. The community was ransacked by Cromwellian troops and visited twice by Charles I. It marked the first community attempt in Britain after the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in the previous century. It came to an end in the same century. Nevertheless, this community endeavour somehow stamped its signature on the place and in succeeding centuries a small group restored the church and looked after Nicolas Ferrar's memory.

Three hundred years later in the 1930s TS Eliot came to visit Little Gidding. The rough road, the pigsty, the church, kneeling 'where prayer has been valid...' all came together in his subsequent poem— [indent for quote]Here the intersection of the timeless moment

Is England and nowhere.

Never and always... [end indent]

When Little Gidding was published in 1942, it was a beacon of hope in a troubled war-torn time. Here was no nationalist tub-thumping and yet here was an assertion of the folk soul of the English, caught in a moment in time and yet out of time. The poem's message of a hope that was more than nationalism —the hope of a future of a choice between 'fire and a fire', of love and a life costing 'not less than everything'—this message spoke when an evil force was on the march. We spoke the poem together in the farmhouse, after Canon Girard's description of what had happened in the recent past and the struggles to establish this community. He reflected, in an important statement,

that communities were there to curb the powerful and support the weak. How often is that ignored, we wondered. The recent community endeavours at Little Gidding have suffered many problems. Canon Girard introduced us to an interesting thread of the English folk soul that T S Eliot had also tried to tease out—in the poem, the phenomenon of the 'glorious failure'—the one who tried but in an earthy sense did not succeed, and yet created something of enduring value. This sense of glorious failure resonates with aspects of the destiny of England since the Second World War. Little Gidding is a meeting of streams, a

meeting of the universal Christian with the individual in its intimate surroundings so far from anywhere and yet so close—we had left Stourbridge only a few hours earlier.

The summer had also seen a rash of flags showing the St. George's cross. It always presents a problem, this flag—what should we do with this emblem? Perhaps finding a place in England transformed by pilgrimage is the key, where one can just go and sit in a little church that is universal and not particular. In this way we might come into relationship with the English folk spirit where it can meet the universal beyond national boundaries.

Vivian Griffiths

Forthcoming Events

BRITAIN

All-Ireland Epiphany Conference in County Clare 21st–23rd January 2005. Contact Karin Shea, Ballymalone, Tuamgraney, Co. Clare

Ordinations for 2005 are planned on 5th & 6th March in West Berlin and on 7th and 8th May in the new church in East Berlin.

Orientation Course for the Priesthood 6th–8th May 2005 in Forest Row. For more information contact Rev. Peter van Breda 51 Queen Caroline Street, London W6 9QL tel: 020 87488388 or Rev. Michaela Wijnberg, Hartfield Road, Forest Row, El Sussex, RH18 5DZ tel: 01342 323205