

REARMEMENT MORAL · CAUX

Centre de Rencontres Internationales

TÉL. 021/9634821
TÉLÉFAX 021/9635260
TÉLÉGRAMME CAUXVAUD

MOUNTAIN HOUSE
RUE DU PANORAMA
CH-1824 CAUX

PRIVATE

29th July, 1991

Dear friends,

It would take a nutshell of some considerable size to house the impressions and events of this 4th week of the 1991 summer in Caux, which we have just set behind us. Has Caux ever seen the like? We doubt it. It's always been true that one could only give a very partial picture of all that happens here, only reproduce on the blank page a few of the colours, a small part of the tapestry, the amazing tapestry. But there have been up to eight parallel programmes at any one time (including a seminar 'for men only' on 'Understanding ourselves, and trying to understand women')! Sheer statistics alone only add to the perplexity of the poor mind behind the pen, wrestling with the A4 nutshell. How to portray the vast variety of people filling every corner of the house during the day, and every available bed in Mountain House and beyond at night? At its highest point, the housecount peaked at 680. It doesn't look like dropping below 500 from now until the end. Andrew is just back from the mountain camp with a dozen teenagers, brown and fit, slightly dazed by the hordes of people, the babble of voices after his lonely, silent mountain peaks!

During the first days of the week, the two sessions on health and family policy were running side by side. 'Family life isn't a matter of give and take, it consists of give and give,' said a British father, taking part with his family. A professional woman caught up between career and motherhood told how after eight years of marriage and determined efforts to control her own life she had given birth to a son. 'If I had continued to run everything, my son would not have been born. What I would have missed,' she said. A son told how verbal violence from his father had led on to physical violence, and hate. Then one day the son had been struck by the thought: 'Whatever you feel about your father, however wrong he has been towards you, you never helped him to be the man he is meant to be. Are you going to pass on the same feelings to your children, or are you going to break the chain of hate?'

Mrs Valerie Riches, who is founder and National Chairman of Family and Youth Concern in Britain, a work born out of her own experiences, said, 'You cannot run a family unless you have some morality to offer.' 'We didn't know what to expect, when we came here,' said two girls from Atlanta, Georgia, USA. 'We thought we would hear lectures, but this way of sharing experiences is totally different. We are all learners together.'

The 'medics' devoted one of their meetings to 'Reconciliation and Health', because of 'the cost of conflict in terms of human suffering. Violent conflict is damaging to the nations' health. People suffer physically and mentally for years after such conflicts.' At the end of this meeting, a young woman from the Middle East came up unannounced. Her family had been forced into exile. 'I am here to find out how I am going to deal with this,' she said. 'I feel responsible. The hate in me has been the main force in my life. "One day they are going to pay for this", I've said. But then the killing will go on and there will be no difference between my attitude and that of my government. I am struggling still, and I hope that I can find it in my heart to forgive them for what they have done. Thank you all for sharing your own experiences.'

Then, in one day, two hundred people left, and another two hundred arrived - so the needs were many, but the ship sailed on into the next session, the women's initiative 'Creators of Peace'. It was a moment of magic, when with one

from each of the 65 countries represented in the house in a vast ring around the Great Hall, each held a candle and passed on the flame until we were surrounded by a circle of light. A woman from each continent read a prayer for peace or a passage from holy scriptures (see the press story attached).

Africa has been very present: African singing and dancing in the entrance hall, to welcome important guests, a tea-time dancing, singing procession to present gifts to Caux. But Russia and the peoples of the Soviet lands have also been very present, through a fascinating series of afternoon seminars, and a deeply stirring exhibition of photographs by Alexander Nazarov, and icons. Victor Sparre, the Norwegian painter who has just had a major exhibition himself in the Soviet Union, opened the exhibition in the newly-created third floor area. 'These pictures are all like icons to me,' Sparre said. 'They show that life is a preparation for eternity. Dostoyevsky said that the Russians would take the world to their hearts. We are taking you Russians to our hearts.'

Yesterday, a leading woman from the Chinese city of Tangshan recalled the earthquake, measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale, that had destroyed her city 15 years ago to the day. The 1000-year-old city of 6 million people had been flattened in seconds. Mrs Hulxin Yao, the Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress in the city was speaking in a meeting on the theme of 'Transforming suffering'. She told how her own house had collapsed around her, and her own daughter had been killed. Nearly 250,000 lives had been lost. The Chinese translator had tears in her voice as she translated the plainly told tale. Tangshan had a hard-won experience that the world community could draw from, Mrs Yao believed. Self-reliance and a selfless spirit had been the keys to reconstruction, she went on, 'the starting point for building a better future'. She hoped that some of the participants would visit Tangshan and see for themselves. Mrs Yao is one of an official delegation of 4 from the China Association for International Understanding taking part in the conference.

Black and white South African also spoke. A white Afrikaner nurse, Helen Harris, from Springs, spoke of the turning-point experience she had had when she'd seen a black baby die of tuberculosis. 'The laws are changing in South Africa,' she said, 'but people must still change. I am proud to be a white woman living in the new South Africa. I have found a mission: to serve all the people of my country, regardless of race, colour or creed.' An Ethiopian refugee and a young black American activist from Black Teen Advancement were among the other speakers.

A widowed cancer patient, Regula Borel, shared from her own experience of suffering: 'Never fall into the trap of thinking that you are suffering more than anyone else and that others can't understand you anyway - this is the best way to lose perspective; Don't consider your feelings and emotions as an enemy, pushing them down and trying to be brave - but use them as instruments to get to know yourself better, and so others; Appreciate fully the spiritual and physical strength given each day rather than worry and complain about an unknown tomorrow; Never let self-pity run your feelings, but constantly try to reach out to others; Face the things you find most difficult to accept and deal with, see if there is anything concrete that you can do - and then go and do it; Don't think that you need to cope with everything on your own, but trust that the Almighty and friends will want to walk the way with you; Never think that peace and healing are something that I am entitled to receive, but accept them as a precious gift if they are given; And last, but for me the most important - never ask the question "Why?" but rather "What for?" which can transform pain and difficulties into the beginning of new life.'

With greetings from two brothers in a Caux overflowing with life,

Finn Harald Wetterfors

Andrew Stallybrass