

Growing Without Schooling

A magazine founded by

John Holt

VOLUME

1

Edited by
Patrick Farenga
and
Carlo Ricci

**Growing Without Schooling:
The Complete Collection
Vol. 1, 1977 to 1981**

John C. Holt, editor and founder

Series Edited by Patrick Farenga and Carlo Ricci

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Series edited by Patrick Farenga and Carlo Ricci

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Introduction

By Patrick Farenga

When I first arrived at *Growing Without Schooling (GWS)* magazine in 1981 I thought it would be a steppingstone for me to another job in the magazine industry; instead, it became a focus of my life's work. Being around people who not only criticized school methods but actually took action to help their children learn and grow in ways that schools will not or cannot proved exciting to me. From kindergarten to college, every educational precept I knew was challenged and alternatives presented and I eventually realized that John Holt was creating something new and different in the world of education that I wanted to be part of. Unlike most schools and corporations, John did not want or encourage slavish devotion to an institutional mission as the primary purpose of one's life. John encouraged everyone, including me, to focus on our interests and concerns that engaged us, no matter how big or small, rather than to always put our own development aside in favor of proving to school officials that we can focus on their interests and concerns.

In formatting and editing these issues for digital readers I realized what an incredible individual and group effort *GWS* was and still is. John Holt almost single-handedly wrote many of the first ten issues and much of his thinking generated some incredibly thoughtful and brave responses. I say "brave" because simply saying you were homeschooling in those days often led to severe personal and public criticism or a court appearance, as you can readily read in this volume. You can see a grassroots movement developing its reach, finding allies and resources, defending its right to exist in the face of bigger, more organized, and well-funded opposition, and celebrating the unique power to learn and grow that is in each of us

I had a lot of misgivings about doing this project at first. Accurately collecting, editing, and formatting the more than six thousand pages of the original, single-spaced *GWS* articles is an enormous undertaking that I long avoided due to the amount of time and effort it required not just by me, but by anyone who joined. I am grateful that Carlo is persistent and over the course of several conversations he showed me that volunteers, good will, and

using some of the graduate students at the school where he teaches, Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario, were good, low-tech ways to tame the thousands of pages printed during *GWS*' 24 years. The manual labor involved was enormous—every issue was retyped—and I am grateful to every typist, proofreader, and copyeditor who helped us create this collection.

This is the first of many volumes of *Growing Without Schooling*; I look forward to sharing them all and hearing back about what you think about parents and children directing their own learning without conventional schooling. Homeschooling has grown tremendously since Holt published *GWS* #1 in August, 1977; Holt estimated there may have been perhaps 25,000 children being homeschooled in the late 1970s; there are now over 2 million children being taught outside of school and in their local communities by their parents. How did this wild growth happen? The answer is right in your hands.

By Carlo Ricci

First, I need to thank all of the volunteers, which includes technical experts who created solutions for us, since they all helped make this enormous project possible. Although, republishing all of the issues of *Growing Without Schooling* seems simple enough, the task required thousands and thousands of human hours and some ingenious technical mastery. I will spare you the details, but suffice it to say that a lot of the work was tedious, time consuming, and took a whole team of us (including over 100 volunteers) over 5 years, so far, to get to where we are today.

For many of us GWS remains one of the most inspirational and important windows into unschooling, self-determination, and willed learning. The insights gleaned by reading GWS are seminal. Years after it was last published, the legend of GWS remains ubiquitous. I believe that GWS is still the turning point for many. For this reason, I hoped that reprinting the issues in volumes to make it accessible would be a great service. So in 2011, I emailed Pat Farenga to ask if he is interested in republishing GWS. Of course, he was. However, he warned me that they tried to do this before, and after putting out one volume containing 12 of the 141 issues, they realized that the task was enormous and required too many people hours to complete.

With the good fortune and hope in newer technology to assist us, we decided to move forward. Initially, Pat, Stephen Tedesco (without his technical expertise, I am not sure if we could have pulled this off. Early into the project Stephen had to leave and we were sad to see him go), and I thought we would tackle this project. It quickly became clear that if it was left to the three of us, this project could not be completed. The hours required to do what needed to be done were far too many for three people, no matter how committed, to complete. In short, the first step required that we either retype every single issue, or that we follow Stephen's technical solution which converted a hard copy of the document into a digital document so that we could manipulate the text. We decided to follow Stephen's solution. Regardless, because of the format of the original issues, converting the issues into a digital document was still very time-consuming, and required heavy proofreading and editing, since the conversion resulted in an error-filled

document.

It became clear very quickly that if we were going to do this we required help, and lots of it. In life, I believe that meeting and having great people in your life that you know personally is a great fortune. Another great fortune is to be a part of a larger community of people that you might not know personally, but that are nonetheless a part of your world. And if you are really lucky, you will have both personal friends and belong to a strong community. Fortunately, I am really, really lucky. So when I suggested to Pat and Stephen that we try and tap into our networks to see if we can get a few volunteers to help, we were hopeful that we might get a few people.

In fact, seconds after we put out the call asking for volunteers, offers came flooding in, for which we remain thankful and humbled. I like to think that they agreed to volunteer because, of course they are special people, and also because they believe in the value of sharing GWS with the world as much as we do. I also believe that Holt remains such a beacon of hope and inspiration that people want to be a part of what his legend and work continues to offer. Holt still brings people and communities together, as this project attests.

GWS is interesting as a historical document, but much more than that. It is as relevant for people today as it was when it was first published. I believe Holt felt the same. When people would subscribe to GWS they would start with receiving issue 1 regardless of when they subscribed. This indicates to me that it was not written for a particular time, but it was meant to be a record for future readers where all of the information in all of the issues is timeless. In fact in issue 5, Holt writes, “Some people, now or in the future, who read GWS ...” This quote makes clear to me that GWS was meant to be timeless. It was written with present and future readers in mind.

GWS, in part, is about how we learn best. It offers clear examples and narratives from people who are learning through unschooling. There are lots and lots of examples of how people successfully learn naturally. GWS shares tips about what people are doing to learn and how and what they are learning. It also offers powerful insights into how to get credentialed by going to school less.

GWS is the best way to learn about “learning.” It’s great because it’s not just theory, but it is what people are actually doing. Again, the tips and insights are just as helpful and relevant today, maybe even more so.

In part, GWS connects people with each other; informs people about

friendly post-secondary options, which is helpful for both unschoolers and mainstream schoolers, and it connects and informs people about alternative possibilities and even friendly schools.

GWS is useful for everyone to read since all of us learn. There are also narratives of people in mainstream schools who see understanding “learning” as a high priority, who report in *GWS* that what is written in *GWS* is helpful to them as mainstream schoolers. They report finding it worthwhile, and clearly provocative.

It is clear that *GWS* helped and continues to help many. It contributed to normalizing homeschooling and to bringing and organizing the homeschooling community. *GWS* connected people with each other, gave people the information they needed to navigate and challenge the laws, and gave people the confidence and ideas about what it means to learn as an unschooler. Of course, it continues to do this for everyone who takes the time to read the issues of this seminal magazine.

In *GWS* #19 Tom Wesley writes: “When I first wrote *GWS* I was too insecure to use my name. Now I feel safe enough after four years of tolerant, helpful teachers and school board members to come out of the unschooling closet.” The security felt by Tom Wesley was made possible, in part, by the pages of *GWS*. Like Tom, many more of us can now feel safe and confident.

I am extremely proud and happy to have such a great social circle and to be a part of such a wonderful project and community, and I sincerely hope that *GWS* will live on and be a source of peace, love, and inspiration well into the future.

Editorial Note

We want to preserve the original tone and context of the original issues as much as possible in this collection, but we have discovered that some conventions from the printed issues do not carry over well to the digital realm, particularly *Growing Without Schooling*’s use of ellipses.

John Holt and Donna Richoux, the editors for these issues, made meticulous deletions to the original letters in order to squeeze the text into a few printed pages. In editing these volumes, we have edited out many of the ellipses in readers’ letters and found doing so does not change the meaning of the letter and removes a lot of visual clutter from the page, making it easier to

read. We have not removed ellipses from quoted materials or where they are needed for comprehension.

A note about *GWS* issue dates and style: John Holt didn't want to date the issues of *GWS* because he felt they contained much timeless material about children and learning, so he decided that a simple number system—*GWS* #1, *GWS* #2, etc.—was more useful. When we reached a certain number of subscribers the postal service required us to print the date of publication in each issue, so starting with *GWS* #31 there are accurate publication dates. But we can only guess at the dates of some of the early issues based on the references we see and the fact that Holt only published when he had enough material, not because it was a certain date. It wasn't until editor Donna Richoux joined *GWS* (see *GWS* #11) that it maintained a steady bimonthly publishing schedule.

Starting with *GWS* #27, one can see the expansion of the *GWS* Resource Lists to include the following categories that were updated in all future issues: Certified Teachers (willing to help homeschoolers); Homeschooling Groups (by state); other organizations that support self-reliance, child-raising, and educational issues as homeschooling allies or help; Friendly Lawyers, Professors and others allies willing to help homeschooler develop curriculum, evaluate progress, or in other ways; Correspondence Schools and Books; Helpful Private Schools that enrol or help home study students; Friendly School Districts; the Directory of Families willing to network with others and be contacted by people interested in learning more about homeschooling. From this issue forward, the Resource Lists took up the last pages of each issue of *GWS*. We chose not to reproduce those lists as this information is quite dated, but they were a vital tool used by many homeschoolers, whether subscribers and nonsubscribers, until the advent of the internet.

While we wanted to make this as easy to read as possible by using standard spelling conventions, the abbreviations and other shorthand John used to write and comment in the issues is preserved. We feel it helps give you a sense of all the excitement about the ideas Holt and others were sharing in those days.

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Growing Without Schooling 1

August 1977

This is the first issue of a newsletter, about ways in which people, young or old, can learn and do things, acquire skills, and find interesting and useful work, without having to go through the process of schooling. In part, it will be about people who, during some of their own growing up, did not go to school, what they did instead, and how they made a place for themselves in the world. Mostly, it will be about people who want to take or keep their children out of school, and about what they might do instead, what problems come up, and how they cope with these. We hope, also, that children who are, right now, growing without schooling will let us know how they feel about this. If they do, we will not identify them as children, except as they do in their own writing.

Growing Without Schooling, or *GWS* as we will call it from now on, will be in part an exchange. Much of what is in it, we hope, will come from its readers. In its pages people can talk about certain common ideas, needs, concerns, plans, and experiences. In time it may lead to many informal and personal networks of mutual help and support.

GWS will come out whenever we have enough material to make an interesting issue. This may at first be only three or four times a year. Later, as more people read it and send in material, it may come out as often as six times a year.

GWS will not be much concerned with schools, even alternative or free schools, except as they may enable people to keep their children out of school by 1) calling their own home a school, or 2) enrolling their children, as some have already, in schools near or far which then approve a home study program. We will, however, be looking for ways in which people who want or need them can get school tickets—credits, certificates, degrees, diplomas, etc.—without having to spend time in school. And we will be very interested, as the schools and schools of education do not seem to be, in the act and art of teaching, that is, all the ways in which people, of all ages, in or out of

school, can more effectively share information, ideas, and skills.

Subscriptions

GWS will be supported entirely by subscriptions, not by advertising, foundations, universities, or government grants, all of which are unreliable. We will do our best to print as much useful material as possible at the lowest possible cost. But we think it best that those who use a service should pay the cost of it. We also want those who work on *GWS* to be paid a decent wage, if only for the sake of staying power. People who work for nothing or for token wages soon grow tired of this and quit. We want this newsletter to come out as long as people feel a need for it. This can only happen if those who put it out do not have to do so at great personal sacrifice.

This first issue is four pages. All following issues will be eight pages, perhaps in time more than that. Subscriptions are \$10 for six issues. A Times Two or 2X subscription (we mail two copies of each issue) will be \$12 for six issues; a 3X subscription will be \$14 for six issues, and so on, \$2 more for each additional copy per issue. Thus, two or more people or families can take out multiple subscriptions and split the cost. In this way, two people can get *GWS* for \$6 a year each; four for \$4 a year each; eight, for \$3 a year each, and so on. Or, people, or bookstores, can take out multiple subscriptions and resell individual subscriptions or copies. Also, people may buy in quantity copies of any issue.

All subscriptions to *GWS* will begin with Issue #1 unless you tell us otherwise, i.e., please begin my subscription with Issue #2, or #3, or whatever.

Someday, if we get enough subscribers, we may be able to lower the subscription price. This will not be for a while; even at its present price, *GWS* will probably not be self-supporting until we have around 2,000 subscribers. And as we said, we think *GWS* must be self-supporting. Charity is fickle, and we mean to be around for a while.

On Social Change

In starting this newsletter, we are putting into practice a nickel and dime theory about social change, which is, that important and lasting social change always comes slowly, and only when people change their lives, not just their political beliefs or parties. It is a process, that takes place over a period of time. At one moment in history, with respect to a certain matter, 99% of a society think and act one way; 1% think and act very differently. Some time later, that 1% minority becomes 2%, then 5%, then 10, 20, 30, until someday it becomes the dominant majority, and the social change has taken place. Some may ask, “When did this social change take place?” or “When did it begin?” There is no answer to these questions, except perhaps to say that any given social change begins the first time one person thinks of it.

I have come to understand, finally, and even to accept, that in almost everything I believe and care about I am a member of a minority in my own country, in most cases a very small minority. This is certainly true of all my ideas about children and education. We who do not believe in compulsory schooling, who believe that children want to learn about the world, are good at it, and can be trusted to do it, without much adult coercion or interference, are surely not more than 1% of the population and perhaps much less than that. And we are not likely to become the effective majority for many years, probably not in my lifetime, perhaps not in the lifetime of any readers of GWS.

This doesn't trouble me any more, as long as those minorities of which I am a member go on growing. My work is to help them grow. If we can describe the effective majority of our society, with respect to children or schools or any other question, as moving in direction X, and ourselves, the small minority, as moving in direction Y, what I want to do is to find ways to help people, who want to move in direction Y, to move in that direction, rather than run after the great X-bound army shouting at them, “Hey you guys, stop, turn around, you ought to be heading in direction Y!” In areas they feel are important, people don't change their ideas, much less their lives, because someone comes along with a bunch of arguments to show that they are mistaken, and even wicked, to think or do as they do. Once in a while, we may have to argue with the X-bound majority, to try to stop them from doing

a great and immediate wrong. But most of the time, as a way of making real and deep changes in society, this kind of shouting and arguing seems to me a waste of time.

Why Keep Them Out?

Jud Jerome (Downhill Farm, Hancock, MD 21750) has written us a long letter, which he will print in this and the next issue. (I hope many other readers will follow his good example.) His youngest child, Topher, after a year of kindergarten, did not go to school again until he was 10. Then he went for a few months to a small “free School” on another commune. After a while, his parents took him out. Of this, Jud writes:

In regard to Topher, though, I should add that though we were glad he was happy and enjoying himself (in school), we were also sad as we watched him deteriorate from a person into a kid under peer influence in school. It was much like what we saw happening when he was in kindergarten. There are certain kinds of childishness which it seems most people accept as being natural, something children have to go through, something which it is, indeed, a shame to deny them. Silliness, self-indulgence, random rebelliousness, secretiveness, cruelty to other children, clubbishness, addiction to toys, possessions, junk, spending money, purchased entertainment, exploitation of adults to pay attention, take them places, amuse them, do things with them—all these things seem to be quite unnecessary, not “normal” at all (note: except in the sense of being common), and just as disgusting in children as they are in adults. And while they develop as a result of peer influence, I believe this is only and specifically because children are thrown together in schools and develop these means, as prisoners develop means of passing dull time and tormenting authorities to cope with an oppressive situation. The richer the families children come from, the worse these traits seem to be. Two years of school and Topher would probably have regressed two years in emotional development. I am not sure of that, of course, and it was not because of that fear that we pulled him out, but we saw enough of what happened to him in a school situation not to regret pulling him out.

I have snatched this paragraph out of the middle of Jud’s letter because it seems to me to answer so perfectly a question many ask me when they first think of taking their kids out of school: “But won’t they miss the social life?”

To this I say that if I had no other reason for wanting to keep kids out of school (and I have many), the social life would be reason enough. In all the schools I have taught in, visited, or know anything about, the social-life of the children is mean-spirited, competitive, exclusive, status-seeking, full of talk about who went to who's birthday party and who got what Christmas presents and who got how many Valentine cards and who is talking to so-and-so and who is not. Even in the first grade, classes soon divide up into leaders, energetic, and (often deservedly) popular kids, their bands of followers, and other outsiders who are pointedly excluded from these groups.

And I remember my sister saying of one of her children, then five, that she never knew her to do anything really mean or silly until she went away to school—a nice school, by the way, in a nice small town.

Useful Resources

N.A.L.S.A.S. (National Association for the Legal Support of Alternative Schools, P.O. Box 2823, Santa Fe, NM 87501). This small organization, under the leadership of Ed Nagel, has done much important research into compulsory attendance laws, the right of people to start and run their own school, and the right of people to enroll their children in distant alternative schools which then approve and supervise a home study program. People from at least two other states have enrolled their children in the Santa Fe Community School (where Ed Nagel teaches) in this way, and in at least one case, and I think more, local courts have upheld their right to do this. N.A.L.S.A.S. needs and deserves support.

The Last? Resort, newsletter of the Committee to End Violence Against the Next Generation (or EVAN-G), 977 Keeler Ave., Berkeley, CA 94708. Members of the Committee (\$10/yr.) receive the newsletter, a very complete survey of court cases, newspaper stories and editorials, and other events in this field. Newsletter is scary reading; large numbers of children are still being brutally beaten, often for the most trivial offenses or no offenses at all. One boy, who had sprained his ankle and had a note from a doctor saying that he should not exercise on it, was severely paddled and in fact injured by a coach (the coaches and Physical Education teachers seem to be among the worst offenders) who told him to high jump during a Phys. Ed. class. The school sadists are in most cases upheld by the courts, most recently by the Supreme Court. Most Americans like the idea of beating up on kids, and are ready to seize on almost anything as an excuse to do so.

SEE (Selective Educational Equipment, Inc., 3 Bridge St., Newton MA 02195). These folks produce and/or distribute some very good school materials, many of which could be used at home. I will comment later in detail about some of the materials available. For the time being I urge you to get their catalogue. They have very good stuff for measuring things.

Outlook, a quarterly (\$6/yr., \$10/2 yrs.) pub. by Mountain View Center for Environmental Education, Univ. of Colorado, 1511 University Ave., Boulder, CO 80309. The only serious (but not stuffy) publication about *teaching* (as opposed to classroom management, tricks to keep the kids busy, etc.) that I know of in this country. Since the editor, Tony Kallet, is a musician, it is

likely to have very good stuff about music.

Home Study Institute, Takoma Park, Washington, D.C. 20012. This well established, respectable, and very extensive correspondence school seems to be run by, or somehow connected to, the Seventh Day Adventists. They offer accredited elementary, high school, and other programs. At first glance, these seem to be very conventional, use standard school texts, etc. This has this advantage, that most schools will accept the credits or certificates of the Institute as being as good as their own.

Their course of study for all elementary and secondary grades includes some kind of bible or religious study each year, presumably from the Seventh Day Adventist point of view. Whether people of other religious faiths, or none at all, can waive this particular requirement, I have yet to find out.

On page 15 of their catalogue is this interesting statement:

School attendance laws vary from state to state. Parents are advised to counsel with the Educational Secretary of the local Seventh-Day Adventist conference regarding compulsory attendance laws and teacher qualification requirements in the area where they live. We will be glad to give assistance if the need arises. In New York, in the case of Foster, 330 N.Y.s 2d8, Family Court of City of New York, Kings County, Feb.16, 1972, the Court stated: "It is settled law that a parent need not avail himself of formal educational facilities for a child in order to satisfy the requirements of the law, it being sufficient that a systematic course of study be undertaken at home and that the parent render qualified quality instruction.

This suggests that the Adventists have had a good deal of experience in bucking compulsory attendance laws, and (judging from the size of their catalogue) that considerable numbers of children are using their courses instead of attending schools. In short, these folks may already know a great deal that we need to find out. We at GWS will look further into this and tell you what we find out.

School Violence And Vandalism—a report of the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency (Sen. Birch Bayh, Chmn.) of the Committee on the Judiciary of the United States Senate. For sale by Supt. of Documents, U.S. Govt. Printing Office, Wash. D.C. 20402; \$4.95.

This is a two-volume report, the first stating the problem, the second

proposing ways (most of them rather foolish) for dealing with it. You may be able to get Vol.1 free from Sen. Bayh's office; if not, it is worth \$4.95 as an official statement of what life in most schools is really like.

Children's Rights Report, published by the Juvenile Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation. 11 issues, \$15/yr. Vol.1, No.8, May 1977, discusses the Supreme Court ruling on corporal punishment in the schools. Well worth reading.

Access to the World

The following is part of an article that came out in the New Schools Exchange Newsletter, and later, in the magazine Green Revolution.

(in this alternative school) there is more than a little talk about the curriculum, so carefully planned, guided, and enriched. So here in free and alternative schools we are still doing what conventional schools have always done. We take children out of and away from the great richness and variety of the world, and in its place we give them school subjects, the curriculum. Perhaps we may jazz it up with chicken bones, Cuisenaire rods, and all sorts of goodies from EDC. But the fact remains that instead of giving them access to more and more people, places, tools, and experiences, we are cutting the world up into little bits and giving it to the children according to this or that theory about what they need or can stand. I say instead that what they need is *access* to more and more of the real world; plenty of time and space to think over their experiences, and to use fantasy and play to make meaning out of them; advice, road maps, guide books, to make it easier for them to get where they want to go (not where we think they ought to go), and to find out what they want to find out. Finding ways to do all this is not a small matter. The modern world is dangerous, confusing, not meant for children, not generally kind or welcoming to them. We have a great deal to learn about how to make the world more accessible to them, and how to give them more freedom and competence in exploring it. It is not a small subject. But it is a very different thing indeed from designing nice little curricula.

A small footnote. To people who are thinking of starting new schools, perhaps because there seems no other way that the law will let them teach their own children, my strong advice is, keep that school as small as possible, the absolute minimum that the law will allow and still call it a school. The problems of schools, the difficulties of running them, the troubles they get into with the authorities, seem to increase, roughly, with the square or maybe the cube of the size of the student body. Four or five kids can go anywhere

with an adult; a dozen gets to be a problem; two dozen is a big problem; and for forty or fifty you have to get a permit from City Hall. Keep it small, keep it cheap; there's no other way to go.

More From Jud Jerome

The next daughter down the line was twelve when we moved to the commune. She finished that year of school on “independent study,” living at the farm, turning in work to teachers back at the city. But when Fall came she did not want to enroll. To avoid the law we enrolled her in a “free” school in Spokane, Wash., run by a friend, who carried her on the rolls, though she has not yet, to date, seen that city or that school. She spent most of the first year here at the farm, pitching in as an adult, learning from experience as we were all learning. While she was still thirteen we went to help another commune, in northern Vermont, with sugaring, and she loved that place—which was very primitive and used horse-drawn equipment so asked to stay. This was an agreeable arrangement on all sides—and she has lived there now for over five years, except for one, when she was sixteen. That year she and her mate (ten years her senior) went to Iceland (Vermont was not rugged enough for them) to winter, working in a fish cannery. The next Spring they traveled, camping, to Scandinavia, hiked the Alps, then flew home—coming back with \$3000 more than they left with after a year abroad. Last year, she wanted to apply for a government vocational program, for which she needed a high school diploma, so went to an adult education class for a few months, and took the test, passing in the top percentile (and being offered scholarships to various colleges). She “graduated” earlier than her classmates who stayed in school. I think her case illustrates especially dramatically the waste of time in schools. She is by no means a studious type, would never think of herself as an intellectual, has always been more interested in milking cows and hoeing vegetables and driving teams of horses than in books, and in her years between thirteen and eighteen moved comfortably into womanhood and acquired a vast number of skills, had a vast range of experiences in the adult world, yet managed to qualify exceptionally by academic standards. By comparison, her classmates who stayed in school are in many cases stunted in mind, emotionally disturbed, without significant goals or directions or sound values in their lives—in large part (in my judgment) specifically because of their schooling.

The Other World

The house magazine of a leading hotel chain contained the following advertisement, for itself:

When you stay at ——— you're in among them ... a never-ending parade of famous faces. The pace-setters work and play at ———. The people who shape events and places. The elevator door opens and *she's* there beside you, the fabled face known in millions of homes throughout the world. Or suddenly the mood tenses, people rush forward to see or touch him as he pauses briefly, surrounded by his entourage, and then he's gone. What he did here today, while *you* were staying at the ——— reported (sic) in the world press tonight.

On Counting

Many years ago I knew a child of about four whose older brothers and sisters were “teaching her to count.” One day I heard her say, “One, two, three, four, five, seven, six, eight ...” at which point the older kids said indignantly, “No! No! Seven comes *after* six!”

“Comes after.” It seemed to me that from such words children could get a very strange idea of numbers, that they were a procession of little creatures, like dwarves, the first named One, the second named Two, the third named Three, and so on. Later on these dwarves would seem to do mysterious and meaningless dances, about which people would say things like “Two and two make four,” etc. It seemed likely that any child with such an idea of numbers would soon get into trouble, and this did indeed happen with this four-year-old. Later, I asked some adults who had always been hopeless at arithmetic what they thought of this idea of mine, and many of them laughed and said this was indeed how they had always felt about numbers, and why they could never make any sense of them.

It seems to me most important that a child *not* be taught to count number names in the absence of real objects. The Sesame Street approach (like many other things on that program) is dead wrong. When little children first meet numbers they should *always* meet them as adjectives, not nouns. Not “three” or “seven” all by itself, but “three spoons” or “seven matches” or “five pennies” or whatever. Time enough later, probably much later, for children to intuit slowly that the noun “five” is that quality which all groups of five objects have in common.

Nor is it a good idea for children always to meet numbers in the counting order. We might at one moment show a child two of some object, but the next thing we show might be five of some other object, or eight, or whatever. Numbers exist in nature in quite random ways, and a child should be ready to accept numbers where he finds them.

It would also be helpful to have children see, and in time learn to recognize all the numbers smaller than ten by the kinds of patterns they make. Thus, a child being shown three small objects might at one time see them in a row, at another, in a triangle. Four objects could be shown in a square, or in a row of three with the extra one on top. The patterns for five

could be a regular pentagon, or a square with a fifth dot on top, or perhaps a square with the extra dot in the center. And so on. Such patterns could be put on cards, perhaps with the number symbol or digit on the other side. I'm not at all suggesting that children should be forced or even asked to memorize these cards. But if children had such cards to look at and play with—they all love regular playing cards—they might in time come to know all these patterns, and would thus have ways other than counting to identify small numbers. In this connection a set of dominoes might be a useful toy, and many young children would enjoy playing with them, even if they were doing no more than matching patterns.

It also seems to me important, when we adults count things for children, that we *not* do what most of us now do, that is, move from one object to the next saying as we go, "One, two, three ..." The child sees us touching these objects, which otherwise look the same, and saying a different word for each one, and may well decide that "One, two, three ..." are the names of the objects, dwarf style. We would do better, as we count each item, to move it to the side, saying as we move the first, "Now we have one over here," then as we move the second, "Now we have two over here," and then in turn, "Now we have three," "now we have four," "now we have five," and so on. Thus at each point the child can see clearly that the number name refers not to a particular object but to the size of the group of objects which we have set to one side.

In time we could introduce the idea of ordinal numbers, which show the place of an item in an array, rather than the size of a group of items. Thus, given a row of small objects, we might touch them in turn, saying as we go something like, "This is the first one, this is the second one, this is the third one, and the fourth one, and the fifth, and the sixth, etc." No need to talk at first about the words "cardinal" and "ordinal." If we simply do our counting in a way that reflects the nature of these ideas, the child will soon intuit the difference. Later, when he fully grasps the idea that one set of number names refers to the quantity or size of something, while another set refers to the place of something, he may be interested in hearing the words "cardinal" and "ordinal." If not, no matter.

When we count a group of small objects, we do not always have to count by ones, and can just as well count by twos or threes. The child will see from this that there are many ways of counting and that he can pick the one that

seems most handy. He will also get a running start on learning some simple products.

A few children, of course, grasp these notions of cardinal and ordinal in spite of our very confused and confusing ways of presenting them. But most do not, and I suspect many children would move more confidently into the world of numbers if we introduced them as I have suggested here.

A School Story

In his wonderful book How to Survive in Your Native Land (Bantam paperback available from GWS) James Herndon writes:

In September of 1967 I looked through the cumulative folders we were going to have in our class for the coming year, that is to say, the next Monday. I read what I already knew—the first grader with testable high IQ, the remarked bright student, leader, reads at third-grade-level, headed for the big time; and the fourth grader with low-average capability, IQ 89, lazy kid, must-be-pushed-to-achieve, reads-at-second-grade-level, discipline problem, parents cooperative.

The first grader and the fourth grader are the same kid.

I read this once to a group of school administrators. I asked them if they had kids like that, and if so how many, in their schools or school systems. None of them knew. I asked if any of them had ever checked through their files to see whether they had some kids like that. None of them had.

We Need To Know

We would like to print, in later issues from time to time, or perhaps someday in a separate directory, the names and addresses of our subscribers, so that people may get in touch with each other directly, or perhaps arrange to meet if they happen to go through each others' home towns. Please let us know whether we may put your name and address in such a directory. Also, if you write us something, please let us know if we may print your name, or name and address, with your letter.

We also need to know, for as many states as possible, what the laws about compulsory school attendance, about acceptable alternatives to it, such as tutoring and home study, and about people starting their own schools, actually say. One group of people who probably know are the Seventh-Day Adventists (see in this issue under **USEFUL RESOURCES**). I would also suggest writing to your state representative and/or senator, *not* your state department of education. The department of education is itself a part of the school bureaucracy, and is very likely to give you a version of the laws which is tilted in favor of the schools, or to conceal from you any parts of the law that might help you escape the schools. Your legislator has no such interest. He is probably not a radical critic of the schools, but he is also almost certainly concerned that they spend so much money and are always asking for more, and also, that for what they spend, they don't seem to get much results. More on this in the next section.

We also need to know (see again *Useful Resources*) any decisions that the courts may have made in your state to interpret school and school attendance laws. These will vary from place to place. Many people write or tell me about this or that court decision which told some parents that they could not teach their children at home, but almost no one knows of court decisions, which went the other way.

We also need to build up a list of people with teacher's certificates who can and will act as tutors (real or paper) for children who are learning at home. People have written me that the schools in their area will not let them tutor their own children at home because they don't have certificates for that state. (By the way, I think it very unlikely that the law contains any such specific requirement; this is more likely to be the schools' interpretation of

the law.) I have suggested that they try to find someone with such a certificate who would be willing to say that they were the child's tutor. How much tutoring they would actually do, they and the parent could decide.

All this information we will have to get from you, the readers.

Letter To A Legislator

Dear Legislator:

I am a parent of school age children, and am seriously thinking about teaching them at home. I fear, with good reason (here you might cite the Bayh report—see *Useful Resources*), that in the schools they will be exposed to and tempted by all kinds of drugs, sex, and violence, and many kinds of peculiar ideas. I also fear that they may not learn anything, may indeed pick up from their peer group a contempt for learning, and in any case, that because of the large classes, they will not be able to get the kind of individual attention and help that I can give them at home.

I would therefore like to have the full text of all the laws in this state relating to school attendance, to alternative possibilities such as tutoring at home, and to the possibility of parents making their own home a school. I have written to you instead of the State Department of Education because I fear that, since their interest is in keeping my child in the schools, they may give me a somewhat biased version of the laws.

I would also like to know anything you may be able to tell me about court decisions in this state interpreting these laws. Thank you very much in advance for your attention and help.

Please don't use this as a form letter. I offer it only to suggest an approach that would be likely to appeal to most legislators, of whatever party or beliefs.

Please let us know, if you send any such letter, what response you get, and if you get any.

What To Say To Neighbors

One mother, who was keeping her child out of school, said to me one day that people—neighbors, relatives, people she knew—kept asking where her child was in school, and that she didn't know what to say to them. I suggested that it wasn't their business and that she didn't have to tell them anything. Later she said that she had tried that, but that it had not done any good—they kept insisting that she tell them. This seems to be one of those things that people feel they have to know, about other people.

After thinking about it a while I suggested that when people asked where her child was going to school, she say something like this, "Well, he's in a special program." If people then asked what kind of program, she could say, "It's very new, and somewhat experimental, and they don't want me to talk about it."

All of which, by the way, is perfectly true.

She tried it out on a few people and said it worked fine. Maybe it will work for others.

Six Hours A Day?

When they first think of taking their child out of school, people often say to me, “How am I going to teach him six hours a day?”

I say, “*Who’s teaching him six hours a day?*”

As a kid, I went to the “best” schools, some public, most private. I was a good student, the kind that teachers like to talk to. And it was a rare day in my schooling when I got *fifteen minutes of teaching*, that is, of concerned and thoughtful adult talk about something that I found interesting, puzzling, or important. Over the whole of my schooling, the average was probably closer to fifteen minutes a week. For most kids in most schools, it is a lot less than that. Many poor, non-white, or unusual kids, in their entire schooling, never get any teaching at all. When teachers speak to them, it is only to command, correct, warn, threaten, or blame.

Anyway, your kids don’t need, don’t want, and *couldn’t stand* six hours of your teaching a day, even if you wanted to do that much. To help them find out about the world doesn’t take that much adult input. Most of what they need, you have been giving them since they were born. As I have said, they need *access*. They need a chance, sometimes, for honest, serious, unhurried talk; or sometimes, for joking, play, and foolishness; or sometimes, for tenderness, sympathy, and comfort. They need, much of the time, to share your life, or at least, not to feel shut out of it, in short, to go some of the places you go, see and do some of the things that interest you, get to know some of your friends, find out what you did when you were little and before they were born. They need to have their questions answered, or at least heard and attended to—if you don’t know, say “I don’t know.” They need to get to know more and more adults whose main work in life is not taking care of kids. They need *some* friends their own age, but not dozens of them; two or three, at most half a dozen, is as many real friends as any child can have at one time. Perhaps above all, they need a lot of privacy, solitude, calm, times when there’s nothing to do.

Schools do not provide any of these, and no matter how or how much we changed them, never could provide most of them. But the average parent, family, circle of friends, neighborhood, and community can and do provide all of these things, perhaps not as well as they once did or might again, but

well enough. People do not need a Ph.D. or some kind of Certificate to help their children find their way into the world.

A School Story

The following are excerpts from a news story in The Real Paper (Boston, Mass.), of 3/17/ 76, headed Doping Springfield School Children.

Dr. Leo Sullivan of Boston prescribed 15 milligrams of Ritalin daily to another ten-year old boy. On a certificate filed with the Department of Public Health he listed this diagnosis: "immaturity." Under tests administered he wrote "none" and under alternative treatment he wrote "none."

Over 60 percent of all the children certified last year apparently never received alternative therapy before drugs were administered and an equal number never received anything more than a physical exam for diagnostic purposes.

Despite a nine-month investigation by the attorney general's office, and another by the Department of Public Health, no abuses were officially found in the Springfield schools.

Neither investigative agency did more than make a few phone calls. DPH did nothing at all except send the Springfield press a release saying that no abuses were evident.

During the past week, however, *The Real Paper* has obtained sworn affidavits describing numerous cases of abuse.

In one instance, the mother of a first grade child reports that her son was one of five children placed on drugs by Dr. Ploof after a teacher referral. When the teacher found little behavioral change with Dexedrine, Dr. Ploof prescribed Ritalin. A pharmacist refused to fill the prescription because of the child's age, and the mother got worried. She refused to place her child on any more drugs.

She was told that if the child were not kept on drugs he would not be allowed in school. According to the affidavit, the mother agreed to place her child back on drugs, but secretly substituted one-a-day vitamins for Ritalin. During a public hearing on the controversy, the teacher defended drug therapy, saying this child had improved considerably since taking drugs. The

teacher was shocked when the mother announced her trick.

In another affidavit, the mother of an eight-year-old girl says that her daughter was placed on Ritalin by Dr. Ploof after a teacher referral and a 20-minute evaluation by the doctor. The drug had little effect, so without any reevaluation Dr. Ploof raised the dosage two times over the phone.

That child eventually left the Springfield school system and did very well in a private school.

In the most disturbing story of them all, Dr. Ploof prescribed Ritalin for an epileptic first-grade boy. Ritalin is dangerous to epileptics. Had it not been for a rediagnosis by a second physician, the child might have suffered effects ranging from convulsions to death. The father is considering a suit against both Dr. Ploof and the school system.

I said this story was typical, and it is, as Schrag–Divoky's *The Myth of the Hyperactive Child* makes plain. This kind of thing goes on in school systems all over the country. Everywhere I go to lecture to education students, they tell me that in the schools where they do their practice teaching many children are on school-ordered drugs, and they describe many of these drugged children as being "like vegetables."

There are Dr. Ploof's everywhere. They are never brought to account. It would seem wise to be extremely skeptical of any kind of psychological or neurological diagnosis made by any doctor, psychologist, or other expert or professional connected in any way with the schools, and to have any such diagnoses checked by outside and independent persons (if you can find such).

It is instructive to read what the Physician's Desk Reference has to say about Ritalin. And it may be worth noting that in Sweden (so I have been told) Ritalin is felt to be so powerful, dangerous, and little understood that doctors may not even prescribe it.

This matter, and many others equally sinister and important, including the keeping of secret, detailed, misleading, and damaging reports on schoolchildren, are dealt with carefully and at length in *The Myth of the Hyperactive Child* (Dell paperback available from GWS). I strongly recommend it.

The Self-Respecting Child

This is the title of a book by Alison Stallibrass, published in England by Thames & Hudson, Ltd., London. It is the best book I have seen about the ways in which very young children explore the world and use, test, and develop their powers. Since no American publisher was willing to print an American edition, *GWS* is selling the British edition.

One of the interesting and surprising things Ms. Stallibrass says is that, even for four and five year olds, bicycles are much safer than tricycles. She has found that children that young are perfectly able to ride real bikes, which have this great advantage over trikes, that they can't run away with the child on a hill.

There are many delightful photos. One, which perfectly expresses the spirit of the book, is of a sixteenth-month-old child, standing at the top of a jungle gym, to which she has climbed by herself, holding on with one hand and with the other waving away an anxious adult who has come running up to "help." A wonderful book.

Helpless

In the last year or so, a number of people have talked or written to me about their children. They tell a familiar story. The child, who had always been alert, curious, bright, eager, was now fearful, bored, withdrawn, etc. All these people had tried to get the schools to make changes, without results. Many of them had tried to find alternative schools; either they could find none, or could not afford them, or felt they were not really different from or better than the public schools. All of them said to me, early in our talk or correspondence, “I just don’t know what to do, I feel so helpless.” I say, “Take them out of school altogether.” They say, “The law won’t let me.” I say, “There are ways.” They say, “I don’t know how to teach my own children.” I say, “Yes, you do, or at least, you know as much as anyone else.” Sometimes they do take their children out of school, sometimes not. But even if they don’t, it changes everything to know that if they want to, they can. They say, “I don’t feel so helpless anymore.”

GWS is to help people to feel less helpless.

A Studying Trick

Here's a good trick for people who have to learn a list of disconnected facts—names and dates in History, formulas in Chemistry, Physics, or Math, capital cities, etc. Get some 3 x 5 cards. On one side of each card put half of your piece of information, on the other side put the other. Thus, on one side, "Columbus discovered America," on the other, "1492." Or, on one side, "Salt," on the other, "Sodium Chloride" or NaCl. Then use the cards to test yourself. Shuffle them up, put aside those you know, work on those you don't. You'll find that just deciding what to put on the card in the first place will do most of the work of memorizing it.

They Really Said It

A number of parents, in different parts of the country, have sued the schools because after spending years in them their kids had not learned anything. A judge on the West Coast recently threw out one such suit, saying in his ruling, in plain black and white for the world to see, that the schools had no legal *obligation* to teach anyone anything.

I foolishly mislaid the news clipping about this. If anyone can send us the details of this case and ruling, I will be grateful.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Growing Without Schooling 2

November 1977

Quite a few people have written us about the first issue of *GWS*. They like it, say it makes them feel less alone, isolated, helpless. One said it was like a beacon. We hope many others feel this way.

Some liked its plain looks. One or two thought we should jazz it up a bit, to look more like other magazines. (We have no plans to do this.)

We see that we didn't make it clear enough that if two or more people take out a joint subscription to *GWS*, all copies of each issue will be sent to one of them, who must then mail or deliver the other copies to the other subscribers. Sending all copies to one address is what makes it possible for us to sell joint subscriptions for less. The record joint subscription so far, by the way, is a 14X sub. from a group in Seattle, who by this means are getting *GWS* for about \$2.55 each.

A single subscription is \$10 for six issues; a 2X sub, \$12; a 3X sub, \$14, and so on up. If you don't say otherwise, all subs begin with Issue No.1.

You may buy extra copies of Issue #1 for 50¢ each, or 25¢ each for orders of 10 or more. Extra copies of all later issues will be \$2 each, two for \$3, \$1 each for orders of five or more. Please send checks (U.S.\$) made out to *Growing Without Schooling*.

Serious Teaching

My first teaching job was to tutor an otherwise interesting and bright teenager whose school skills were at about second or third grade level. Top specialists had pronounced him “brain damaged.” In spite of the label, he wanted to read, write, and figure like everyone else, and wanted me to help him.

Not having studied “education,” I had never heard of “brain-damage,” didn’t know enough to know that it was just a fancy way of saying, “We don’t know what the trouble is.” But it was clear to me that brain damage or no, it was my task and my responsibility to find out what was keeping him from learning and to figure out something to do about it. Working with him, I found out that he had a very precise, thorough, and logical mind, and had to understand a thing thoroughly before he could move on to the next. He asked hard questions; to find answers to some of them took me many years. But if I did not solve his problems, perhaps my belief that they *could* be solved was enough. Some years later, while in the Army, he wrote me, and told me what books he was reading—serious, adult books. He had clearly solved his problem himself.

In short, I was what I call a *serious* teacher—I would not accept fancy excuses and alibis as a substitute for doing the work I had chosen and had been hired to do—help children learn things. If they were not learning, as many were not, I couldn’t blame it on them, but had to keep trying until I found something that worked. As *How Children Fail* makes clear, this often took a long time, and I failed as much as I succeeded. Another book about serious teaching is James Herndon’s *The Way It Spoiled To Be*, a very funny, truthful, and in the end sad story about his first year’s painful struggles—finally successful, for which he was fired—to help students that the rest of his school had long since given up on.

The reason that schools are no good at their work is above all that they are not serious. “Good” schools and “bad,” private and public, with only a few exceptions they have always run under this rule—when learning happens, the school takes the credit; when it doesn’t, the students get the blame. In the old days the schools said the kids were stupid, bad, lazy, or crazy. Now they say they have mysterious diseases like “minimal brain dysfunction” or “learning

disabilities.” Under whatever name, these remain what they always were—excuses for the school and teachers not being able to do their job.

Life in Schools

From a letter from Raleigh, N.C., which by the way is supposed to be one of the enlightened areas of that state.

Only today I had a luncheon with a good friend whose 9th grade son has on his permanent record (thanks to one of his teachers this year) these “crimes”: suspension from school for three days because of breaking into lunch line, going up a flight of stairs used by the teachers but not permitted to students and saying “dang” back to a teacher for saying something to him, and a comparable list of 4 other unbelievable offenses.

A 5th grade boy and son of good friends was spanked in front of the class when he was out sick for the day. He was used as an example to the class so that the class would not be tempted to do the same thing, i.e., think of being out sick.

A 2nd grader took more money to school than her teacher thought she should have. She argued with the mother, who said that the money was actually that of the child. She was accused of stealing and spanked. Two months later on April 1st, the same teacher told her class to put on their coats and hats as they were going outside to play. After they were dressed, she told them “April Fool!” Nothing could be done about her treatment of the children; it was all legal.

Defenders of schools might say that such incidents are the exception rather than the rule. It would be easier to believe this if unjust and cruel teachers ever got into trouble for acts like these. I have not yet heard of this happening.

Reading Guides

In *Freedom and Beyond*, and again in *Instead of Education*, I proposed a reading program which for little or no money might help children, above all poor children (or adults), to read better. I proposed that we have what we might call “Reading Guides.” Anyone who could read could volunteer—college students, younger children, housewives, older or retired people, or anyone of any age who in daily life might come in contact with children or other non-readers. The guides would wear some identifying armband, hat, button, etc. so that anyone wanting information could easily spot them. Seeing a guide wearing a sign, you could ask him either or both of these questions: 1) You could show him a written word and say, “What does this say?” 2) You could say, “How do you write such and such a word?” That’s all the guide would have to do.

A school, a church, a group of parents, a block committee, a branch library, or students themselves (in or out of school) could run such a program. It would cost little or nothing. There would be no need to test or screen the guides; there is no reason why they should have to know every word they might be asked.

So far, no one I know of has tried to start such a program. This is not surprising; most people now believe, after all, that only “official” programs run by “professionals” can get anything done. Every year these programs cost more and fail worse. We can only hope that when ordinary people get enough fed up with these incompetent experts, they will begin to act for themselves.

Angry Asps

ASPS are what I call people who constantly Attack Schools but Protect (or promote) Schooling. In one breath they say, “Schools are terrible to, and for, poor kids.” In the next they say, “Schools are the only way that poor kids can escape from being poor.” The logic is hard to follow. Schools have made it far harder for poor kids to escape from poverty than it used to be. There are hundreds or thousands of jobs, that people used to do perfectly well without college or even high school diplomas, that people now have to have diplomas to get. And how the schools, which have always despised, ignored, insulted, and oppressed poor kids, are suddenly going to protect and help them, the ASPS never make clear.

One ASP wrote me a furious letter about GWS, saying “How is a welfare mother with five kids going to teach them how to read?” The answer is, teach them herself. If she can’t read, but one of her children can, that child can teach the other children, *and her*. If none of them can read, they can get a relative, or friend, or neighbor, or neighbor’s child, to teach them.

Reading, and teaching reading, are not a mystery. The schools, in teaching the poor (and the rich, too) that no one can teach a child anything except a “trained” teacher, have done them (and all of us) a great and crippling injury and wrong. A number of poor countries have had mass literacy programs, often called Each One Teach One, in which as fast as people learn to read they begin to teach others. They found that anyone who can read, even if only fifty or a hundred words, and even if he only learned them recently, can teach those words to anyone else who wants to learn them. Every now and then, in this country, a school, often a city school for poor kids, lets older children, fifth or sixth graders, teach first graders to read. Most of them do a better job than the regular teachers. Quite often, older children who themselves are not very good readers turn out to be the best teachers of all. There is a clear lesson here, but the schools don’t seem able to learn it, mostly because they don’t want to.

People who make careers out of helping others—sometimes at some sacrifice, often not—usually don’t like to hear that those others might get along fine, might even get along better, without their help. We should keep this in mind in dealing with attacks from ASPS.

And this may be the place to note that “trained” teachers are not trained in teaching, but in classroom management, i.e., in controlling, manipulating, measuring, and classifying large numbers of children. These may be useful skills for schools, or people working in schools. But they have nothing whatever to do with *teaching*—helping others to learn things.

Reading, Chicago Style

From a recent Chicago Tribune:

It has been ten years in the making, but Chicago school officials now believe they have in place a complete sweeping program to teach children to read—a program that may be the pacesetter for the nation ... it is built upon the concept developed by Benjamin Bloom, distinguished University of Chicago professor of education, that children should master—bit by bit—elements of reading. ... For some years, a Board of Education reading expert, Bernard Gallegos, has been putting together a package of the reading skills children need to learn in elementary school. At one point, Gallegos' list topped 500 elements. It has since been reduced to 273 over grades 1 through 8. The first skill a child needs to master, is to repeat two- and three-syllable words. The second is to point out objects by going from left to right ... some other skills the child should acquire: knows long vowel sounds, (Ed. note: There is nothing “long” about them, the word is inaccurate and needlessly confusing.) places accent marks on accented syllables, (Ed. note: I was reading at near-college level before I began to do that.) and identifies rhyming patterns. This is the final skill: (No. 273)

This might be quite funny if it were not so horrifying. 500 skills! What could they be? When I taught myself to read, I didn't learn 500 skills, or even 273; I looked at printed words, on signs and in books, and puzzled them out; each one I learned made it easier for me to figure out the next. And how did the 500 get cut down to 273?

ASPS would do well to take a look at Bernie's first skill: to repeat two—and three-syllable words. In practice, this is going to mean the children, black, Hispanic, Asian, or from other non-WASP groups, are going to have to pronounce these words the way the teacher *wants* them pronounced. Until they do, they will not be allowed to go to the next step, or into the next grade. So step No. 1 in the Chicago schools is going to be to talk like white people, and until you can do that, you won't be allowed to do anything else.

This, in spite of the fact that many people in the West Indies or Africa, or for that matter Great Britain, can read fluently, though they speak an English

that few Chicago teachers could understand.

The schools were never intelligent; as I pointed out in *Instead of Education*, they have never even tried to find out how many children teach themselves to read, or in what ways; nor have they tried to find out what skillful readers did to become skillful (they read books that were “too hard” for them); nor have they learned anything from the experience of people like Dennison, Fader, Herndon, Kohl, who taught kids to read that the schools said could not be taught.

But now the schools are beginning to make stupidity into a system, even a kind of pseudo-science like alchemy, or phrenology, the old “science” of reading people’s characters from the shapes of their heads. Like all pseudo-sciences, the pseudo-science of “education” has all the trappings of real science, including mysterious big words, plenty of measurement, plenty of numbers. But this is as far from reality, and its precision is just as spurious, as medieval arguments about how many angels could stand on the head of a pin (326.734 angels). The alchemists tried to measure what did not exist; the educators say something even stupider, that nothing exists except what they can measure.

Not long ago, a teacher in Baltimore, who being *serious* had found a way to make good readers out of children who had never read before, was fired, because when the school board adopted some new reading program and ordered all teachers to use it, she sensibly and responsibly refused to scrap her reading program that worked. This will happen in Chicago; most of what few good reading teachers they have will quit or be fired. The children will be so busy trying to learn how to pass 273 reading tests that they will have no time to read, and what’s worse, no desire. Indeed, some children who *can* read will probably be held back because they can’t pass some of the 273 tests. Then, ten years or so from now, we will hear about some great *new* plan.

Life At Home

A mother of four children, the wife of a career officer in the U.S. Armed Forces (both of them “church-going Catholics”), who for obvious reasons prefers that we not (yet) give her name, has written us a splendid letter, saying, in part:

Always, always must we parents and anyone else who undertakes a revolutionary change which seriously affects the lives of others remind ourselves that we do so for selfish reasons. My husband and I began to get cold feet (“sounds like an epidemic,” our daughter said) two or three days before school started this year; what urged me to continue with our plans was the thought that I would be very unhappy if I didn’t give it a try. It was certainly not that we didn’t consider what was best for the children; we believed (and believe) they would be better off growing up at home than in a classroom. But keeping them home was mostly my decision, my experiment, my act of faith. What I hope is that the children not only will flower more truly in their home environment, but also will be enriched by growing up with parents who are attempting to live their beliefs. I hope that they will learn the true meaning of action, that a wrong seen is a wrong to be righted; a better way seen, one to be taken.

We did not give C (12), M (9), S (7), and K (5) a choice between school and school-at-home. As the excitement in the neighborhood mounted during the week before school started, the boys were disturbed about our decision. But we felt that they had been so completely indoctrinated by our society’s trust in schooling that they would never decide “in our favor” if we gave them a choice. If after two or three years of this experiment they are still determined, we will discuss it. Living as we do in the heart of our school-going, career-pursuing, achievement-oriented culture, we had to operate this way. We justify it by the fact that we are their parents and, we think, of all the people on earth, wisest when it comes to their upbringing. We monitor their socialization as we do their TV and sugar consumption. And yes, they’re doing fine. They’re generally contented. Only S complains about staying home, and that less often each month. They occupy themselves continually and, though I don’t get out much, we get on each other’s nerves very little, even when it’s been raining for days.

You'll notice I didn't say back there, "We monitor their education." That's because the whole subject is an embarrassment. We are *in charge* of their education, (thank you, state), but if the local superintendent came to take a look, he wouldn't think we were doing such a slam-bang job of it. We are using the Calvert Home Instruction courses – because we said we would. But we are not using them the way they were intended to be used. For one thing, they are highly structured, so well organized that any dummy who can read could use them with his child. If they were followed faithfully, there would be no time left for teaching, that is, being there when a child needs help in learning something. I've been in a quandary several times and I've tried to teach a child something he either already knew or wasn't ready for. All in the name of following the curriculum and staying on schedule. And my heart really isn't in it. I think, for instance, doing a scheduled lesson on the Industrial Revolution, which right now is utterly boring, when you've spent hours over the last few weeks watching and discussing the Rome of "I, Claudius," is stupid. You scribble some hasty answers to questions about the Industrial Revolution and you forget all about it.

But I am getting smart and here is basically what we do about "education." At the beginning of each month the children each make and decorate a folder out of 12" by 18" sheets of construction paper. We fill the folders with paperwork, including the tests which Calvert provides; we never send these in to Calvert since we are not using the Advisory Teaching Service. This "proves" that we are keeping up in (almost) every subject. There is not nearly so much paperwork done as Calvert demands, but every paper is perfect. When the children make mistakes, they erase and correct them immediately. I make no traditional teacher's marks on their papers such as Xs, checks, happy faces, etc.; but I dispense National Wildlife stickers freely. (I hope I am teaching them that mistakes, in work and in life, are not irrevocable; and, though I don't know if it means anything, I like the idea of keeping reminders of myself off their work.)

(Ed. note: I interrupt only to say that I think it means a great deal, and can't imagine a more humane or sensitive way of putting it.)

Many of the drawings that they all do spontaneously at the dining room table are put into the folder in case anyone wonders if we are having "art." If on a school day we go somewhere "educational," we paste a souvenir of the trip on a piece of colored paper and include it. The two older children each

keep a list of pages done in separate workbooks and include these in their folders. So we actually look pretty good, even if we aren't. And the filled folders at month's end, which we ritually arrange and staple, seem to give the children a sense of accomplishment.

What I would really like to do is put all the Calvert courses out in the rain. (The children keep them in their original cartons.) For one thing I am really too busy for all that nonsense, between housework, normal family activities, and a couple of my own interests, and for another I think it is an empty ritual. During the week after *No More Schools* (Ed. note: A weekend conference.) I kept notes on academically related activities which the children did spontaneously. Here are the notes for one day:

C taught M and me to play *Go Fish* and *Concentration*; she asked if *Concentration* helped in life.

C and I played gin rummy.

S worked on crossword puzzles.

S read *Put Me In The Zoo* silently twice, then aloud to K.

K built with blocks.

(When asked, C, M, and S each helped with chores.)

C tested her memory of names of states (45/50) and their capitals (35/50); invented charades to describe 3 countries.

M showed S placement of U.S. and England on map (which hangs on wall).

C read *Rocky* and we discussed possible jealousy of Stallone's wife.

I played "War" with K and used phrases "greater than" and "less than."

S read aloud phrases on back of Ivory Snow box.

S went out to play in his knight's costume (homemade: result of reading about knights.)

I read *Little Toot* to M and K; M asked questions about vocabulary.

S and I discussed bees (when the queen flies out of the hive; how bees aid in pollination) after he got stung by one.

M counted his money.

Also from that week:

M cut open avocado seed and we discussed seed coat, embryo, seed leaves and true leaves.

K built aircraft carrier with blocks.

S made reconstituted juice, reading label to determine amount of water to

add.

C suggested own math project, figuring cost to carpet upstairs rooms.

(I took C to Self-Sufficiency Seminar at community college.)

S used tape measure to measure several objects around house. He reported lengths and widths in both centimeters and inches.

C read *The Metric Book of Amusing Things To Do*, and did an exercise with curves and straight lines.

S and K read *The Question and Answer Book of the Human Body*.

C took her and S's temperature.

C continued with her project to average a book a day for a month for the Mental Health Readathon. The most serious books included *David Copperfield* and *Treasure Island*.

We went to the library.

We toured the replica of the Santa Maria in the harbor.

What is important to remember about these activities is that because they were self-initiated they were meaningful; that is, because they fit in with an ongoing and/or current interest, what was learned is not likely to be forgotten. This deepened my curiosity about what the children would teach themselves if they were freed from imposed school work entirely. Hopefully, next year I can move toward satisfying this curiosity. (Ed. note: They will be stationed in another country.)

I began this mental evolution, this change in my attitude toward schooling, after reading Ivan Illich and your *Escape From Childhood*. I was ready for the conversion that took place, in what must have been a very deep part of my soul; it was "Of course, why didn't I think of that?" when I learned that children could grow up at home. And so I, and then soon, we, began to change the way we were bringing up our children. We had been conscientious parents, but we had (and have) a lot to learn. We are learning to listen, to stop what we are doing to pay attention when it is needed, to answer questions simply, to sit around and just talk sometimes.

More learning comes out of just plain talk than can be imagined. (Ed. note: This was my point about the Ny Lilleskile in *Instead of Education*.) I hung M.C. Escher's "Verbum" on the dining room wall and several conversations that started with "How did he draw that?" occurred, and careened wildly through design, artist's materials, optical illusion, evolution and the Gospel of St. John. With C, I can see the encrusted layers of school-

rigidity falling away; several times a lesson with her has dissolved into a conversation about her real worth as a loving, responsible human being versus the graded, classified, surely stupid person she sometimes felt herself to be in school.

Good Books Cheap

A good place to buy, at low cost, the kind of books that many or most children would find interesting (partly because they are not children's books, but about the grown-up world) is Publishers Central Bureau; Dept. 516, One Champion Ave., Avenel, N.J. 07131. It is what they call a remainder house. When publishers find they have printed more copies of a book than they think they can sell, they sell the extra copies at very low cost to remainder houses, who sell them, usually by mail, at much lower than the original cost. I strongly recommend that you write for one of their catalogues.

Here, from a recent one, are some sample titles that might interest many children: *The Baseball Encyclopaedia* (\$9.98); *The Anatomy of Costume* (\$7.98), a history of clothing; *The Encyclopaedia of the Horse* (\$10.98), a sure bet for many girls; *The World of Clowns* (\$9.98); *Lost Cities* (\$2.98); *The Vikings* (\$2.98); Frank Leslie's *Illustrated History of The Civil war* (\$12.98); *Ripley's Giant Book of Believe It or Not* (\$6.95), a sure-fire success (like the *Guinness Book of World Records*, which Pub. Clear. does not sell); *Prehistoric Man* (\$5.98); *The Time of The Buffalo* (\$3.98); *National Football League—The First Fifty Years* (\$3.98), a sure winner for many boys; *Railways Then and Now* (\$7.98); *The Horse, Through 50 Centuries of Civilization* (\$15.96), probably well worth the price; *Gold and Silver in The West* (\$5.98); *Timber: Toil and Trouble in The Big Woods* (3.98); *History of Aviation* (\$17.95); *Hilter's Luftwaffe* (\$9.98); *The Adventures of Sail, 1520–1914* (\$17.95); a number of books by Beatrix Potter (*Peter Rabbit*, etc.) and many others.

Worth looking into.

Re-Cycling Toys

From Briarpatch Review, 330 Ellis St., S.F . Cal. 94102.

Knowing that children lose interest and outgrow toys that are in still good condition and that quality toys are too expensive, we created Toy Go Round—an alternative way of disposing of toys. The toys' original owners can share them with younger children and at the same time support new interests with money returned from their resale.

We each had “like new” toys in the basement, attic, or closet because they were too good to give away or throw out. ... Both of us wanted to use our talents and skills, have fun, create our own job and provide a service for others.

We began in Sept. 1976 selling outgrown toys belonging to our children and friends—returning 50% to the toy's owners. In ten months Toy Go Round had grown to over 250 individual accounts. People bring in outgrown toys, books, and games on consignment and receive 50% share upon their sale. Checks are available the first of each month for all items sold the previous month.

Children with their own accounts often return to make a purchase and to see what they have sold and what toys with *their* code number remain on the shelves for someone else to buy and enjoy.

We have done much research on prices and pricing, quality and availability. If a toy comes in “like new,” we check to see what a reasonably priced store is selling the new one for, then we automatically discount it 30%. We have many catalogs and price lists to use as guides. We estimate our prices on toys to be sold by their condition and play value. For example, a cobbler's bench might be nicked and dented and appear “well-loved” but if the pegs and hammer are intact, it still has good play value.

We scrub, repair, improvise many a tail, ear or wheel, make missing pieces to wooden puzzles with a jigsaw and try to give others advice with their problem or sick toys.

When games arrive with missing pieces, we code them, set them aside to wait for another to arrive. Then we combine pieces, and both accounts receive credit. We match up toys to make complete sets. Some of our toys have returned for a second and third round.

Toy Go Round assists in fundraising for schools and playgroups. They collect and bring in toys in the group's name and receive the 50% upon their sale. They are also able to buy toys and supplies from us economically.

Our bulletin board, one whole wall, is overflowing with want ads, for sales, playgroups, schools and community activities for children.

We have assembled an arts and crafts corner. Collage materials, homemade playdough, paint, etc. are available at all times. We have wood scraps, large-headed pounding nails and scrap craft paper of varied size, color and texture. Burlap and yarn for stitchery and wire bundles for creating sculptures are popular items. Recycled computer paper and cards are sold by the bundle for 10¢ and 5¢.

Toy Go Round welcomes handcrafted toys and games giving 75% to the maker. Personalized birthday banners are made upon request.

You are always welcome to stop by for a visit. You'll find us at 1715-B Solano Ave., Berkeley, Cal.—Tues., Thurs., Sat., 12:00–5:30. Andora Freeman, Joy Ernst

People who want to work with or in some way make themselves useful to children, and don't want to work in schools, may find some good ideas here. In *Instead of Education* (available from GWS), I suggested toy libraries, but on the whole I like the toy recycling store even better.

Though I haven't asked them, would guess that Toy Go Round might well accept toys sent by mail.

Briarpatch Review is a quarterly, \$5/yr., about small, self-supporting businesses. Many readers of GWS might find it useful, esp. those on the West Coast.

Before You Were Three

This is the title of a new and much needed book, by Robie Harris and Elizabeth Levy, with 100+ superb photos by Henry Gordillo (pub. by Delacorte Press). It is a book for young children about what they (and other children) were like when they were even younger. It seems a perfect book to read aloud to 3–6 year olds, or for slightly older children to read themselves. It will surely spark hundreds of questions, conversations, rememberings, about being a baby or toddler, and about growing up. It would help children to understand themselves better, and other children, and younger brothers and sisters, too. I can't recommend it too highly.

If enough *GWS* readers are interested in this book, we could add it to the list of books we sell, so that if people couldn't find it in local bookstores they could get it from us. Let us know if you have trouble finding it locally. But do look for it. It could be immensely valuable.

Life at Home (Cont.)

In *Blackberry Winter*, Margaret Mead (who did not attend school regularly until she was eleven) said that children used to be brought up by means of stories. I thought I'd like to try that with my own children but didn't know how to start until Sean began to ask me questions last summer about the origins of man and the universe. He would ask me, "How did God make Adam and Eve?" or "How did God make the earth?" Knowing nothing, I knew everything, and I began to enjoy answering his questions, which I did with stories. One evening as his father was tucking him into bed he said, "You know, Daddy, every day I ask Mommy how you make things—and she always knows the answer!" Sure enough, the next morning as soon as he awoke he sat up and asked me, "How do you make stones?" My knowledge of geology is scant, but I managed to bring the earth from big hunks of rock through earthquakes, thundering ocean waves, etc. to little stones, which by the way are made of minerals like gold, copper, and calcium. He nodded his head, satisfied, and laid back on his pillow.

When K asked me where he came from, I followed the advice of A.C. Harwood (who was writing on Rudolf Steiner's philosophy of education) to tell the child a truly spiritual story of his origin and not to get bogged down in biological details. He loved hearing about what went through God's mind as He decided where to send a little blond baby. I included some biological details, too, but we had already discussed them several times (on his level, of course). He was delighted.

I must include one more thing. C and M have joined the junior swim team at ———, which has, in the absence of school, become a focus for their lives. Four or five times a week they practice rigorously and attend meets on some weekends. They love it and we are happy about it for several reasons. The physical benefits now and in adulthood, when their bodies will crave the exercise they are giving them now, are great. They meet children with a common interest. They have chosen to join the team; it is not compulsory P.E. They are engaged in competition in a real sense; no amount of apple-polishing or cheating can get them to the other end of the pool any faster. But most of all, it is an example of the best kind of learning (life) activity; they go to an expert (the swimming coach) to learn a specific skill (swimming) and

they do it while they learn it (they participate in meets no matter what their times).

May I underline, among all the good things in this letter, J's words, "knowing nothing, I knew everything." We don't have to know everything, or even very much, to give useful answers to children's questions. A child asking a question does not want to know everything; he wants to take a step or two further into the world in a given direction. It is all right even to make a wild guess, and then say, "That's what I think, but if you like we can look it up in a book and see what it says." This gives the idea that when you don't know something you *can* always go look it up somewhere.

I think with sorrow and horror of an article I read, in which two college-graduate parents said that they were looking for a school for their four-year-old because "we were not competent to teach him ourselves." The schools work hard to make them, and everyone, think this way. But it is not true.

Unschooling and the Law

GWS will say “unschooling” when we mean taking children out of school, and “deschooling” when we mean changing the laws to make schools non-compulsory and to take away from them their power to grade, rank, and label people i.e. to make lasting, official, public judgments about them.

I have only seen, in detail, the compulsory school laws of a few states. The experience of people so far makes clear that whatever the laws say, if the local superintendent and/or school board are willing to let you take your children out of school, you may do so; if they are not willing, you will probably have to fight for the right to do so in court (unless, of course, you decide simply to try to escape the schools’ notice). The wording of the law in your particular state may have much to do with the grounds on which you make your fight.

In his letter elsewhere in this issue, Jud Jerome urges that in as many places as possible we test the constitutionality of compulsory school attendance (hereafter CSA) laws, in other words, claim that such laws violate one or more of the constitutionally guaranteed rights of parents and/or children. Ed Nagel at N.A.L.S.A.S. (see *GWS #1*) agrees with him. I don’t, for reasons I will explain, but I do agree that the issue is well worth exploring. We should try to find out from experts in constitutional law, and also to decide for ourselves, on what grounds we might make such a claim. If you have ideas about this, please write us. You might ask your local branches of the American Civil Liberties Union or Emergency Civil Liberties Committee what they think. So far, most branches of the ACLU have not been willing to consider CSA a civil liberties issue, or to take any interest in it.

The most obvious claim we might make is that CSA deprives children of liberty without due process of law, and without the overriding excuse of national emergency which in time of war justifies the draft. We might also claim that CSA violates the rights of parents to control the instruction of their own children, though such a right is not stated or even clearly implied in the Constitution.

I don’t think there is a chance in a million that the U.S. courts would sustain such claims. In the first place, in the recent case of the Amish (*Yoder*

vs. *Wisconsin*), the Supreme Court said that while they would grant the Amish the right not to send their children to high school, they did so only because the Amish were an established religious group who had long proved the depth and strength of their religious convictions. The court then said explicitly that they would not grant this same exemption to other people on “philosophical grounds.” In other words, if you are a member of a religious group (preferably conservative in its views and way of life, like the Amish) which *for a long time* and even at some risk has insisted on keeping its children out of school, the Court may sustain you. Otherwise, no.

In the second place, the even more recent decision of the Supreme Court, allowing the use of “corporal punishment” in schools, shows that this court, like most citizens, takes a very light view of the liberty and dignity of children. A court which holds that the schools may beat children, often very brutally, and often for the most frivolous of reasons, is surely not going to rule that children do not have to go to school at all.

In the third place, even when the judges are not elected but appointed for life, courts are political bodies, sensitive to public opinion, and as such are extremely unlikely, by calling CSA unconstitutional, to pass a law that 95% or more of the people would strongly oppose. Such court decisions invite meddling with the Constitution itself—witness the Constitutional Convention resolutions right now circulating among our state legislatures. Even if the Supreme Court thought CSA a bad idea, which it clearly does not, it would almost certainly not rule against it unless it felt a fairly weighty body of public opinion behind it, perhaps not a majority but at least a powerful and influential minority. We can hope this may be so twenty years from now, but it is not so today.

Some will say we should try anyway; it would at least be educational. Perhaps it would. But it would divert time, energy, and money better spent elsewhere. It would give us more public visibility than we are ready to have, or than it would be wise to have. And it is very possible, if the courts did make a positive decision in favor of CSA, that we might be worse off than before, since such a decision might close off loopholes through which many of us may now escape. Finally, since the courts generally don’t like to reverse previous decisions, we would probably be better off having the Supreme Court say nothing until there is a fairly good chance they will say Yes.

These are my opinions/guesses. If you have ideas about this, please write

us.

Nor do I think that local or state courts will rule that schools in general, or the local schools, are so unkind, threatening, competitive, violent, or even incompetent, that any parents who want to can take their children out of them. It would be wiser to ask them to decide each case, as it comes up, on its own merits. *The broader the decision, the more likely it is to go against us.* What I think we may be able to get many courts to say, in particular cases, is that the track record of schools is not so good that they can claim (as they do) that nobody but themselves is competent to teach children. In some cases the courts may also agree with us that because they are so concerned to hold onto their students/ customers the schools can hardly even be considered disinterested or fair judges of the teaching competence of others. This is important; the schools are going to go into court with the claim that since they are the certified experts in education, they and only they are fit to judge whether or not parents are competent to teach their own children.

From “D”

The writer of this letter has been writing me very interesting and valuable letters for a year or more about unschooling. For the time being, he thinks it better not to have his name and address attached to what he is writing. He says, in part:

Here is the information I want to share with you (on issues raised in GWS), which I'll take up in the order in which they appeared.

1. *Home Study Institute* is the correspondence school of the Seventh Day Adventists Department of Education (which maintains, primarily, a world-wide system of parochial day schools, like the Catholics and Lutherans, and also colleges.)

Waiving the Bible/religious study: we ordered the complete second grade course for A, omitting (and thus, not having to pay for) all the “Bible” materials. This is fine with HSI—the “Bible” stuff is *not* required, as HSI does not want to discriminate in any way against those of other faiths (it's open to anyone, regardless of belief, or lack of it). Dynamite service, incidentally; all materials arrived via UPS in less than a week!

Re. the “conventional” aspect: this has been the case with the Calvert School stuff ... it has been *no* drawback whatsoever with our 1st-Grader. He *loves* the stuff—really! And, of course, the parents can modify freely.

Re. the experience of the Adventists: HSI told me that their “assistance” would be limited to giving testimony (i.e., they can't afford defense costs, or anything). You should keep in mind when considering the considerable number of children enrolled in HSI—and by the way, HSI feels that Calvert, which advertises in the *National Geographic* each month, has larger elementary enrolment—that the great majority of students are children of missionaries, etc. so that HSI's experience in “bucking compulsory attendance laws” may not be that great. (Ed. note: A good point. Still, I would think that testimony from HSI to the effect that many children had used their programs at home with good results might in many cases be very valuable to unschoolers.)

Let me add here that the Adventists are, I've found, not a reliable source of information regarding possible loopholes in the state laws (as you suggest in the “We Need To Know” section.) After receiving a very encouraging,

confident letter from HSI's Director of Studies saying, in effect, "Go ahead and do it," I wrote to our state Adventist Superintendent of Schools who deflated the whole idea by replying that home study is not allowed in Ohio! This was blatantly wrong, as I had already discovered a provision for home-study in Ohio law (and had it verified by an attorney)—so the man plainly did not know (although he thought he did) the state laws.

(D points out that the Bayh report is still being sent out free from his office.)

2. We Need To Know—I've learned a lot about "legal research" just from doing it, and want to share what I know:

First, let me hasten to point out that *everything* you folks want to know about the various state laws, court cases, etc. is contained in the study put out by the Mass. Center for Public Interest Laws. (Ed. note: Title and address at end of this letter.) The only thing this book *doesn't* give you is the exact text of each of the state laws. It does, however, refer you to the specific title, section, etc., so that you could easily get this for yourself.

I would suggest that it's more educational and satisfying to go to the local library and look up the laws for yourself than to ask your state legislator (who will have to do just that, as he certainly will not be familiar with them.) Any large public library, like the main library of a large city system, or the public library in the county seat, will have volumes of all the laws of one's home state. Once you find the "Education" or "Schools" section, there is usually a sub-section entitled "School Attendance." After each of the specific laws, court cases relating to that law are listed and commented on, but while you're in the law books, you'll want to look at the index at the back—which is usually quite extensive—for cross-references to subjects like "home study," "private school," "tutoring," etc. which will lead you to other laws dealing with these.

Often, the education laws are also bound in a separate volume as well (e.g., Baldwin's *Ohio School Law*) which contains a "text" section setting forth all of the laws in a more readily understood, almost narrative form, which, however ... you'd want to crosscheck with the statutes themselves. Finally, while you're in the local library, you might want to look at a commentary on the state's laws, called (state name) *Jurisprudence*, which will give you a concise overview of the statutes and related court cases.

(Ed. note: The names of these volumes may vary from state to state, but

people in the library will help you find what you are looking for.)

The Final Report: Legal Implications of Compulsory Education, National Institute of Education, Project # NEG-00-3-0061, by Wm. Aikman and Lawrence Kotin. (Sponsored by HEW) Avail. from Mass. Center for Public Interest Law, 2 Park St. Boston MA 02116, \$10.75.

You may also be able to get this report, perhaps free, from the National Institute of Education, HEW, 1200 19th, N.W., Washington D.C. 20008.

Looking Up The Law

I took D's good advice, and did what I had been saying for some time that people ought to do—get information for themselves, instead of depending on some expert. Went to the main Boston Library, asked at the information desk where I would find state laws, was sent to a reference room, asked again there. They told me to look up in a law index the numbers of the particular laws I was interested in, then come back and fill out a slip for the books themselves. The law books used to be on open shelves, but people (law students, perhaps?) were stealing them, so now they are all on reserve. I picked the index that seemed easiest to use, made up my list of statutes, took them to the desk, and soon had the law books. I found the Massachusetts education laws scary reading, much more tightly drawn, threatening, and punitive than I had expected. One would suppose that they dealt with dangerous criminals rather than children. Of course, they were written around the turn of the century, and so, written *by* rich Yankees and aimed *at* the children of poor (probably mostly Irish) immigrants. I had hoped to find that the School Boards and Superintendents had been given the task of running schools, but that the task of enforcing school attendance laws had been left to other agencies, perhaps the police. Not so; in this matter, the schools *are* the police. They can demand information about children, and people have to answer. If they refuse, or give wrong answers, they can be fined. Nothing in the wording of these laws encourages the idea that the state looks kindly on children and wants to help them. On the contrary, the impression is that the state considers unattended children a danger, and wants them all safely locked up.

The trouble with reading laws is that one cannot tell, from the books, which laws are actively enforced and which are what they call a Dead Letter, laws long ignored because it is easier to ignore than repeal them. Our state codes are full of such laws. Many of the older states still have on the books laws on sexual conduct that, if strictly enforced, would put most of the population in jail—to name one example, laws in one state saying that a man may not kiss his wife on Sunday.

At least one Massachusetts law on education is such a Dead Letter. It provides, again under the threat of penalties, that the Superintendent of each

school district shall take an annual school census i.e. find out what children live in every household in the district and where they go to school. Perhaps some districts still take such a census, but no one has asked me any such question in the twenty years I have lived in Boston. Is the same information available somewhere else? I can't imagine where.

At any rate, D is right. Whatever in practice the laws may mean, ordinary people can at least find out what they say, and they should find out.

However, I still think it is useful and probably important for people to write their state legislators on this subject. The lawmakers ought to know that some citizens are concerned about this. We in turn need to know which if any lawmakers are sympathetic to unschooling, and which strongly oppose it. We need to begin to make legislative allies. For in the long or maybe not so long run, unschooling will be a political matter.

Do We Need Lawyers?

Several people have written recently to say they want to take their children out of school, and feel they need a lawyer. We have been trained to think of ourselves as incompetent, dependent on experts and professionals, in more and more areas, so it is natural that when we have to deal with the law we should think, “I need a lawyer.” But it may not be so; a lawyer may be no help, even a hindrance. Recently the owner of the building in which I had rented an apartment for nineteen years decided to make it into a condominium. I planned to buy my apartment, but knowing nothing of condominium law, I hired a lawyer to represent me. He got into a tangle with the lawyer of the building owner, and only when the building owner and I bypassed our lawyers and began to deal with each other directly could we get our business done.

A newly published book has some words on this that may be useful: *Disabling Professions*, five essays by Ivan Illich, Irving Zola, John McKnight, Jonathan Caplan, and Harley Shaiken. (Pub. in Great Britain by Marion Boyars Publishers; 18 Brewer St., London W1R 4AS. U.S. distribution—22 South Broadway, Salem NH 03079. Pub. in Canada by Burns and MacEachern Ltd., Suite 3, 62 Railside Rd., Don Mills, Ontario M3A 1A6) In his article, *Lawyers and Litigants; A Cult Revised*, Jonathan Caplan, a British lawyer, says, in part:

Do we need a lawyer? In any system of criminal justice the answer is unqualifiably that we do. But in relation to every other issue—that is to say, every noncriminal matter—the role of the lawyer should be open to question.

(Ed. note: How would Mr. Caplan classify unschoolers? Clearly when he talks about criminal law, he has something very different in mind—robbery, assault, murder. The schools will of course accuse unschoolers of breaking the law, yet I think we would be closer to the truth, and wiser, to consider unschooling as a part of civil rather than criminal law.)

The second half of the twentieth century is the age when experts were revered and when expert advice became an expensive commodity. For the professions this was a Klondike since all professional advice

passes as expert. But legal advice is not invariably expert. To seek legal advice may, therefore, cover a multitude of situations none of which necessarily arise from the need to consult a lawyer at all. Frequently legal advice is simply common sense or experience of the kind of which most rational people are capable, yet we choose to pay lawyers for the reassurance of involving some intelligent third party in our personal affairs. In such a way we consult lawyers as a lovesick teenager would consult an agony columnist. To gain an ally at a time of doubt or distress. To have an audience with someone who is dispassionate.

In the majority of legal consultations, all that a lawyer does is to elicit the facts and then to restate the client's position in terms of legal rights and duties so as to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the case. Like a soothsayer of the law, a lawyer predicts a court's reaction to a given situation. His experience and judgment may often be invaluable, (Ed. note: In the matter of unschooling, most lawyers have no experience whatever, and hence no basis for judgment.) but much more often this mere stating of the odds is unnecessary (Ed. note: In our case, irrelevant, since we are determined to unschool whatever the odds and are only concerned to find a way.) and people could help themselves equally well if only they were educated and encouraged to do so.

The truth is that, nine times out of ten, cases are decided not on a point of law but solely on their facts and the merits. Judges rationalize their conclusion of what is just in the circumstances before them; they do not deduce it from rules and legal precedent. The late Lord Reid, a distinguished member of the appellate committee of the House of Lords, used to advise extra-judicially not to waste time arguing law but to establish a case on its merits as quickly as possible. *It is precisely the facts and the merits which are best known to the litigant himself*, (Ed. note: Especially in unschooling cases.) and a large part of the cost of all legal consultancy is accounted for by the time it takes to explain them to a lawyer so that he can repeat them at a later stage. Yet facts can, in the course of such re-telling, lose their force or cogency and litigants in many cases might do better in presenting their cause themselves and in establishing the merits.

Legal systems give no confidence to litigants to go it alone. They call for dependence on lawyers. The complexity of pre-trial procedure, the ritualized style of pleadings, the public arena of the court—all contribute to make the pursuit of even the most simple claim a professional venture....Left alone, people are unsure of their rights and even more unsure of how to press for them....There is a grave risk, therefore, that a litigant representing himself will not be able to get into the best position for negotiation before trial (Ed. note: Irrelevant in unschooling cases.) or to maneuver to his best advantage at trial. (Ed. note: Again, probably largely irrelevant.) In this curious way, it may be that our legal systems have made representation the prerequisite to complete justice.

Where does all this leave us? Perhaps we need lawyers to advise us on procedural matters, what sort of motions to put before the court, delaying tactics, etc. But we are not likely to find many lawyers who know, or even are willing to find out, as much about the law on CSA and unschooling as we can find out for ourselves. The ideal, of course, will be to assemble—GWS may help in this—a body of lawyers who are as strongly committed to unschooling as we are. This will not be easy—most lawyers are more likely to be on the side of their fellow professionals, the educators.

On one point Mr. Caplan's words are both reassuring and important. Legal trickery is not going to determine whether we win or lose. Years ago the *Saturday Evening Post* used to run stories about an old Yankee lawyer named Ephraim Tutt, who won all his cases (in which justice was clearly on his side) by digging up some obscure point of law that his opponent had never heard of. This made most people (including me) feel more than ever that the law was a mystery, full of dirty tricks. Mr. Caplan is saying that even without the legal trickery the judge would have ruled for Mr. Tutt and his clients, solely on the merits of their case. It is up to us to learn how to make the strongest case for ourselves. But we are as likely to be able to do this as anyone else.

Leadership

Unschoolers are leaders, though many of them may not think of themselves this way. Leaders are not, as we are often led to think, people who go along with huge crowds following them. Leaders are people who go their own way without caring, or even looking to see, whether *anyone* is following them. “Leadership qualities” are not the qualities that enable people to attract followers, but those that enable them to do without them. They include, at the very least, courage, endurance, patience, humor, flexibility, resourcefulness, stubbornness, a keen sense of reality, and the ability to keep a cool and clear head even when things are going badly.

True leaders, in short, do not make people into followers, but into other leaders.

“D” (Cont.)

For the court cases themselves, you have to go to a law library—which are maintained by local bar associations and often “bar” admittance to the public. (Ed. note: Some lawyers may have this material in their offices, and might let you read it. Or a friendly lawyer might arrange for you to get into the local law library.) If this is the case, go to the nearest law *school* library and make yourself at home. You can either register at the desk as a non-student, or just walk around pretending you’re a student. You can look up (with a bit of assistance at first) any case cited in your state laws (or elsewhere for that matter) and read and copy (for a fee) the entire text of the decision. You can get the texts of the big pro-home study decisions (*People v. Levisen, Ill.* and *State v. Masse, N.J.*), just for your edification.

Another thing the law school library has is complete sets of state law volumes for each state. Let me relate how I used these just last week. A man in Mass. wrote me that he’d asked a lawyer if there were any loopholes in Mass. Law regarding home study. The lawyer found one, which this man is now using. (Ed. note: I am not sure, but will ask D., what this loophole is.) The man did not quote the law to me, and I was anxious to see how closely it paralleled our own state’s loophole. So, I got the volume of Mass. law relating to “Schools” or “Education” opened to the section of “School Attendance,” and there in the very first law was the short phrase that constituted the home study loophole; this took less than 5 mins. I then skimmed the cases cited throughout the section (after each of the laws) and found one described as relating to home study (*Commonwealth v. Renfrew*). I read the entire decision in this case, which cited and thus led me to several other important Mass. cases (as well as some from other states). I was done in less than half an hour, and had a great time.

(Ed. note: I have to repeat what I say in the section “Unschooling and the Law,” that no matter what the law says, if the local school board decides to take you to court it will be the judge and not the wording of the law that determines whether you can teach your child at home. As Chief Justice Holmes said many years ago, “The Constitution is what the Judges say it is.” In any state (i.e., all states except Miss.) which has CSA, the law will *not* say that parents may teach their children at home whether the local authorities

like it or not. The law gives local school authorities full power and discretion in this matter. Some school boards will say, as they already have, “Sure, teach your kids at home, just let us know what you’re doing.” Most, I predict, will not, and many of these professional helpers of children will pursue their escaping helpees with great determination and vindictiveness.)

But, since our original inquiry, a landmark court case here in Ohio—*State v. Whisner* (351 N.E. 2d 750)—has greatly diminished the legitimacy of these “standards” as they relate to private schools. Rev. Whisner’s church had a school which did not meet the “standards,” and some of the language of this decision is worth quoting as it pertains to the rights of parents:

It has long been recognized that the right of a parent to guide the education of his or her children is indeed a fundamental right guaranteed by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

In the opinion of a majority of this court, a general education of high quality can be achieved by means other than the comprehensive regimentation of all academic centers in this state. In the words of Thoreau, “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.”

Pretty far out, huh? Quoting Thoreau and all. This is the only Ohio court decision interpreting school attendance laws that’s worth noting—and its significance is that *perhaps* parents could call their home a private school and get away with it (without meeting the absurd “standards.”)

I have at hand the complete citations for the two major successful home study cases:

1. *People v. Levisen*, 404 Ill. 574, 90 N.E. 2d 213 (S.Ct. Ill. 1950);
2. *State v. Massa*, 95 N.J. Super, 382, 231 A. 2d 252 (Morris County Ct., L.Div. 1967).

There are others, where the courts decided in favor of the parents (and home study):

3. *People v. Turner*, 98 N.Y.S. 2d 886 (New York, 1950);
4. *Wright v. State*, 209 P. 179 (Oklahoma, 1922);
5. *State v. Peterman*, 70 N.E. 550 (Indiana, 1904);
6. *Commonwealth v. Roberts*, 34 N.E. 402 (Mass., 1893);

Finally, a recent Vermont case similar to Whisner:

7. *State v. LaBarge*, 357 A. 2d 121 (1976).

That's about all I know, John. Hope it's of some help.

I should say it is. Much thanks to D, who has set us all a good example. Don't be put off by those letters and numbers in the citations. They all mean something perfectly simple, and the law books themselves will tell us what they mean.

Let me repeat Mr. Caplan's advice—judges are not going to rule for us just because we can show them favorable citations from judges in other states. But such citations will give our cases more weight. It will probably be a very good idea to cite them when we first write school authorities about unschooling our children. It will show them that we know something about law and will not be a pushover in court. Some of them, at least, may decide that it will be easier to let us do what we want than to go to the expense and trouble of taking us to court, in a case which they may well lose.

From Jud Jerome

When the oldest three of our five children were in the early grades, Marty and I told them very clearly that we never wanted them to go to school a single day thinking that we were making them go or that they were going for our benefit. If they chose to go, that was their business. If it developed that someone had to go to jail over their non-attendance, that would be a family matter we would have to discuss at the time, but they shouldn't assume that going to school was the best answer, even then. We made a point of signing their grade cards without looking at them, never pushed, never went to school functions. In spite of this general lack of encouragement, they performed better than average by school standards—probably because they came from a stimulating home filled with people who were intellectually engaged. But when the oldest was fifteen we moved from Ohio to Maryland, and she was resistant to attending the new high school, which was big, impersonal, populated by youngsters who had segregated themselves into mobs of snobs and greasers (Ed. note: A fairly standard social pattern in most high schools.) by their own denomination, and Michelle didn't see that she fit into either group ... the day she was 16 she got her driver's license, moved into an apartment with another young woman in the city, got a job—all with our approval.

There was never any hostility or tension with the family; she simply thought it was better for her development to be self-sufficient. In the next two years she worked at various jobs, joined a communal group ... and finally decided that she wanted to go to a community college. She took and easily passed the high school equivalency test to qualify her to do this. She is still in college, earning scholarships to support herself, with very clear vocational goals which enable her to put up with the collegiate nonsense.

The second daughter also quit at 16, the earliest legal age to do so, in order to live with a man in California. After an interlude she enrolled in school there, as she really wanted the diploma for vocational reasons, and didn't trust herself to pass the high school equivalency. For a year she was in and out of schools and new living situations. We had, meanwhile, moved to a communal farm, and for a while she lived here with us and attended the nearby small-town high school, where she was miserable. The students—and

even the teachers—continually teased her, for being “different” (i.e., for not having grown up in that town), for living in a commune, above all for being “bookish,” or having intellectual interests. Often she would call home in tears, asking us to pick her up and bring her home. Finally she quit and moved back to the town where she had started high school, shared an apartment with her older sister, and finished with her class – not in the least delayed by her year’s absence. She, too, is now in college and doing well (by their standards).

To A Parent

I'm not going to try to talk you into taking your children out of school. If they insist on going, let them go. But let's keep the facts straight. It is possible to do interesting and useful work in the world, even be "successful," without a college degree. It is hard, but then it is hard to do those things even *with* a college degree. Most of the people now getting college degrees are going to be doing work that is not very interesting, and that people used to do without college degrees. Also people can get into graduate school without going to college. One friend of mine got into a leading American theological seminary, another into the leading Canadian law school, with only a year of undergraduate college. The former is the minister of a big church, the latter perhaps the outstanding student in her class. Other people I know or know of have gone to college without going to high school. In short, even if you get off the school road, you can get back on whenever you want, and you will probably be ahead of the people who stayed on it all along.

If kids want to go to college so they can enjoy the social life, go to football games, join sororities/fraternities, etc. OK, if their parents can afford it. But let's not kid ourselves that anyone learns anything very important in those places. As far as securing their future goes, they might be a lot better off to get an external degree and put in the bank the money they would have spent on college tuition.

Jud (Cont.)

Our fourth daughter is aphasic and a special case. When she reached school age we began putting her in various special education classes, but by the time she was six the teachers were begging us to take her out. They said she needed a residential school and we agreed, since her adjustment at home and in the neighborhood were no better than that in school. We found a residential school which was, in fact, a religious commune, based on the teaching of Rudolf Steiner (Camphill). Jenny was immediately happy there, and it was evident to us and to the staff at the school that this was an excellent home for her. In my view it is not the schooling so much as the total environment of the village-like commune which is the primary educational force in her life. Since the law requires that the state provide free education appropriate to such special needs, and since we would never be able to afford keeping her there on our own (though the costs are very low compared with those at conventional residential schools), she is there on state funds. Interestingly, our most serious battles with the educational system have not been to keep the other children out, but to keep support for Jenny at Camphill. Since the staff at that school are European trained, they do not have the credentials required by law for state approval. No one in the Department of Education denies that the school is excellent in every respect and perhaps the only available placement for Jenny which meets her particular needs, but we continue to have a battle with the officials to continue receiving support for her. (Ed. note: It seems more and more clear that an important function of compulsory education laws is to provide jobs for teachers, specialists, teachers of teachers, administrators, etc.)

Our fifth child is a son, Topher, who was five when we moved to the commune. He had had a few months of kindergarten—which he loved—but we could already see the effects of acculturation on him—e.g., increasing possessiveness, preoccupation with money and spending, giggling attitudes toward sex and nudity, sassy, silly, rebellious patterns he was picking up from the other children. We were eager to get him out of school and keep him out. We investigate the laws in Pa., where our commune is located, and found that one could not qualify for home instruction unless there were evidence of physical, emotional, or mental disability—and if one so qualified, the system

would send instructors into the home (which we wanted no more than we wanted him to go to school). So we applied for a license as a private school with one student. We had plenty of people with credentials on the farm, plenty of educational materials, and we were amused and confident as we filled out the elaborate forms asking whether the boys and girls had separate bathroom facilities (we have a two-holer, one marked *men* and the other *women*), and so on. We complied with the most absurd inquiries.... Nothing happened. For nearly six years now, nothing has happened. Our application, with its \$25 fee, apparently is sitting in the back of the file of the Head Honcho of Private Schools in Harrisburg. ...Each fall—at least for the first three years or so—the local Superintendent would send us a letter demanding that we report where our school-age children were enrolled, and we would reply that he was enrolled in our private school, and tell the Superintendent that if he had any questions he should consult the State Department of Private Schools. Recently he has stopped asking.

In all those years we have not had other school-age children than Topher living at the farm. At times he grew very lonely, and at times visiting relatives and friends would strongly imply to us that we should do something about his schooling. We explained that he had “lessons,” but we were very lackadaisical about them. That is, we had a wide variety of books and educational materials available, and when he asked for us to work with him, we did so, and occasionally we would take the initiative in encouraging him to work on reading, mathematics, or some other academic study. We were intrigued by the things he chose to study: for example, he often chose the most conventional kind of workbooks, the sort one finds at low cost in toy stores, and one of the books which helped him most in learning to read was a very old fashioned Dick-and-Jane teachers’ edition, complete with vocabulary lists and inane questions and exercises for lazy teachers in the back. I am not sure whether Topher chose these materials from the wide array of things available to him because he found them to be actually on his level or whether they fit his conception of what school was and thought that somehow he was creating the equivalent of school if he used them. Mostly, though, he learned simply by following adults around, helping, asking questions, becoming involved. By age eight he was baking bread and cakes, repairing machines, wiring lamps and rooms, and had considerable knowledge of automobiles, calculators, tape recorders and videotape

equipment, and usual farm tasks such as gardening, animal care, forest and wild-life, rocks (he has always had a strong interest in geology and electronics), weather, and machines of all kinds. He helped us at many tasks in our small factory, manufacturing planters from oak logs. But he had little opportunity to play with other children except when they visited the farm or we happened to be on a trip where children were. It was for the company of children, especially, that we thought perhaps he needed some experience in school.

So this past winter we moved temporarily to another commune, a hundred miles away, which had a small “alternative” school (26 students). Topher attended four months (middle of his tenth year), and at the end of the school year he passed at grade level or above all the standardized tests the teacher had to give to satisfy state requirements. He loved the school—but then, he loves most things he does. He was very frustrated by the noise his little class of six students made, at their lack of focus on “school” matters such as reading, writing, arithmetic, social studies, art, science. The teacher (whom he also loved), in desperate efforts to keep their attention, took the class often on “field trips”—to museums, a power plant, a circus, a park, a polling place (when she had to vote), and Topher complained that his whole life has been a field trip, and he wished they would just stay in school and study. He is not actually a very studious child—for example, doesn’t read much on his own. But it somehow seemed a waste of time for him to have this rare experience in school wasted in play. He would have gotten over that had he gone another year.

But his parents couldn’t take it. It was too disruptive for the family living away from home—and we anticipated that it might be a couple of years before Topher was willing to live there without his parents. At first that seemed worthwhile—a sacrifice we might make. But for many personal reasons aside from those having to do with Topher and school, we decided we had to find another alternative. (Ed. note: The rest of this part of Jud’s letter was reprinted in *GWS #1*, under the heading “Why Take Them Out?”)

Luckily (I think) the “alternative” we have hit upon came in the form of three more children, girls, moving to the farm. This fall there will be at least four and perhaps five children here between the ages of 6 and 13. So, as we put it to them, we will have “school” here. We have agreed to rotate adults who will give the children about two hours a day (and so far as we know that

means 7 days a week, all year long) of attention to “academic” matters. Already this summer the pressure has come from the children to get underway, to have “school.” It seems like a game to them, and we have agreed to play. But if we are going to give them hunks of our time, we expect in return that they will give hunks of theirs to chores and farm work. Privately we think they are likely to learn more in the latter activities than in those they regard as “school.” Already, though, other families are considering moving here, and am wondering what our situation will be when there are eight or ten or a dozen children on the farm. In the interest of consolidating the chore of overlooking child activity, we might find ourselves creating a “school” in spite of ourselves. Furthermore, as we have more children, the State is quite likely to develop more interest in what we are doing. I believe this is a financial matter: the appropriation for the local schools is probably based on a head-count, and in this poor and sparse county the Superintendent is not likely to let too many warm bodies go unnoticed as he has let Topher go.

I think it may be urgent that the GWS network get behind some kind of local action to test the constitutionality in state after state and at the federal level, of compulsory education laws. There is only a limited amount we can do for one another exchanging ideas and experiences: most of us going through this have had similar experiences, and though there is some satisfaction in hearing that we are not alone, that doesn’t really help much. Banding together—e.g. joining in neighborhoods or communal groups—is not much of an answer either, for unless the laws change, the more we are concentrated, the more motivated will the authorities be to do something about us, and the more children we have in one place the more the dynamics will force us back into schooling patterns. But I think we are likely to need legal help at our farm as early as this fall 1977—and certainly in the future. I hope we can begin accumulating a directory of lawyers who are sympathetic and have some special knowledge of school law. (Ed. note: I suspect there maybe very few of these, but we certainly should know about them.)

Write me—Downhill Farm, Hancock, MD 21750 (717-294-3345) if you want to know more about anything I have said here or see some way we may be of help to one another.

For my views on the constitutional question, see the section “Unschooling and the Courts” in this issue of *GWS*.

News From Iowa

Two families in a small town in Iowa, trying to unschool their children, have met rigid and angry opposition from the schools. One parent's request to teach her child at home has been turned down by both local and state school boards. The other family's appeal to the state board, has not yet been heard, though the state Attorney General has ruled that in this matter the state board has no power. (Could the Governor have said, "Don't get me into that can of worms!")

In her appeal to the state board, one parent made (among others) these points:

Iowa law provides for alternative education to that provided by public schools (a) if teacher is competent and (b) equivalent education will be provided. Specific provisions (229.0 and 229.4) authorize that such alternative education may be in the form of private instruction.

A. (The mother/tutor of the child in question) is (a) a certified teacher in the State of Iowa (b) otherwise qualified by experience and training as a specialist in education—formerly in charge of co-ordinating Head Start programs for six counties in Southern Minnesota (c) has taken special courses of study, including a Montessori Diploma from London, England, and a degree in alternative education.

B. Education records of (the child) indicate her to have been evaluated as a superior student by the (local) school system as well as the open school (Wilson) which she attended in Mankato, Minn., and the school she attended in London, England. Much of this can be attributed to home instruction and environment.

C. In denying permission the (local) school board did not contest competence of teacher.

In spite of state law, and the overwhelming evidence of competence, the local Superintendent turned down the parent's request. Before her appeal could be heard by the state board, he requested and obtained a warrant

against mother and child under the truancy statute. Pending the state hearing, mother and child went to live with relatives in another state. The child is now back home, enrolled in a local Catholic school. The mother has not yet, as far as I know, asked that school to allow and support a course of partial or complete home study.

(Though they are appealing on slightly different grounds, the other family expects the state board to turn them down as well. They plan to appeal to the courts; we have discussed by mail and phone, what might be the best grounds for this appeal.)

Both local and state boards, in ruling against the parent, said that her proposed program was not “equivalent,” though neither said in what respects it was not so, or how it could or should be changed to make it so. I have suggested that the strongest appeal these families could make would be to say that the local and state boards, in acting as they have, have in effect nullified state law. Clearly, the legislature meant to allow alternative methods of instruction, including individual tutoring. Clearly, by “equivalent” they did not mean identical; parents and/or tutors can obviously not do in a home everything done by a large school, and even if they could, why would they want to? The legislature clearly meant to allow people to do things *different* from what was being done in school: “equivalent” refers to results (i.e. that the child know how to read and write, be able to go to college, etc.) rather than specific methods.

The legislature did give local school boards the right to approve or turn down proposed alternative programs, but not the right to turn down all of them. The school boards must, then, stand ready to approve programs that meet certain requirements. These requirements must be public, explicit, and reasonable. The legislature cannot have intended that people would have to guess in advance what the school boards would approve. Nor can people be required to do the impossible, like provide their children a full-sized basketball court or machine shop.

I further suggested, and this seems to me a good idea even for people whose children (with the schools’ consent) have been unschooled, that all *or any part* of the school’s activities and programs should be available to all the children of the community, whether or not they are full-time students at the school. Nothing in the law or in reason says that if a child is not in school *all* of the time he has no right to be there *any* of the time. If school boards want

to say that things which can only be done in school are an essential part of any “equivalent” program, then they have to let *all* children in the community, even those being tutored at home, into the school to do those things. Otherwise, they impose impossible requirements, and so, in effect, nullify the law. This argument, if upheld, would dispose of the schools’ claim that home programs, by definition, cannot be equivalent because the child does not have the “social life” of the school.

This seems to me a kind of model for legal action in states whose laws specifically allow for alternative methods of instruction, whether or not they name home tutoring as one of them. In states (if there are such) where the law does not specifically allow for any instruction other than in state-approved schools, our best bet is probably to say that it should, that to impose a uniform theory and method of instruction on all the parents of the state is not a proper intent of the legislature, if that was in fact their intent. On this issue, we might find other grounds for support in the state constitution, or in other laws relating to parents and children. If not, we might have to go into the Federal courts. But for reasons set forth elsewhere, think we should avoid this if we can.

Meanwhile, as a happy city-dweller, may I observe that our “impersonal” big cities may be better places for unschooling than our friendly, kindly small towns.

Mixed Allies

Those who read *GWS*, and want to take or keep their children out of schools, may have very different, in some cases opposed reasons for doing this.

Some may feel that the schools are too strict; others, that they are not strict enough.

Some may feel that the schools spend too much time on what they call The Basics; others, that they don't spend enough.

Some may feel that the schools teach a dog-eat-dog competitiveness; others, that they teach a mealy-mouth Socialism.

Some may feel that the schools teach too much religion; others, that they don't teach enough, but teach instead a shallow atheistic humanism. I think the schools degrade both science and religion, and do not encourage either strong faith or strong critical thought.

Some feel that the school curriculum is dull, fragmented, devoid of context, in George Dennison's words, that it destroys "the continuum of experience." Others may feel that the school curriculum is fine, but that they don't do a very good job of teaching it.

What is important is not that all readers of *GWS* should agree on these questions, but that we should respect our differences while we work for what we agree on, our right and the right of all people to take their children out of schools, and help, plan, or direct their learning in the ways they think best.

In all these matters, we at *GWS* have our own opinions, and will express them. This is not going to try or pretend to be an unbiased publication. We will be very biased. But we will try to be as useful as possible to *all* our readers, whether or not we agree with them on all details. And on the issue about which we are all agreed we will print as wide a range of ideas and opinions as our readers send us.

Writing in School

From the Aug. 1977 issue of the monthly magazine Mother Jones.

Pumping Polysyllabism

Two Chicago English professors have found that a good way to improve your grade on a term paper is to use what they call ‘verbose, bombastic’ language.

Professors Joseph Williams and Rosemary Hake say they took a well written paper and changed the language a bit. They kept the ideas and concepts the same, but wrote two different versions—one in simplified, straightforward language and another in verbose language, loaded with pedantic terms.

They then submitted the two papers to nine high school teachers; they were surprised to find that all nine gave the verbose papers nearly perfect scores but downgraded the straightforward essays as too simple and shallow.

The professors then submitted the same two papers to 90 more teachers and came up with similar results. Three out of four high school teachers and two out of three college professors gave higher marks to pompous writing.

Reason to wonder what these same college professors mean when they tell us, as they do all the time, that today’s students “can’t write.”

Just Enough Teaching

Not long ago, an extremely intelligent and capable friend, (Ed. note: Now a brilliant student at law school.) not at all daunted by most forms of learning, and a lover of music, told me that she wished she could read music, but that ever since she had studied music in school, the task had seemed hopelessly mysterious, terrifying, and impossible. I asked if she could think of any special part of it that seemed harder than the rest. She made a large gesture and said, “All of it. I just don’t understand *anything* about what those little dots mean on the page.” I asked if it was the rhythm or the pitch that seemed most mysterious. After some thought, she said the pitch. I then said (there was a piano handy), “If you like, I think I can show you in a few minutes how to find on that piano any given note.” She agreed. Within half an hour she was very slowly playing, by herself, a piece out of a beginning piano instruction book.

Five things made it possible for me to help her find out how to do this. 1) It was her idea, her interest; she wanted to do it. 2) I was at all times ready to stop if she wanted to. She knew that I would not, in my enthusiasm, push her into the confusion, panic, and shame into which eager or determined teachers so often push their students. 3) I accepted as legitimate and serious both her anxiety and her confusion. Even in the privacy of my own mind, I did not dismiss any of her fears or questions as silly. 4) I was ready to *let* her ask all the questions, to wait for her questions, and to let her use my answers as she wished. *I did not test her understanding.* I let *her* decide whether she understood or not, and if not, what question to use next. 5) I was not going to use her to prove what a gifted teacher I was. (Ed. note: I might once have done so.) If she wants to explore written music further, that’s fine. If she wants to ask me for more help, that’s fine too—though even better if she can do it without my help. But if, having proved to herself that she can figure out what notes mean, she doesn’t want to do more of it—well, that’s fine too.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING 3

March 1978

In its short life to date, *GWS* has already changed its character somewhat. It is turning out to be less about teaching than I thought it would be, and more about law, less about what your children can do once you get them out of school, and more about what you may have to do to get them out. I rather regret this. I am much more interested in helping children to explore the world and to find out and do interesting and worthwhile things in it, than I am in arguing about and fighting with schools. But it begins to look as if, like Moses in Egypt, we may have to find ways to make things a bit hot for the school Pharaohs, if only so that they will let our people go.

The dozen or so letters and phone calls I have had about this during recent months don't add up to much of a sample, perhaps not even a representative one. They suggest, though, that many people who ask their local schools to approve some kind of home study program are going to meet, not sympathy and support, not even intelligent questions, but threats—"We'll take you to court! We'll put you in jail! We'll take your kids away from you!"

So it may not be a good idea just to walk in cold into the Superintendent's office and say, "I want to teach my kids at home." It may be better to do some groundwork first. What kinds, *GWS* will discuss. If I had children, and wanted to teach them at home, I think I would ask someone from out of town, perhaps even out of state, to write the local School Board saying, in effect, "I am now teaching my children at home, am thinking of moving to your area, and am looking for a school district in which I can go on doing this. What requirements and conditions would I have to meet in order to be able to do this in your community?"

To put the question this way puts the School Board in a bit of a spot. If they say, "It doesn't make any difference what you do, you can't teach your children at home under any conditions," they may be violating state law. In any case, such a statement will not look very good if the matter ever goes to

court. If they say, “You must meet such and such conditions,” and you later meet them, it will be harder for them to say no. If they begin asking prying or hostile questions, or do not answer at all—well, there is your answer. Whatever you decide to do next, you will not have revealed yourself to them.

Meanwhile, I hope that readers of *GWS* who have unschooled their children with the approval of the local schools will tell us how they did this. It may help us approach schools in other communities.

New Record

We now have about 405 subscribers. A number of magazines have mentioned us, which has been very helpful. *New Age* (Feb. 78) and *Radcliffe Quarterly* (Mar. 78) have run good stories about us. We plan to run short classified ads in a number of publications, to see whether this will bring in new subscribers and supporters. In the long run, what will best help *GWS* grow will be people who like it telling other people about it.

About half of our subscribers have individual subscriptions, the rest group subscriptions. In *GWS* #2 we said that the record group sub, 14X, came from a group of teachers in Seattle. The record has now moved to Milwaukee, where people at the Multicultural High School have taken out a 15X sub.

This school, by the way, sounds like a very interesting place, and may make Milwaukee a good city for unschoolers with high-school aged children. The local school system tolerates and even supports Multicultural as a handy place to put kids whom the regular schools don't know how to deal with. But the result is that it keeps the truant officers off the backs of many young people while they are doing useful work, earning some needed money, or studying and learning about the world in ways that make some sense to them.

An Irony

The Boston Globe of 2/28/78, in a story about school attendance, says, “On a typical day, about 70% of the school system’s 65,000 youngsters attend classes.” They say nothing about the missing 30%. Who are they? Why do they stay away? What do the schools do about them?

The answers are, probably, that most of them are poor; that they stay away because they hate school and can see, even if they haven’t got anything much else to do with their time, that the school is wasting it; and that the schools do almost nothing to get them back.

There is irony here. As I said in an earlier GWS, compulsory school attendance laws were invented by rich people and aimed at poor kids. These rich people said in effect, “We educated people are perfectly capable of teaching our own children, but the poor don’t give a damn about their kids and wouldn’t know enough to teach them anything even if they wanted to. So, unless we lock up those kids in school all day long they are just going to run around the streets, cause trouble, get in bad habits, become drunks and criminals. We’ve got to put them in school to make them into good, obedient, hard-working factory hands.”

The irony is that if you are in fact the kind of kid that compulsory attendance laws were first aimed at, you can skip school all year long and nobody will pay any attention. The streets are full of the kinds of kids that schools were designed to keep off the streets. But if you are one of those now rare people who really care about the growth of your children and are willing to take the responsibility for helping that growth, and you try to take them out of schools where they are not growing but shrinking, the schools are likely to begin shouting about courts and jails. Strange.

More From “D”

I asked D (see GWS 2) about the “loophole” he referred to in Mass. law. He replied, in part:

*Mass. General Laws Annotated, Vol.9 (Chapters 69-78), (West Pub. Co., 1969), Chapter 76—School Attendance, section 1 of which states that “attendance shall not be required of a child ... who is being otherwise instructed in a manner approved in advance by the superintendent or the school committee” (p. 429 of the edition specified above). The “otherwise” in the context of the full section means “other than in an approved school.” At the end of section 2 (“duties of parents; penalty”) of this chapter (p. 434), however, the case of *Com. v. Renfrew* (1955) 126 N.E. 2d 109, 332 Mass. 492, is cited, warning that *prior* approval, (which the Renfrews failed to obtain) is crucial—and without it parents are liable to be prosecuted as for those letters and numbers in the citation, this is what they mean: volume 126, in the *Northeastern Reporter* (N.E.), *Second Series* (2d), page 109; the same case is also cited in volume 132 of the Massachusetts state reporter, on page 492. (Ed. note: Other states and regions will have comparable volumes and abbreviations.)*

Stephen Arons wrote an excellent article last year reprinted as a pamphlet (\$1.00) by the Center for Independent Education (Box 2256, Wichita KS 67201), *The Separation of School and State: Pierce Reconsidered*, in which he argues “that the Constitution protects the right of parents to pass their values along to their children.” He emphasizes the First Amendment as preserving “individual consciousness from government coercion.”

Another excellent pamphlet from C.I.E. (also \$1.00) is *Litigation in Education: In Defense of Freedom*, by William B. Ball, who was counsel for the defense in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* and in Ohio’s *Whisner* case.

A year or so ago, the Committee on Academic Freedom of the American Civil Liberties Union began to study the matter of compulsory schooling; its chairman is David Cohen (ACLU, 22 E. 40, NY NY 10016).

About using lawyers, I know of several cases where a *letter* to school authorities from a lawyer convinced them at the outset of the strength of the parents’ position and thus avoided prosecution, another where a lawyer was

able to arrange a pre-trial conference with the D.A. who then disposed of the case with a writ of *nolle prosequi*, and another where a lawyer was able to get a case tried before the most sympathetic judge (who was an old ACLU lawyer, and ruled in favor of the parents); indeed, this latter particularly is the real value of getting a local lawyer—he knows the local courts and judges, and can really do some effective maneuvering for position.

Again, many thanks to D for more good research. If others of you send information to GWS, please try to be as complete as D about your sources, so we (or others) can look up the same material. And isn't it good to know that all those mysterious letters and numbers, that we have been seeing for years after law citations, in fact mean something quite simple and sensible.

I have read the Arons and Ball pamphlets and recommend both of them, but even more the Ball. If Arons is talking about what he thinks the courts *should* do, I and most of us will agree with him. If he is talking about what they are likely to do, he seems to me too much of an optimist. Ball seems more tough-minded.

I agree very strongly about the use of lawyers for maneuvering purposes. Even there, though, the more we can learn about how our courts run, who the local judges are, and so on, the better off we will be. One thing we might do well to find out is whether the *procedures* of a given court (in which we might someday find ourselves) are written down, and if so, where. It would be useful reading. The more we know, and can show we know, about the law, the less likely the schools are to want to tangle with us.

From Alex

Alex Marton; 11460 N.W. 30th Place; Sunrise, FL 33323, has written us a most interesting letter, saying in part:

I really enjoyed issue #2 of *GWS*. I particularly got turned on by some of the legal questions covered in the letter from “D.” I took his advice and went to the nearest law library, which happens to be at the Court House. By the way, the Court House Law Library is open to the public, at least, in my case, and you don’t have to pretend being a student or anything because nobody really cares.

Anyone who is really interested in the general background of what the courts have said in relation to various claims by parents who were tried for failure to comply with their state’s compulsory attendance laws can get an excellent overview in 65 ALR 3d 1222. Incidentally, this numbering system also is very simple: ALR stands for American Law Reports, 65 means volume 65, 3d means this is the third set of books (there is also ALR 1st and ALR 2d), and 1222 is the page number where the report starts.

For the record, I would like to raise issue with the somewhat optimistic view “D” seemed to convey with regard to some of the court cases favorable to Home Study. In point of fact, only *People v. Levisen* and *State v. Massa* are true home study cases. *People v. Turner* was actually decided *against* the parents, the court’s position being that a “private school” within the meaning of the compulsory attendance law was a formal or established type of institution; the court also pointed out that the state could not be burdened with the expense and difficulty of supervising “schools” taking the form of parents instructing their own children at home.”

I interrupt to note that this was exactly the point that one court made when it threw out the suit that some parents had brought against a school system because their child had graduated without knowing anything. The court said, in effect, if we let these parents get damages from the schools, tens of thousands of other people will also sue, and this will cost the state too much money. One might say that justice, rather than the state’s finances, ought to be the concern of the courts. It does not always work that way. The courts

have an interest in keeping the machinery of government running, more or less smoothly, and they are not likely to make decisions which might threaten to bring the machinery to a stop.

State v. Peterman had to do with a case where the child was taught in the home of a retired school-teacher. The court held this situation to constitute a private school within the meaning of ... the compulsory education law. Not exactly relevant to home study, but at least a step in the right direction, although not much because the teacher was in fact certified by the state.

Write v. State appears to be, in its language, philosophically more sympathetic to the parents' right to choose as they see fit. It suggests that if the moral training afforded by the public and private schools in a district should not comport with the reasonable requirements of the parents, and the parents are well able themselves to give or to obtain for their children instruction in the subjects in which the state can require instruction, and actually do so, the state cannot compel attendance at either a public or private school. Even here, the court recognizes the state's right to require instruction in specific subjects. How does the state insure that its standards are being met? (Ed. note: They are obviously not being met in most schools.)

That was one of the points in *State v. Whisner*, where Rev. Whisner's religious school did not obtain state "approval" (actually never applied for it) because it felt that compliance with the school board's minimum standards would violate their free exercise of religion. It is interesting to note that the Ohio Supreme Court, which finally decided the case in favor of the school on rather abstruse interpretations of the "free exercise" clause, nevertheless ended by admonishing both parties on their overly litigious course in search of a resolution, and suggested that Whisner himself might have saved himself much cost and embarrassment had he attempted to deal with the School Board by availing himself of the judicial review of the administrative proceedings guaranteed by such and such and so on. In other words, the court would have preferred Whisner and the parents to go through the morass of dealing with the bureaucracy because basically the court subscribes to the idea that the educational establishment has jurisdiction. It only ruled in favor of Whisner's school because it saw a threat to the free exercise of religion.

I interrupt again to point out that as a general rule, and in all kinds of cases, the courts do not want to hear cases unless the parties have “exhausted all available remedies.” In other words, don’t come up to our rung of the judicial ladder unless and until you have dealt with all the people on the lower rungs. There is a sensible reason for this. If everyone tried to bypass lower courts and go directly to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court would have as many cases as all the lower courts put together cases would come in a hundred times faster than the Court could decide them.

I am quite sure that this is one reason why the Supreme Court decided as it did in the matter of corporal punishment. There may well have been a majority of judges who felt that in the case before them the beating inflicted by the school was indeed excessive. But someone, at the very least Chief Justice Burger—and it is worth noting that Chief Justice Warren before him was greatly concerned about the overloading of the federal courts—must have said, “Look, if we rule that this punishment was cruel and unusual and so prohibited by the Constitution, then thousand people every year are going to come into the federal courts asking them to rule that *their* children’s punishments were also excessive.”

Religion was also the prime element in *State v. LaBarge*, specifically an “unapproved” religious school. In all these “private school” cases where the school is a “religious” school, courts have interpreted the statutes rather strictly, and have relied quite heavily on arguments relating to First Amendment considerations. Again, there is not much here to comfort the parent who is not motivated by religious imperatives in his desire to withdraw from the established system.

Even in *State v. Massa*, where the mother taught her daughter at home, the favorable decision is guided by the fact that the New Jersey statute required attendance at a public school or ... to receive *equivalent* instruction elsewhere than at school. The parents were lucky, and the court, in its summary, opined that defendant’s daughter had received education equivalent to that available in the county’s public schools, and that there was no indication of bad faith or improper motive on defendant’s part. *But* it also said that had the wording of the statute been something other than “equivalent” education, the whole case might have gone differently. In the

end result, there is little sympathy to be found anywhere for the principled parent who simply does not want to have official education shoved down his throat.

The most encouraging note seems to come from *People v. Levisen*, the Illinois decision where the court said that (1) school is a place where instruction is imparted; its existence is not dependent on the number of persons being taught; and (2) the object of the compulsory education law is that all children be educated, not that they be educated in any particular manner or place. This is good news, although, to take things in context, the case is somewhat vitiated by the fact that the parents were Seventh Day Adventists and the withdrawal from school was somewhat religious in nature. I believe that the quotes from the court rulings sound like ringing calls to freedom when taken in isolation, but the true meaning of the decisions can only be evaluated by looking at the whole picture.

I can say one thing about what I learned in a couple of days at the library reading up on these cases, as well as on the many that went against the parents, and the commentaries appended to them. Courts have interpreted their state laws very close to the letter; decisions favorable to parents were on the second or third appeal; the precise grounds on which most of these decisions were made do not point in a direction that would make a principled parent feel optimistic about a future lawsuit involving him and his children. As a matter of fact, the experience of reading through these volumes gives me pause regarding the kind of society we live in, and the liberties we take for granted.

Many thanks to Alex Marton for his good research and letter. I think we should heed his warnings. In most places, unschooling children will not be easy. The more we understand that it will be hard, and why, the better our chances of doing it anyway.

Friendly Lawyers

D also sent the names of some lawyers “who are sympathetic and know about unschooling.”

William B. Ball (*very* sympathetic); Ball & Skelly; 127 State St.; Harrisburg, PA 17101.

Robert P. Baker; On The Square; Sarcoxie, MO 64862.

Helen Baker; 2555 Kemper; Shaker Heights, OH 44120.

David C. Gibbs; Gibbs, Craze, & Thompson; 6929 W. 130th St.; Cleveland, OH 44130.

To which I would add the name of a lawyer I met recently in Boston:

Steven S. Tokarski; Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy; Tufts University; Medford MA 02155.

May I suggest that (except in cases of great urgency, where something must be done right away) people who want to get in touch with these lawyers write them a letter, and *not* call them on the phone. Writing takes more time for the writer, but saves it for the reader; a lawyer can read in a few minutes what we might spend half an hour trying to explain. Also, the law works by the written word, and it will be good for us to try to get our thoughts down clearly and simply on paper.

These lawyers are much more likely to stay friendly if they are not besieged by phone calls from unschoolers.

By the way, if some of our readers are lawyers, or know lawyers, who would like to be added to this list, please let us know.

News Item

From a Cleveland, Ohio paper, Dec. 8, 1977.

Juvenile Court Judge Angelo Gagliardo in September found Tom and Martha Lippitt guilty of civil neglect charges for not enrolling their daughters Amy, 7, and Alice, 8, in state approved schools. The charges were brought by the South Euclid Lyndhurst School Board.

The husband spent a week in jail for not complying with the judge's order that the children be enrolled in a properly chartered public or private school.

Mrs. Lippitt and another woman operated a three-pupil unchartered school until Mrs. Lippitt and her children disappeared when Judge Gagliardo threatened to jail both parents and place their children in county custody.

Mrs. Lippitt objects to modern schooling, saying students are taught secular humanism, which excludes God and extols man. She has also criticized sex and drug education and the lack of dress codes.

Her husband, who is an insurance man and John Birch Society member, last night called public schools a cesspool.

Mrs. Lippitt said she will continue to teach her children herself, as she did while staying in six different locations with them while away. She is a former teacher.

Mrs. Lippitt has appealed the civil neglect charge—the news story does not say to what court. The judge has stayed a bench warrant for her arrest until the appeal is decided. I have asked my informant to send me any later news stories on this case. Perhaps some GWS readers who live in Ohio might look further into this.

Note carefully the words about the judge staying the bench warrant for her arrest. In GWS #2 we told about a woman in Iowa who was denied permission to teach her own child. Since then I have read about a man in

Greenwich, Conn., who was in fact arrested—police came to his house and took him off to jail because he had been keeping a child out of school. In both these cases, and any like them that may come up, it would seem wise to ask the judge, as was done in Cleveland, to stay the arrest warrant until the case has made its way through the courts to some final decision. After all, according to the principles on which our legal system is based, we are entitled to be presumed innocent of any crime, including keeping a child out of school, until the courts have declared us guilty. This may mean that while the issue is being decided, which may take some time, we can keep the child at home.

Money

A friend writes:

The kids don't get allowances. I don't even like the word in that context. If adults "allow" children to have money then who "allows" adults to have it? Each week \$5 goes to each kid and it is called a share. The family receives about \$75 a week from rental of income property and \$20 of it is the kids' share to do with as they wish. A sort of guaranteed income. It's either a lot of money or a little depending on how you look at it. All real needs are provided by the adults as a gift. We have the connection and money-earning skills (Ed. note: And the legal right.) to earn what is needed. We even have enough extra energy to provide a lot of the wants but some of them the kids have to get on their own. We provide honey—you buy your own sugar. We provide wheat and oats, but you buy your own Cocoa Pops and Twinkies. Exceptions are numerous because we all like that junk but the point is still made—I buy my junk, you buy yours. If you are smarter than me you will buy less than I do.

On rare moments of weakness I get heavy and play God. S got sore at someone one day and smashed a glass in the middle of the road to demonstrate his feelings. I considered it a transgression on all our freedoms so I ordered him to clean it up. He did a sloppy job of it, maintaining his position. I asked him if he had cleaned it all up. He said he did. I asked him if he would pay 10 cents apiece for any he had left. He said, "Sure." We all went to work and he paid. If he had said, "No, and you have no right to require me to pay," I would probably have backed down and found some other way to lean on him. The use and abuse of power is always a question only half answered. We try to keep the question fresh.

A nice way to put it. It is a tough question. One could say that the political history of the human race is one long struggle to find a decent and workable answer to it.

On money, a friend told me that when her daughter was about five she gave her an allowance of 10 cents a week. The child had a couple of younger friends in the neighborhood, about 4 and 3, which whom she played, and it turned out after a while that she was giving *them* an allowance of a penny or

two a week.

No two ways about it, little people want to do what big people do.

On the whole, I tend to think that children, particularly from the age of about eight on, should be given less money than many of them are now, but should instead be given a chance to earn much more than they do now. How much each family can afford or will want to give or pay a child they will of course have to decide, but it seems to me better if most of this is earned.

My reason is this. Thoreau, in his essay *Life Without Principle* (as fine as his essay on Civil Disobedience), said something about like this: “The cost of a thing may generally be reckoned, broadly speaking, as the amount of *life* that must be exchanged for it.” A very important truth (under any kind of economic system), and important for even quite young children to learn. Children who ask themselves, “Is (or was) that toy, doll, game, etc. worth the time I will have to work (or did work) to earn the money to pay for it?” are asking a useful question. To use a phrase now much in fashion, they are “clarifying their values” (or at least some of them) in the only way values can be clarified—by making choices which cost something.

Legwork

A father called me the other day. For many good reasons he is thinking of suing his local school. Looking for a good lawyer to represent him, he asked advice from a nationally famous expert on Constitutional law. This lawyer recommended a lawyer friend. When the father interviewed that lawyer, he was surprised and discouraged to find that he planned to turn most of the work of the case over to a young assistant, who, though he knew little or nothing about the law in this area, would charge him \$50 for every hour he spent on the case. The father mentioned a book that he thought had an important bearing on the case; the lawyer had never even heard of it. Later the father said to me, “I’m not going to pay him \$50 an hour to read that book. I can’t afford to educate him at that price.”

Quite right. He can’t afford to, and he shouldn’t. People who make \$100 or more can afford to pay other people \$50 an hour to do leg work and research for them. People who make \$5 or \$10 an hour have to do that leg work and research themselves and use the \$50 per hour person to do *only* those things they can’t do for themselves. Take this book the father thinks the lawyer should know about. The smart thing for the father to do is to go through the book, copy the pages he thinks are of the greatest importance and make a digest of the rest, and have the lawyer read that. It will take the lawyer a few minutes and cost the father a few bucks.

For a while at least, we are not likely to find many lawyers, anywhere in the country, who know as much about the law on unschooling as we know *or can readily find out*. There is not an issue about which lawyers, above all experienced and famous lawyers, have concerned themselves. We cannot count on them to work out good strategies and write good briefs for us—at least, not at a price that most of us can afford. We are going to have to do most of the research, decide what legal action we want to take, what courts (federal, state, or local) we want to go into, what kind of decision we want from them, put together all our necessary supporting evidence, statutes, citations, etc. and then show these to some lawyers, ask them what they think, and if they think we have a good case, ask them to polish it up and see if they can steer it through the courts.

Experts

In the preceding piece I said that the parents had good reasons for wanting to sue the schools. When their child was six, he went to school. Soon after, on the basis of a *twenty minute* examination by a school psychologist, he was labeled “hyperactive” and put into a special class. Looking into it, the parents found out that most of the children in that class were seriously retarded. They took their child out of school altogether and, still wanting to obey the law, asked the school to send them a tutor. The tutor arrived and within a few minutes, in the presence of the parents, asked the child, “How long have you been emotionally disturbed?” The parents told the tutor they would not be needing his services, and the child has not been back to school since.

The story reminds me that I was traveling on a plane not long ago. As we got up to leave, I saw that in the row ahead a pleasant and intelligent looking young woman was reading a book called, as I remember, *Structure of Behavioral Disorders in Children*. She had another book with much the same kind of title. I assumed that she was studying to be a teacher, “Special Ed” teacher, or school psychologist, and reflected gloomily that she will probably do far more harm in her work than was ever done by an old fashioned teacher with a hickory switch, or even some of our present-day paddle freaks.

Right And Left

Schools get very upset and anxious about right and left. If a child writes a letter backwards, or reads off some letters in wrong order, or does anything else to suggest he is confused about right and left, adults begin to talk excitedly about “mixed dominance” and “perceptual handicaps” and “learning disabilities.” The child is quickly labeled as “having a serious problem.” Specialists (if the school can afford them) are called in and told to take over.

A child once asked me a question that not only completely surprised me, but also suggested that when children are confused about right and left, the reason may be something wrong, not in them, but in *us*, the adults, and the way we talk about right and left. In short, the child’s confusion *makes sense*, and if we only understood that we might easily straighten it out.

I was in an early elementary classroom, working on something with some children in a corner of the room. I needed something in my desk, and asked a child if he would get it for me. He said OK, and asked where it was. I said, “In the top right hand drawer.” There was a pause. Then he said, “Whose right hand, mine or the desk’s?”

For a second, I was baffled. What on earth could he mean? Then I saw, and understood. When he looked at the desk, it was as if he saw a living creature, looking at him. So I said, “Your right hand.” Off he went, brought back what I had asked for, and that was that.

Later, I thought that many young children must be animists and see objects as if they were living creatures. I wondered how many of them might have had that same question in their minds, without ever getting round to asking it. And if they didn’t ask it, how did they ever learn the answer? I decided after a while that one way or another they learned it from experience. They went to the desk, looked in *its* right hand drawer, found nothing, looking in *their* right hand drawer, found what they wanted, and so learned which was meant. Like the infant I described in *How Children Learn*, who at the dinner table asked people to pass her the salt, pepper, butter, etc. so that by seeing what was passed she could find out what those words meant.

But some children might not interpret the desk experience in that way. They might assume that the adult had made a mistake about the drawer. Or

they might think that they themselves had made a mistake about which was right and which was left. The kind of children who *worried about mistakes* (because their parents or teachers worried) might be particularly ready blame themselves for any confusion.

Only recently, as I began to think about writing this piece, did I realize that our adult rules about right and left are even more confused than I had thought. Thus, when we ask a child to get something out of our right hand coat pocket, we mean the *coat's* right hand, not the child's. When we talk about the right headlight of a car, we mean the car's right hand. The right hand (or starboard) side of a boat is always *its* right hand. But the right hand entrance of a house is *our* right hand, not the house's. In short, we adults talk sometimes as if things were people, and sometimes as if they were not, and there's no rhyme or reason at all in the way we do this. Why should a car or boat or train have its own right side, but not a house?

In the theatre, of course, the confusion about whose right or left is meant, the audience's or the actors', was so great that they invented the words "stage right" or "stage left" to mean the right or left of the actors as they looked at the audience.

Under photos of groups of people, we see, "Reading from left to right, Jones, Smith, etc." A child, being shown such photos, might hear someone say, "That's me over on the right." Our right? Or the right of the group? So the people on the right are really on the left, and vice versa. Some children might see this as more of the world's delightful nonsense. But other children might think in panic and terror, "Why don't they make up their minds which way they want it? How do they ever expect me to get it straight?"

We might well ask, how do any of us ever get it straight. Most of us get it straight the way we learn the grammar of our language, which is so subtle and complicated that (I am told) no one has yet been able to teach it to a computer. Children learn very early the words "I, you, she, etc." refer to different people depending on who is saying them. Not an easy thing to figure out, when you come to think about it. Yet no one ever explains that to them. Nor do they say to themselves, somewhere in their growing up, "*I* refers to the person who is talking, *you* to the person talked to, *we* to both of them together, and *he, she, or they* to the people talked about." They just use the words that way, and it works.

In the same way, children don't think to themselves, "Cars, coats, boats,

trains, planes, all have their own right hands, but photos, books, desks, houses do not.” They just learn from experience which is which, and don’t worry much about the contradictions, just as most French children don’t worry about why a house should be feminine and a building masculine, or a coat masculine and a shirt feminine.

In short, most children master the confusion of right and left because they never become aware of it, any more than I did until just a few days ago. Others may become aware of the confusion but are not troubled by it and don’t feel any need to set it right or make sense of it—it’s just the way things are. But some children, like the boy I wrote about in *Serious Teaching* (GWS #2), are philosophers. They examine everything. They like things to make sense, and if they don’t, to find out why not. And still others are threatened and terrified by confusion and paradox, above all, by seeing people act as if something made sense when it obviously doesn’t. At some deep level of their being, they wonder, “Am I the one who’s crazy?”

I suspect that most of the children who have persistent trouble with right and left in school or in life are of this latter kind. After a few right-left mistakes, which they make only because they have not yet learned our crazy right-left rules, they begin to think, “I must be stupid, I never can figure out right and left.” Soon they go into a blind panic every time the words come up. They work out complicated strategies of bluff and avoidance. When people ask about right and left, they learn to get other clues. (“You mean the one over there by the window?”, etc.). In general, they assume (which they were all too ready to assume in the first place) that there is something wrong with them.

If this is true, or to the extent it is, what might we do about it? One thing we should not do, which the schools are very likely to do if they ever buy this theory of mine, is to set out to “teach” the rules of right and left, as they now “teach” the rules of phonics, or colors or shapes or sounds, as if no one ever learned anything unless it was taught. I can just see workbooks with lists of things that have their own right hands, and things that do not, and daily tests for the children, etc.

Most children have always figured out the right and left without much teaching, other than being told when very little, “This is your right hand, this is your left foot, etc.” Let them go on learning it that way. But if a child seems to be confused or anxious about this, then we can begin to make the

rules more explicit. We can say, “I mean your right hand, not the desk’s,” or “I mean the *coat*’s right hand, not yours, perhaps adding, “I know that sounds a little crazy, but that’s just the way we do it, don’t worry about it, you’ll get used to it.”

East And West

Thinking about right and left brought back and old memory. Years ago a teacher of geography told me of a most interesting and surprising discovery. Teachers who teach young children about maps and directions find out that some pick it up quickly. But others, when shown a map and asked to point East, act like the children I described in *How Children Fail*—wave their hands in all directions while carefully reading the teacher's face for cues, watch their smart classmates, bluff, fake, wait it out, and so on. Most teachers let it go at that. Good students, bad students, you get all kinds.

But somewhere a serious teacher, unwilling to accept failure and blame it on the students, noticed something. A few children, shown a map and asked to point East, almost always pointed wrong, *but always in the same direction*. In time, people looked into it further. They found that a certain small percentage of people, some of them children, some adults, had a very strong sense of direction. It was as if they had a compass in their minds, or as if under their feet the ground was everywhere marked with direction lines. Whether their compass and direction lines were correctly labeled, whether the East they pointed was in fact true East, I don't know. But they always pointed the same way.

My mother had that kind of sense of direction. Driving without a map on strange, winding, suburban roads, when the rest of us had long since lost our bearings, she always knew about where we were, which way we were headed, and which way we needed to go to get where we wanted. An inborn gift? Perhaps, though some have probably learned it, like old sailors. At any rate, for children with such a gift, the question, "Which way is East?" can only mean, "Which way is *true* East, or *world-East*?" If we understood this, we could make the distinction (which we ought to make anyway) between *world-East* and *map-East*. Once children understood the relation between maps and the territory being mapped, which we could help them see by making maps of their room, the house, the yard, the block or neighborhood, the town, etc., we could then ask questions like, "If you were here (showing a point on the map) and began to walk East, show me on the map where you'd be going." Or we could walk first, and then see on the map where we had walked. After doing this a few times, a child would be able to show map-

East, map-North, etc.

I talked to a teacher friend (Math) about this. He laughed and said that when he was a kid he thought for quite a few years that North, world-North, was straight up, and world-South straight down, since all the maps he had seen in school were on the walls. In time, he figured it out for himself—*by* himself.

Recently these thoughts about East and West have led to a new thought. Suppose there were some people who thought that Right and Left, like East and West, referred to something *in the world itself*, in short, that Right meant world-Right and Left meant World-Left. How could they ever figure out, from our talk about Right and Left, which was which? One minute world-Right would seem to be here, the next minute there. We can hardly imagine their confusion and terror. Most of them would soon decide that they were just too stupid to figure out what seemed so easy for everyone else. Small wonder they would fool psychologists. They would talk and act just as if something was indeed wrong inside their skulls or skins. Yet they (or we) could clear up all that confusion if they (or we) just thought to ask a couple of the right questions.

What to do? Above all, keep calm. If a child shows some confusion about right and left, don't panic, give him plenty of time to figure it out for himself. Some things we could do might help. When we first tell the child which is our Right hand and which our Left, it would probably be a good idea for both to be facing the same way, the child standing in front of us or on our lap. At some point, facing the same way, we might each hold a toy in our right hand, and show that when we are facing the same way, the right hands are on the same side, but that when we turn to face each other, the right hands are on the opposite side. Probably not a good idea to talk very much about this, or try to explain it, or in any way make too big a production of it. Just show it casually now and then, as another interesting fact about the world.

Beyond that, we should not assume, because children know that this is the right hand and this the left, that they understand all about right-hand drawers and coat pockets and headlights, in short, all our crazy rules about right and left. For some time, when we talk about such other things, we should point out which side we mean. If the child seems to take all this in stride, we don't need to say anything, and would be wiser not to. But if, as I said earlier, the child seems unduly puzzled or anxious about all this, then we can make the

right-left rules more explicit.

In my mind's eye I can see a little right-left reminder—a little rug, or piece of heavy cloth, or wood, or even cardboard, with an outline of the child's two bare feet, side by side, the right foot marked R, the left L. When the child stands on it, with his feet pointed the same way, he can tell which is which.

If any of you ever had as children, or have now, these (or other) confusions about right and left, I will be grateful if you will write me about them. Or, if you try out some of these ideas with your own children, let me know how they work out. Above all, let me know if you have some right-left ideas of your own.

Teaching Machine

When the Santa Fe Community School was just starting, a young inventor, who hoped to market one of the “teaching machines” then much in fashion, lent one of his models to the school. It was a big metal box, that sat on top of a table. Through a window in the front of the box, one could see printed cards. Beside the window were five numbered buttons. On the card one might read something like this: “An apple is a 1) machine 2) dog 3) fruit 4) fish 5) musical instrument.” If one pushed button #3, a little green light went on above the buttons, and a new card appeared behind the window. If one pushed any of the other buttons, a red light went on. In short, like most “teaching machines,” it was a rather fancy way of giving multiple choice tests.

On the day the inventor brought the box to school the children, aged 5 through 8, gathered around the machine to see how it worked. The inventor showed them how to use it, and for a while the children took turns pushing the buttons and answering the questions on the cards. This only lasted a short while. Then the children began to say, “Open the box! We want to see inside the box!” Someone opened up the front panel, showing the cards, mounted on a revolving drum, and beside each card, on the drum, five little holes, and a metal plug to stick into the hole matching the “right answer” on the card. The children considered this a minute, and then all fell to work—*making cards*. After a while they all had some cards to load into the machine. Bargains were struck: “I’ll play using your cards if you’ll play using mine.” One child would load up the machine with his cards, and put the answer buttons in the right places, then another child would come and take the test, then they would trade places. This went on for perhaps a day or so, all very serious.

Then, so the friend told me who was teaching there at the time and saw all this, the game began to change. There was much loud laughter around the machine. The teachers went to see what was going on. What they saw was this. A child would load the machine, as before, and another child would take the test. Up would come a card saying something like, “A dog is a 1) train 2) car 3) airplane 4) animal 5) fish.” The child taking the test would press button #4, the “right answer,” and *the red light would go on*. The cardmaker would shriek with laughter. The child being tested would push the buttons, one by

one, until he or she hit the right one and the drum turned up the next card. Then, same story again, another right answer rewarded with the red light, more shrieks of laughter. When one child had run through all his rigged cards, the other would have a turn, and would do exactly the same thing. This happy game went on for a day or two. Then the children, having done everything with the machine that could be done with it, grew bored with it, turned away from it, and never touched it again. After a month or so the school asked the inventor to come take his machine back.

This little incident tells us more about the true nature of children (and all humans) and the way they learn about the world (if we let them) than fifty years worth of Pavlovian behaviorist or Skinnerian operant conditioning experiments. Sure, “Psychologist and Pigeon (or rat, etc.)” is a good game, for a while at least. But everyone wants to play Psychologist; nobody wants to play Pigeon. We humans are not by nature like sheep or pigeons, passive, unquestioning, docile. Like these children, what we want is to find out how the machine works, *and then to work it*. We want to find out why things happen, so that we can make them happen. Maybe we want this too much; in the long run (or not so long) it may be our undoing. But that is the kind of creature we are. Any theory of learning or teaching which begins by assuming that we are some worm-like or rat-like or pigeon-like creature is nonsense and can only lead to endless frustration and failure.

Learning Music

The Oct. 5, 1977 issue of MANAS quotes, from the book Piano: Guided Sight Reading, by Leonard Deutch, this interesting fragment:

The famous Hungarian and Slovak gypsies have a century-old musical tradition. This colorful folk has brought forth numerous excellent instrumentalists, notably violinists. They learn to play much as an infant learns to walk without teaching methods, lessons, or drills. *No written music is used. The youngster is merely given a small fiddle and allowed* (Ed. italics) *to join the gypsy band.* He gets no explanations or corrections. He causes no disturbance, for his timid efforts are scarcely audible. He listens; he tries to play simultaneously what he hears, and gradually succeeds in finding the right notes and producing a good tone. (Ed. note: I do quite a bit of this playing by ear in my cello practicing.) Within a few years he has developed into a full fledged member of the band with complete command of his instrument.

Are these gypsy children particularly gifted? No, almost any child could accomplish what they do. *The band acts as teacher talking to the pupil in the direct language of music.* (Ed. italics.) The novice, by joining the band, is immediately placed in the most helpful musical atmosphere and psychological situation; thus, from the beginning, he finds the right approach to musical activity.

News From Ca.

We have moved to ... This was an effort on our part to take G (10) and D (9) out of isolation and into the world where there are other answers to people to relate to other than public school. In some ways it appears (we have been here such a short time) to be successful. The children are not going to school this year and as a family we enjoy the quietness of the school hours for family things. Then when school is out there are 12 children here in our townhouse complex of the ages for G and D to have a variety of friends. They appear to be a compatible group. It is just that we find these children tend to bring home with them a lot of the actions and attitudes that they learn at school and thus the interaction among the children is very similar to a school situation. However, at home G and D are free to walk away from it, and also we are hoping that we might be a positive influence that will help these children to see there are other ways.

So far we haven't been hassled about the children not being in school. The landlord and all the other families in the complex know they aren't. They don't understand but don't seem to have any desire to cause us trouble. One child asked G if she didn't go to school. When G said No the girl replied, "What do you do? Just stay home and be dumb?" G and D have learned to play it cool and just drop the subject. The Librarian asked G the other day to take part in a project and asked her when she gets out of school so they could plan the time for the project. G told her Two O'Clock. I asked her why she just didn't tell her she wasn't in school and G said, "I just wasn't in the mood to hassle all the questions that follow." (Ed. note: Smart G! This is not a matter about which, unless I knew them very well, I would trust most public officials.)

While it is true that our children were enrolled in public school last year they attended only a short time. We took an extended trip from the end of Sept. to the first of Dec. The children went back to school when it reopened in Jan. Then the snows came and closed the schools for 19 days in Jan. and Feb. The last of Feb. we took another trip and were gone until the second week in April, at which time the children went back to school but only a few days a week (whenever they chose to go). G did happen to be there for the achievement tests though and that proved something interesting too. G had

been turned off Math through a bad experience in the fourth grade and we told her to just tune it out until she felt she wanted to try again so all through last year she just didn't do it. (Ed. note: The smartest thing to do.) If she was given a page of Multiplication to do she added them, as she likes to add. But because she was absent for one day of the tests she had to make them up and thus got to see her folder and how she had done on the tests she had taken earlier. She scored above grade level even in Math. She says she is just a good guesser as she didn't know at all what she was doing. But this story just confirms what you and we already knew about achievement tests!

This sounds like an unusually relaxed school system. More and more schools are threatening to fail children, *no matter how much they actually know*, if they miss more than a few days of school. This widespread and growing (and inexcusable) practice of using grades for disciplinary purposes or to compel attendance is something GWS will have much more to say about.

And N.J.

Nancy Plent (see Directory) writes, in part:

Enclosed is some information on New Jersey school laws for your files. (A Digest of Laws and State Board of Education Regulations Regarding Private Schools in New Jersey—from State of New Jersey, Department of Education; 225 West State St.; Trenton 08625) Pages 2 and 9 have the information unschoolers want. (Ed. note: Will quote these sections at end of this letter.) As you can see by the digest, New Jersey makes it easy to start a private school, and they leave you alone once started.

Please be sure my name and address are in the next directory. I have a N.J. teacher's certificate and plan to file the affidavit which makes me a private school. I may be able to help someone else with these two items.

I've long planned to teach my son, Eric, now 6, at home. Before *GWS*, I was waking at night in a cold sweat just thinking about the conflicts involved. I was going to do it anyway, but on my gloomy days it feels good knowing that someone else out there agrees with me. I have no such support here and would really welcome mail from other N.J. people, or anyone for that matter.

A couple of things I've learned that may help others. One of my first steps was to call the ACLU. They promised to research the laws for home education if I gave them my reasons in writing. They also referred me to an Education Law Center. I don't know (Ed. note: I don't either.) whether this kind of office is unique to N.J., but it seems to me that other states might have similar offices tucked away somewhere. A few phone calls might locate it.

The lawyer I talked to there was very encouraging and had no inclination to defend public education to me. He told me about the *Massa* decision and that I might have to prove equivalent instruction, the key words in N.J. He recommended having a well-organized curriculum to show, and set hours of study. (I'll be able to "show" this, but I don't live well organized with set anything.) His final advice was to confront the local principal with my plans as a matter of "professional courtesy." He explained—if someone sees you out during school hours and reports you, the principal will feel foolish and annoyed that he isn't on top of things in his district and will come down on you harder.

I know you disagree with this (Ed. note: Not always.), and D felt it was wrong. This is a small town I live in, however (pop. 1200). As you have pointed out, it isn't as easy in a small town. Besides, I was raised in the best American tradition (Ed. note: Not unique to us.) of guilt and fear. If I tried to hide out during school hours, every phone call and ring on the doorbell would start my heart pounding furiously. No, for cowards like myself it's best to put the whole thing out in the open and have several alternative plans ready in case you lose.

So far, the local school doesn't seem to know what to do about me. Since I was courteous and matter of fact with them, I'm getting back the same treatment. (Ed. note: It doesn't always work that way, but it's still a good way to begin.) The board lawyer asked for an outline of my educational plans after I called the Massa decision to their attention. I'm waiting for their reply to my reply. I'm sure I'll stop promoting the direct approach if they decide to take me to court. The idea is far from appealing.

After sending to Calvert and Home Study Institute, I got to wondering how hard it would be to start a correspondence school. The state sends out a thick pamphlet on instructions and procedures. It is much harder to do than to start an actual school, but not impossible. I feel that it might be helpful at a later time to have an approved correspondence school in each state. (Ed. note: I agree.) The danger here of course is that the authorities feel so comfortable with duly approved stuff that they might eventually disallow a parent's curriculum.

This past October I placed an ad in *Mother Earth News*, looking for parents doing home education. I thought I'd start a newsletter or *something* just for contact. (Thanks for doing it first!) It was my last desperate attempt to find an alternative to starting a school.

The first answer to my ad was from D, and he told me about GWS. After months of this very alone feeling, you can see why I walked around with a silly grin for days after getting my first copy.

About lawyers. I agree we are better off not to have ourselves interpreted and thereby watered down by them. I'm keeping mine informed just in case, but I find that the very act of having to explain my position to others has strengthened me. Being deeply involved, parents become more informed than a lawyer takes time to be. Chances are also good that in a short time any parent can be better informed than the local school board on school laws and

alternatives, which certainly can't hurt.

One private school in N.J. was started by two couples who refused to send their children to public school. I have the name of the lawyer who convinced the school board not to take them to court. One of these mornings I'll write to ask about her availability for similar cases, and will pass along her name if she is interested.

I hope more stories about the lives of unschooled people (I think that term is beginning to un-nerve me!) will reach GWS. (Ed. note: I see her point. Why don't we just use the word "unschoolers" to refer to people who are trying to get their children or themselves out of school, or did so at some time in the past?) We all want to believe that our children will lead happy, even exciting lives as a result of what we do, but most of us have to operate on faith. Actors' children or child actors get to stay out of school and we can all see that they have some elusive advantage over most of us. But most of us don't personally know any actors' children or *any* children who have lived very long without schooling. No matter how firm our commitment we all need reassurance.

My only success story for unschooling: I had a boy in my first third grade class who always handed in a cartoon for a book report, drew cartoon figures all day instead of doing his school work, spelled his entire 20 word list wrong (words like CAT and PLAY) but defiantly added "Mississippi" and "hippopotamus" at the bottom, spelled correctly, and questioned the necessity for every assignment. Enough to unglue any new teacher, especially when his mother vigorously defended him. Eventually she took him and her other four children out of state and just avoided the authorities. Last year this same boy (now 24) had a book published on cartoonist Max Fleischer. News of him and the rest of his offbeat, creative, busy family always cheers me and renews my faith in what I'm doing.

That's all I have for now. I'll be happy to hear from anyone in N.J. who contacts you.

Thanks for a fine letter. The digest of N.J. laws on education says on p. 9 that people must cause children between 6 and 16 to attend school "or to receive equivalent instruction elsewhere than at school." On page 2 it says, "The State Department of Education is not charged with approval of private

elementary schools nor private day kindergartens. Such schools which may include all, part, or some combination of grades from kindergarten through eight, do not need a license to operate.

At least, they don't need a state license. They may require some kind of local approval, and they will probably have to conform to various Fire, Health, and Safety codes, which in some states, at least, are so drawn as to make it virtually impossible to call a home a school.

As for that third-grader, about the only thing that a really bright child *can* do in most classrooms, to keep-from being driven crazy with boredom, is to raise Cain one way or another.

And it may not be long before some group of professionals, trying to create still another monopoly for themselves, will be able to lobby through the N.J. legislature some sort of law requiring elementary schools to have a license from the state—all this in the name of “raising standards.” Perhaps not. Anyway, let's make use of all such opportunities we can find.

A Baby

A mother writes about her 19 month old baby:

The lumpkin is booming. *Understands* English—even tries to hang up his coat if you ask him to. If anyone (or two, I mean) are kissing he stands there smacking his lips till he gets kissed too. Learned how to pull his chair up to the counter to get 6 doz. cookies at once. Sets up a course in the bedroom, over and under things, and goes over and over it. Loves to dance—last night with bouzouki music on the radio he put his arms up in the air and danced with such seeming accuracy a Greek sort of dance that I decided he must have been a Greek mountain man with an affinity for dancing in the past.

(A month or so later)

He is really into talking, but not making much sense to us yet. He sounds so sure of himself, has so much variety and inflection, that I think he's pretty sure of what he's saying. He does have several real words which he uses quite clearly, got "snow" and "truck" (Ed. note: Important words for this mountain family.) the other day. I am sort of keeping track of them in the order they come in, and may eventually teach him to read those words in that order, seeing as how they must be awfully important for him. Still no word for me, or for B (his father) either for that matter. Probably because we're ever present.

Capable Children

A friend, S, writes:

I am making lists with the kids. We each have a list of what we do during the day and cross off as we do them. In the grocery store we each have a list of the stuff we need to get, each person having certain things to get. I got my typewriter fixed and the kids take turns typing on it. If they both want to do it, we use a timer so each person can do it a certain number of minutes. M is making the sauce for lasagna and F is waiting for the water to boil to put in the noodles. (Ed. note: M is 6, F is 4.)

M has learned his letters since he was 1 or 2 but hasn't learned words because, I can see now, I was trying to sound them out. We found a box of cardboard letters at the thrift shop. He spelled out a sentence in a book that he got from the library, and we picked out the letters from the pile and made the words on the rug. That was fun.

When M was less than 2, one of his favorite snack foods was peas. F was going to sleep in my arms and I didn't want to get up and make him any, so he got a pan out, put water in it, got a chair and got a package of peas out of the freezer, opened it, (Ed. note: I would have thought that would be the hardest part.) put them in the pan, and turned the fire on. From the time they were about 1 1/2 or 2 they have used knives (which had not been sharpened for a while) to cut vegetables and stood on chairs by the stove to cook them. They know how to cook French fries themselves. A couple of weeks ago they climbed up the ladder and helped D (their father) paint our mobile home roof white. (I'm too scared to climb up the ladder!) The thing is, any child could do the same if their parents let them ... their children might get hurt ... but I don't think the risk is much greater, if at all, than the risk we'll get hurt doing the same things. Kids don't want to get hurt any more than we do. They welcome suggestions that will prevent them from getting hurt (such as putting French fries in with a slotted spoon instead of dropping them in with their fingers).

I suspect children get hurt most often when doing things they are not supposed to do, in a spirit of defiance and excitement, rather than when doing

something sensible and natural that they do often and like to do right.

The head of a big adventure playground in London once told me that when parents could come right into the playground, the children often hurt themselves, doing things to impress, scare, or defy their parents, but that once the parents were told that they had to wait for the children outside the playground (in a spot with chairs, benches, etc.) the accidents stopped.

S continues:

I don't feel I teach them enough, they seem to be turned off by my trying to teach them, but they seem to be learning some words and are becoming interested in words or asking me about them by reading labels on food, names on letters, signs, and stuff like that. They are very interested, especially M, in numbers from looking at the calendar, playing SORRY (a board game), counting stuff, and most importantly, using money.

An interesting thing here: games that would seem to us to be innately competitive, they don't play that way. When we play Slap-Jack, whoever's pile is getting low gets to Slap the Jack so he can get more cards. Or when we play SORRY, they make sure it's OK with the other person if they're going to send him back to Start, or we decide who has the most men out of his Start so his can get sent back. And when someone gets a man home we all clap and yell, "Yay! Yay!"

I've read this part many times, and every time I am touched by the thought of this game of SORRY, with everyone cheering when anyone's man gets home. It won't take much of school to knock that spirit out of those children.

George Dennison wrote eloquently about this in *The Lives Of Children*. Even the toughest New York street kids, thrown out of public schools for their violence, understood that, as much as they loved and needed to win, what was most important of all was to have a good game and keep the game going. It's only when they come under the control of nutty adults that children learn to think, in the words of Vince Lombardi, that "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing."

Abe's Baby

Manas is a weekly magazine, very much worth reading, hard to describe in a few words, other than to say that in plain, strong, non-academic English it talks about old-fashioned important ideas like Truth, Meaning, Purpose. (\$10/yr. Box 32112, El Sereno Station, Los Angeles, CA 90032).

The Jan. 4, 1978 issue had a quote from The Farther Reaches of Human Nature, by the famous (now dead) psychologist A. H. Maslow.

Our first baby changed me as a psychologist. It made the behaviorism I had been so enthusiastic about look so foolish that I could not stomach it any more. It was impossible. Having a second baby, and learning how profoundly different people are even before birth, made it impossible for me to think in terms of the kind of learning psychology in which one can teach anybody anything. Or the John B. Watson theory of "Give me two babies and I will make one into this and one into the other." It is as if he never had any children. We know only too well that a parent cannot make his children into anything. Children make themselves into something.

He's right. Spending some time around a baby is about the best cure for behaviorism I know.

M And The Stove

I asked S how M learned to cook so young. She replied:

The stove. What could have become my first battle with M. He learned to turn the burners on. I said no, dangerous. Effect, naturally: *fun, interesting*, do it all the time. So I slapped his hand, slightly, grabbed him up, me in tears, was he, I don't even remember, holding him on the couch, what to do, what to do. Slowly it dawned on me. There wasn't a damned thing dangerous about him turning them on. I was always with him, could keep the stove cleared, his hand was way below the flames. What was I afraid of? *If people knew*, of course. So I let him turn them on, watched, kept my mouth shut. He turned them all on, went over to the table, stood on a chair, and watched them, turned them all off, back on the chair and looked at them (he was so far below the flame he couldn't see them by the stove, his hand just reached the knobs). How old? Less than 16 mos. Did this for a while, then a couple of times the next day, and *that was all*, he never "played" with them—again except to turn one on when he saw me getting a pan out to cook something in. Or after F was born to turn them on for himself, when he wanted to cook something. No, one other time when he was much older and his friend was over he thought it was funny to turn them on and see how afraid his friend became.

Why did he not respond to my "no! dangerous!" Because there was no real fear in my voice. Children *will* respond to you when you say something's dangerous if you really are afraid they are going to get hurt *at that minute*. I read somewhere that you have to teach children to do what you say because if you don't they could be out in the street and a car coming and they wouldn't get out of the road when you yelled at them to. That's not the point at all. They're responding mostly to the fear in your voice in that situation, not to the fact that you're telling them to do something.

People are always worrying too much about the future, extrapolating out of the present, with children. They think, if I let them turn the burners on now, they'll always want to turn them on.

I would add three comments to this (to me) sensible (but probably

controversial) letter. First, the main reason M no longer needs or wants to play with the stove is that *he can cook on it*. It isn't a toy any more, but a serious tool, that he and the grownups use every day. Before they can drive, little kids love to sit at the wheel of a parked car turning the wheel this way and that. But who ever saw a kid doing that, *who could actually drive*? It would be baby stuff. And it would be baby stuff for M to play with the stove on which he (and his younger sister) regularly cook food that the whole family eats.

Secondly, the reason that M responds quickly to strong fear or other negative emotion in his mother's voice is that he doesn't often hear this kind of emotion. Children who constantly hear in the voices of adults the tones of fear, disgust, anger, threat, soon take that tone of voice to be normal, routine, and turn it off altogether. They think, "Oh, that's just the way they always talk." Then, when we really want them to pay attention to that car (or maybe dope peddler) coming down the street, they no longer hear us at all.

Finally, the panicky feeling that if I let children do some little thing now, even something that isn't bad, they will do some terrible thing later, is what makes so many schools and teachers (and parents) so obsessive and panicky about "discipline"—and is the reason they have so many discipline problems. As Evan-G (see *GWS #1*) points out time and again, most of the children who get "corporal punishment" in school, i.e., are brutally beaten, often with heavy paddles, are far too small to present any physical threat to teachers or school, and are beaten for trivial offenses that more often than not have nothing to do with discipline i.e., for being late, being sick, getting homework in late, doing badly on a test, forgetting to bring money for something, or sneakers to gym class, and so on. By constantly asserting their coercive and punitive authority, the schools slowly destroy their moral authority, until for many kids the best reason of all for doing anything is that the school doesn't want them to do it.

A Girl Skating

This was the title of a short story, by Laurie Colwin, in The New Yorker. Ms. Colwin and The New Yorker have given permission to quote this excerpt:

I did not want to be taught to skate. I wanted that mastery all to myself. The things you teach yourself in childhood are precious, and you have endless patience for them. My parents knew that I skated, but they knew that I did not want to be encouraged or given fancy sweaters for Christmas. I did not want them to witness my achievement, or comment on it, or document it. I did not want praise for effort.

Choral Reading

Years ago, a psychologist friend of mine, Dr. Robert Kay (Ed note—I've lost touch with him, if anyone knows his address, or if he reads this, please write) told me about a very interesting way of teaching reading called Choral Reading. It was basically like the old "Sing Along With Mitch" TV show. The teacher would put on the board, in letters large enough for all the children to see, whatever they were going to read. Then she/he would move a pointer along under the words, and at the same time the children would read the words. The children who knew a word would read it; those who were not sure, would perhaps read softly; those who didn't know at all would learn from those who were reading. No one was pointed out or shamed, everyone did as much as he/she could, everyone got better.

For a few years, before the place became rich and stylish, my parents lived in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Now and then they used to visit a small elementary school not far from where they lived. The teacher taught reading through singing. The school was poor—now it is probably five times as rich, and has all the latest reading materials, and five times as many reading problems. The teacher wrote the words to a song on the board—perhaps a song that all the children knew, perhaps a new song that she taught them—and as she pointed at the words, the children sang them, and so doing, learned to read.

Any number of parents have told me this story: they read aloud to a small child, a favorite story over and over again. One day they find that as they read the child is reading with them, or can read without them. The child has learned to read simply by seeing words and hearing them at the same time. Though he probably couldn't answer questions about it, *he has learned a great deal about Phonics*. Nobody taught him to read, and he wasn't particularly trying to learn. He wasn't listening to the story *so that* he would be able to read later, but because it was a good story and he liked sitting on a comfortable grown-up lap and hearing it read to him.

Let's Read

This is the title of a book, by Leonard Bloomfield and Clarence Barnhart (Wayne State Univ. Press; Detroit, Mich., \$12.50), which could help many children *teach themselves* to read. This was not the authors' idea—they meant parents to use the book to teach their children to read. I think this is not useful or necessary and will in most cases be harmful. Learning to read is easy and most children will do it quicker and better and with more pleasure if they can do it themselves, untaught, untested, and helped only when and if they ask for help.

The first 59 pages are introductions and instructions. I urge that you ignore them. Much of them are a kind of running argument with the Look-Say people, who when the book was first published were in control of school reading and reading texts i.e. *Dick and Jane*. Bloomfield and Barnhart talk sensibly about what was wrong with Look-Say and even say a few sensible things about what ought to be done instead. Thus, they do understand that since we *talk* in syllables, not single letter sounds, i.e. say “cat” and not “cuh-a-tuh” we should learn to read that way. But like most teachers they believed that children learn only what they are taught, and also, that they learn best when they are taught one little thing at a time, getting each one down cold before going on to the next. They also have the child looking at picture stories to make sure he can read from left to right. Not necessary at all. In fact, much better *not* to talk about left and right in connection with reading—just show children with a finger which way it goes.

The authors also say that the child should learn all the letters of the alphabet, capitals and lower case, *before* starting to read. Again, not necessary at all. There is no connection between knowing the names of the letters in a language and being able to read i.e. turn written words into spoken words, in that language. I can read (in that sense) in three languages in which I do not know any letter names at all. Knowing the names and order of letters is useful, but a separate task, which children can and will pick up easily as they go along. But we ought not to let this task clutter up the exciting adventure of figuring out what written words *say*.

On page 60 begins the good and useful part of the book. At the top of the page are all the one-syllable English words that end in *-an*: can Dan fan man

Nan pan ran tan an ban van. Then come a number of short sentences using these words. On page 61 the *-at* words: bat cat fat hat mat Nat pat rat sat at tat vat, with sentences using both *-an* and *-at* words. Next page has *-ad* words, and the next pages, in order, words ending in *-ap*, *-ag*, *-am*, *-ab*, *-al*, then *-ig*, *-in*, *-id*, and so on. We could of course figure out those words for ourselves, but it is handy to have them all printed out, in big print. Each page has sentences using the new words of that page, plus all the words that went before. They don't make very interesting stories, but as the authors rightly point out, at this stage children find it exciting enough just to figure out what the words say. Later, when they have more words to work with, the stories get a little better. But by the time a child works her/his way to page 100 (or even much sooner) she/he will know enough about how the reading game works to start puzzling out real books, magazines, signs, cereal boxes, etc.

I see it as a book for a child to browse through. When my niece was about four, I gave the book to my sister, thinking she might use it to teach her. As I have written elsewhere, neither she, nor later, her younger brother, would stand for being taught – they just refused to go along. But the book was left in sight where the little girl could get at it, and she was encouraged to think of it as hers. Pages 60-65 are covered with little brown marks which I take to be her fingerprints. She must have spent quite a few months looking at those pages, thinking about them, before she figured out the system and went on to look at other books. I wasn't there when she was teaching herself to read, and as she did most of the work in private, often with her door shut, asking very few questions of anyone, no one knows exactly what she did.

I would guess that many little children would like to browse in *Let's Read* in much the same way. It is big, grown-up, official looking, obviously not a "children's" book. There are only four pages of line drawings in it; all else is print. But much of the print is large enough to be easy for little children to see, and of words small enough to be easy for them to figure out. If I had a young child, I would give her/him this book (along with others), and let her/him decide how she/he wanted to use it—if at all. If the child asked me to read it aloud, I would, perhaps moving my finger under the words as I read them. Though on second thought I suspect that some children would take this to be teaching and make me stop doing it. If the child asked questions about this word or that, I would answer. Otherwise, I would leave child and book alone. Some, or many, like my nephew, will not choose to use it at all. But

those who do may find it a helpful tool. If you get it and use it, tell us what happens.

Gnomes

This book (text by Wil Huygen, illustrations by Rien Poortvliet, U.S. publisher Harry N. Abrams, Inc., NYC) is one of the most unusual, interesting, beautiful and wholly delightful books I have ever seen, for children, or for anyone of any age with a love of nature and a taste for fantasy. Anyone who likes the Tolkien books will surely love it.

It purports to be a scientific study of Gnomes, their geographical range, habitat, physiology (there is a lovely illustration of a gnome skeleton), customs, diseases—everything that anthropologists might write about any strange culture. As such, it makes a little bit of fun of science and scientific studies, but such gentle and good-natured fun that I can't imagine that any scientist would mind.

Having once decided to write their book as a scientific report, the authors (as in all good fantasy) play it straight; they do not burlesque scientific reports, nor invite the reader to join them in making fun of what they have written. Their tone is absolutely serious, and they ask the reader to suspend disbelief and take their report seriously. In other words, they write as if (they might well ask me, “Why do you say ‘*as if*’?”) gnomes really existed. They are, to be sure, less “objective” than most social scientists claim to be. They like and admire gnomes and clearly hope that the reader will too.

What makes the book, and not just for children, are the illustrations. The jacket says that Poortvliet is Holland's most popular illustrator, and one can well believe it. On every one of the 200+ pages of the book are the most beautiful water color illustrations. They convey very strongly the authors' love of nature and of animals, but they are not Disney-ish, preachy, or sentimental. The animals are animals, not people disguised as animals, not looked down on as “Man's dumb friends,” but wild, strange, dignified creatures. The gnomes live among them as the first among equals, helping them out of traps, curing and healing their diseases and injuries, and receiving different kinds of help from them in return. The Gnomes, in short, are the kind of stewards of the Earth that we have not yet learned to be.

I have given the book to a few friends of various ages, and all love it. It costs \$15, and considering the number and beauty of the illustrations, is an incredible bargain. I have already read it through about four times myself,

and expect to read it many times more. I can't imagine a book that I would more enjoy reading to or exploring with children. Do try it.

Subscriptions

GWS will come out when we have enough material to put it out, probably not less than four or more than six times a year. A single subscription is \$10 for six issues; a 2X sub, \$12; a 3X sub, \$14, and so on up. If you don't say otherwise, all subs begin with Issue No. 1.

Please remember that when two or more people take out a joint subscription, all copies of each issue will be sent to one of them, who must then mail or deliver the other copies to the other subscribers. Sending all copies to one address is what makes it possible for us to sell joint subscriptions for less.

You may buy extra copies of Issue #1 for 50¢ each, or 25¢ each for orders of 10 or more. Extra copies of all later issues will be \$2 each, two for \$3, \$1 each for orders of five or more. Please send checks (U.S.\$) made out to *Growing Without Schooling*. If sending a Canadian money order, please explain when buying it that it is to be cashed in the U.S.

People have asked whether, by sending in an additional \$2, they may convert a single subscription to a 2X, or a 2X to a 3X, etc. After some thought, we have decided that the *minimum* bump must be 3X, or \$6. Thus, by sending \$6, you may increase a single sub to a 4X, or a 2X to a 5X, etc. The reason we won't accept bumps of less than 3X is that it takes about as much time and work to change the number of a subscription as it does to enter a new subscription, and we can't afford to do that much work for only \$2.

Cousteau Society

The Society (Box 2002, NYC 10017) has for years been exploring the oceans and ocean bottoms and learning about the creatures who live there. More recently, it has begun to struggle to save this ocean life from growing pollution. The Society publishes an interesting magazine about its work, and also a calendar and posters which have some of the most beautiful color photos and printing I have ever seen. Children will like these. They like to know, and need to know, too, that the earth is still full of many strange, wonderful, and beautiful things, and also people doing exciting, demanding, difficult, and interesting work. The people on the CALYPSO, the Society's research ship, are all sailors, explorers, divers, and scientists—a fine mixture, and proof that there is still work worth doing.

The Flyer

With this issue of *GWS* we enclose a flyer, which we have made up for mass distribution, or for posting. One way to help *GWS* find more readers might be to get some of these flyers from us, and send them to friends, hand them out at meetings (if you think that useful and appropriate), put them on literature tables or on bulletin boards, or wherever you think people might see them. Most towns where there are many students or young people are likely to have many such b-boards, particularly where young people buy stuff or hang out, such as natural and organic food stores, bookstores, record stores, craft centers, etc.

If you should decide to use some of these flyers, may we suggest that you get some pressure adhesive labels from a stationery or office supply store, put *Growing Without Schooling* and *your* own address on them, and stick the labels over the *GWS* return address on the flyer. Then people who want a sample issue of *GWS*, or who want to subscribe, will tell *you*. (You can get extra copies of *GWS* #1 from us—see above.)

This will have at least two advantages. You will know right away what other people in your community are interested in unschooling, and if people do want to subscribe, you can get them together in a joint subscription, and so save them some money.

Of course, it may not be a good idea to put your name on these flyers, or even to hand them out at all in your home town, if you have unschooled your children without the OK of the local schools.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Growing Without Schooling 4

May 1978

As we go to press, we have close to 500 subscriptions. In recent weeks many of these, and a great many more inquiries and orders for single copies, have come in because of articles or other material about *GWS* in *Radcliffe Quarterly*, *Mothering*, and above all, the Canadian magazine *Natural Life*, which has brought us many new subscribers from Canada.

As in the U.S., it seems to be easy to unschool one's children in some parts of Canada, hard in others. People are doing it in some of the Maritime or Plains provinces, also in Quebec. Others, in Ontario, have run into the usual troubles—police, arrests, etc. We plan to write about all this in more detail. Please send any news you have.

Radcliffe Statement

The Radcliffe Quarterly invited me to write a short piece for their March 1978 issue. I wrote about GWS, saying, in part:

The idea of “education” seems to me to have embedded in it a number of ideas, all of them newfangled, mistaken, and harmful. These include:

- 1) Learning is an activity separate from the rest of life, done best when one is not doing anything else, and best of all in places where nothing else is done.
- 2) Important learning is, must be, and can only be the result and product of teaching. What we learn for ourselves, from the experience of our daily lives, can only be trivial or untrue.
- 3) Teaching is best done, and most often can only be done, by specialists who do no other work.
- 4) Children cannot be trusted to learn about the world around them. They must be made to learn, told what to learn, and shown how.
- 5) Education is a people-improving process; the more of it we have had done to us, the better we are.
- 6) People are raw material, bad in their original state, but almost infinitely processable and improvable.
- 7) People have no right to refuse any processing or treatment that their betters believe will improve them.

Aside from being deeply rooted in the harmful ideas about education just listed, (schools) treat their students with what Charles Silberman, no sentimental child-worshipper, once called “appalling incivility.” Beyond that, they are appallingly *incompetent* at their work, even as they define it, having always found it easier to blame all their failures on their students. Because the schools adamantly refuse to take the responsibility for the results of their teaching, they cannot even begin

to learn how to do it. How much simpler to call students “learning disabled” than to figure out why they are having trouble learning what the teacher is trying to teach. Worse than that, the informal, haphazard, and fumbling incompetence of the schools in their earlier years, which at least left some room for the work of a few serious, responsible, and competent teachers, is now being organized into a system, a pseudo-science, which leaves no room at all. To be a truly responsible and competent teacher at any level of the system, up to and including graduate school, carries the grave risk of not getting tenure or being fired. In the country of the incompetent, the competent are not kings but pariahs.

Batting Practice

The eight year old I talk about in “Rub-On Letters” lives in a little house on a small side street, really more an alley. Cars seldom come through, so kids can play there safely. In one part of the street there are high board fences on both sides, which makes it a good place for small ball games. My friend and her friends often play their own version of baseball here. For a bat they use a thin stick about three feet long. The ball is a playground ball about six inches in diameter. The rules fit the space perfectly; with that stick, no one can hit that ball over those fences.

The day I arrived, after dinner, she asked me if I would pitch some batting practice. I said Sure, and we had about forty-five minutes worth in the alley. Next morning after breakfast she asked again, and we had about an hour more. Some of the time she very kindly pitched to me—I was amazed to find how hard it was to move that squishy ball with that skinny stick.

The point of the story is that in all this I did something of which I am quite proud, that I don’t think I could or would have done even five years ago. In our almost two hours of play I did not offer *one word* of coaching or advice. The words were more than once on the tip of my tongue, once when she tried batting one-handed (she did better than I thought), once when she tried batting cross-handed (she gave it up on her own), now and then when she seemed to be getting careless, not watching the ball, etc. But I always choked the words back, saying to myself, “She didn’t ask you for coaching or advice, she asked you to pitch batting practice. So shut up and pitch.” Which I did.

Nor did I give any praise. Sometimes (quite often, as it happened) when she hit a real line drive, I let out a small exclamation of surprise or even alarm, if it came right at me. Otherwise, we did our work in silence, under the California sun. I remember it all with pleasure, and not least of all the silence. I hope I can be as quiet next time.

To The ACLU

I have recently written to Mr. Aryeh Neier, director of the American Civil Liberties Union, more or less as follows:

Dear Mr. Neier—Thanks very much for your kind invitation to take part in your National Convocation on Free Speech on June 13.

I think that compulsory school attendance laws, in and of themselves, constitute a very serious infringement of the civil liberties of children and their parents. This would be true, I feel, no matter what schools were like, how they were organized, or how they treated children, in short, even if they were far more humane and effective than they actually are.

Beyond that, there are a number of practices, by now very common in schools all over the country, which in and of themselves seriously violate the civil liberties of children, including:

1) Keeping permanent records of children's school performance. I would consider this inexcusable even if there were nothing in the records but academic grades. It is nobody's proper business that some child got a C in Social Studies when she or he was eight years old.

2) Keeping school records secret from children and/or their parents, a practice that continues even where the law expressly forbids it.

3) Making these records available, without the permission of the children or their parents, to employers, the police, the military, or to other branches of the government.

4) Filling these records, as experience has shown they are filled, with many kinds of malicious and derogatory information and misinformation. These may include, not just unconfirmed teachers' "reports" of children's misbehavior, but also all kinds of pseudo-psychological opinions, judgments, and diagnoses about the children and even their families. For examples, see *The Myth of the Hyperactive Child*, by Schrag and Divoky (Pantheon).

5) Compulsory psychological testing of children, and including the results of these tests in children's records.

6) Labeling children as having such imaginary diseases as "minimal brain dysfunction," "hyperactivity," "specific learning disabilities," etc.

7) Compulsory dosing of children with very powerful and dangerous psycho-active drugs, such as Ritalin.

8) Using “corporal punishment” in school, which in practice usually means the brutal beating of young children for very minor or imagined offenses.

9) Lowering students’ academic grades, or even giving failing grades, solely for disciplinary and/or attendance reasons. Not only is this practice widespread, but school administrators openly boast of it, though in fact what it amounts to is the deliberate falsification of an official record.

10) In all of these matters, and indeed in any conflict between the child and the school, denying anything that could fairly be called “due process.”

As long as such outrages go on, I can’t get very excited about such issues as the controlling of violence and sex on TV, the restricting of advertising material on TV programs, the rating of motion pictures, the censorship of student publications, or the banning of textbooks and library books on various grounds. People who argue strongly about such things, while accepting without protest the practices I here complain about, seem to me to be straining at gnats while swallowing camels.

To return once more to the matter of compulsory school attendance in its barest form, I think you will agree that if the government told you that on 180 days of the year, for six or more hours a day, you had to be at a particular place, and there do whatever people told you to do, you would feel that this was a gross violation of your civil liberties. The State justifies doing this to children as a matter of public policy, saying that this is the only way to get them educated. Even if it were true that children were learning important things in schools, and even if it were true that they could not learn them anywhere else (neither of which I believe), I would still insist that since in other (and often more difficult) cases the ACLU does not allow the needs of public policy as an excuse for violating the basic liberties of citizens, it ought not to in this case.

Testing The Schools

Peter Perchemlides, B-2 No. Village Apts., Amherst MA 01002 is fighting in court against the local schools for the right to teach his child at home. Not long ago I wrote him, in part:

“Since the schools are demanding the right to judge your program, I think you have the right, as a citizen, taxpayer, and the parent of the child whose education they wish to control, to judge theirs. More specifically, I would like to suggest that under the Massachusetts Freedom of Information Act you demand, and if necessary go to court to get, answers to a number of questions about your local school system, including the following:

1) At the various grade levels, how many hours of school time are allotted each week to *uninterrupted* reading—that is, uninterrupted by questions, corrections, or demands from teachers? In short, how much of just plain reading are students allowed to do at school?

2) At the various grade levels, how much time each week are the students allowed in the school library? What restrictions are there on the use of the library itself, or on the borrowing of library books?

3) In addition to those in the school library, are there books (other than textbooks or workbooks) in the classroom? How many, and how chosen?

4) At the various grade levels, how many children are reading below grade level (both national and state)?

5) At the various grades, how many children are reading at least two years ahead of grade level? Since grade-level simply represents the national or state median, a serious parent would hardly consider it an acceptable standard for any child much more than eight years old.

6) Of the children reading below grade level two years ago, how many (among those still in the local schools) are now reading at grade level or better? In other words, how effective are the schools at *improving* the reading of students who are having trouble?

7) At each grade level, how many children have been designated as having “learning disabilities?”

8) Of the children so designated two years ago, how many are now judged to be cured or freed of them? In other words, how successful are the schools in dealing with and overcoming these problems?

9) Same questions for “emotionally disturbed.’

10) Same questions for “hyperactive’ or “hyperkinetic.’

11) On the basis of what tests, of what duration, and administered, scored, and judged by whom, are these judgments about “learning disabilities,’ etc. made?

12) To what degree are school records, including these judgments, and results of other school-given psychological tests, available to the scrutiny of parents?

13) To what degree is it possible for parents who disagree with any such judgments to challenge them or seek independent confirmation of them, so as to be able to clear their children’s records of possible incorrect and/or derogatory information?

14) At various grade levels, what percentage of children are being medicated with psychoactive or behavior modifying drugs, such as Ritalin? What medical examinations do the schools give, and how often, and by what doctors, to check for possible harmful side effects of such drugs?

15) What is the policy of the schools about altering students’ grades for reasons of discipline or attendance? What percentage of students in the system have had their grades so lowered?

16) Where grades have been so lowered for such reasons, what provisions have been made for students and their parents to restore the correct academic grade to the student’s record?

You might consider some kind of community-wide publicity about this case. I imagine some kind of public statement, perhaps a letter to the editor of a local paper, perhaps an ad, saying more or less, “There is much talk these days about the family being the most important influence on a child’s life. We agree with this, and therefore want to undertake the primary responsibility for the education of our child. The superintendent of schools of this district, Mr. ... is trying to prosecute us as criminals because we want to do this, and is threatening to put us in jail and to deprive us of the custody of our child. To this end he seems willing to spend quite a bit of the taxpayers’ money, which might better be spent in improving the quality of the local schools. And so on. You might ask those citizens who feel you should have the right to teach your own child to make this view known not only to you but to the Superintendent and the local School Board.”

These seem to me questions which people, whether unschoolers or not, might do well to ask in almost any school district. The schools' answers, or their refusal to answer, might in some instances make up a valuable part of a court case against the schools. Not all states will have Freedom of Information laws; you will have to check to find out. In states which do not, you might say something like this: since the courts have said, in two different jurisdictions, that people may not collect damages from schools because their children did not learn anything there, they have in effect established the rule of *caveat emptor*—let the buyer beware. This being so, the courts can hardly deny the buyer the right to ask questions about the product—schooling for his children—which in this case he is being compelled by law to buy. In some cases, at least, this argument may be enough to persuade a reluctant school system to answer your questions, or if not, to persuade a judge to tell them that they must.

From Florida

A mother writes:

I got the information back I sent for from the (Florida) Dept of Ed. on the rules for setting up a private school. There are hardly any! Here is stuff from page 1:

References to non-public (private) schools are noticeably absent in the Florida Statutes and in the Fla. Administrative Code. The only direct or inferred references to these schools which are made are limited to registering annually with the Dept. of Ed., compulsory attendance, sanitation, voluntary participation in certain programs, incorporation, and distribution of student records. Aside from general business considerations the majority of their operations are not regulated in any manner.

Under the current statutes and regulations there are no laws governing at least those educational aspects of non-public schools listed below:

- (a) length of school day
- (b) length of school year
- (c) certification, educational attainment, or specialized training of teachers or administrators
- (d) content and comprehensiveness of the curriculum
- (e) graduation requirements
- (f) content, retention, transfer, and release of student records . . .

The mother goes on:

But anyway, it's unbelievable. All you do is fill out what looks to be a one-page form every year. I just can't believe it's so easy. (Ed. note: According to another mother who has been doing it for some years now, it is just as easy as it looks.) I wonder if other states are like that. (Ed. note: N.J. seems to be, and I have been told that starting your own school is very easy in

Cal., Texas, and Oregon, though I have not yet seen the regulations for these states.) Maybe I should write and find out.

Beating The System

In the Jan.–Feb. '78 issue of the British magazine Resurgence John West has an article, "How I Beat The System," which I think holds some useful lessons for unschoolers. In 1954 he was completing his basic Army training, in Virginia, hiding from the Army his desire to become a writer, and wishing he could get sent to Europe. An Army-wise friend tells him how. He writes, in part:

The military hierarchy is modeled upon Kafka's *Great Wall of China*. Yet, within this fabulous complexity, the destinations, and therefore destinies, of one and all at Ft. Belvoir are in the hands of one top sergeant; one old, bored, hung-over top sergeant buried in Administration HQ....The trick is to go to see him three weeks prior to the end of training. But there is no legitimate way to work this. No one cares that I want to go to Europe . . . I wait for the appointed time, go AWOL for the afternoon, and head for the labyrinth where administration is being administered—the familiar knot of anxiety in the pit of my gut. It's not being AWOL that terrifies me. It's the prospect of having to bluff my way through the hierarchy to get to Sgt. Ffuffuff. I've been advised to think up a good excuse. I can think of none. Then, at the last minute, my Muse responds. To the dreaming Pfc. at Reception I say, "I've been sent to see Sgt. Ffuffuff."

And I've hit upon the magic word, the military "open Sesame!" I've been "sent", therefore am following an order, therefore I must get to see Sgt. F. . . . Even Captains and Colonels will drop what they're doing to point the way. I could get to see the President this way! I've been "sent!"

A variation of the same gambit works on Sgt F. "Sgt. F," I announce, "I have permission to see you." Permission! It's the other magic word. Someone in charge, an Officer, has set his imprimatur upon my quest. It's not Sgt. F's to reason why. I don't even need a phony excuse. I just tell him I want to get to Europe, and mumble vaguely about carrying on with my studies when my service is up.

He rubs the sleep out of his eyes, rearranges empty coffee cups and

overflowing ashtrays, extracts the document ... Next to my name, on the otherwise virgin paper, he pencils in, "Europe if possible." And that is all there is to it.

Only four soldiers were sent to Europe. West was one of them. The moral is plain. It pays to know how big systems work.

From L

L writes about his son, saying, in part:

My wife and I did not begin with the notion that our son would not go to school. We named him Neil, after A.S., true, but assumed he would find an alternative school at age five. What we did begin with was a conviction that we would help him in any way possible to realize his potential. Since this meant that we were *available* (Ed. italics)—without ever being intrusive—he quickly began to *use* us regularly, hourly, for learning, and we found that by the time he was two we literally couldn't stop him from spending his day in learning. He read very well by two, and by three and four moved into continuous lessons in nature, history, science, and so on. Here is an example: at three, in Central Park, he was looking at the pretty trees, and I mentioned that they could be distinguished from each other by type, this was an oak and that a beech, and others were like them. "Let's make a map of all the trees in Central Park!" he said, having seen a map before. Well, normally this would have been shunted off, but since I really had been practicing what I preached we did indeed spend every day for the rest of that summer and several days a month in following summers making maps of all the trees in Central Park (almost all of it). I didn't know much about trees, but we got a book to identify them, and one could find us every afternoon in the Park, me trudging behind my son while he shouts, "One more hill, daddy, it's another Schwedler Norway Maple."

By the time he was 5, he was so used to getting up in the morning with the ecstatic prospect of learning all day long that I hated to disabuse him of the notion that learning was natural by sending him to school. Still I took him to a few and asked him to make his own decision and of course he said he thought it would be like going to jail which he also thought he preferred not to try. Since he was never registered anywhere, no one knew of his existence so I didn't have to test the New York State Law which says only if home learning was "equivalent" to schooling could he legally be kept at home. (Legal research showed constant harassment of N.Y. parents who tried to prove equivalence, like saying home tutors could only be those who had N.Y. State teachers' licenses—I found anyone with a teacher's license to be useless as a tutor to a self-regulated child, so to this day the state still doesn't

know he exists.)

During his early years my wife and I and a couple of friends taught him all he wanted to know, and if we didn't know it, which usually was the case, it was even better for we all learned together. Example: at 7 he saw the periodic table of elements, wanted to learn atoms and chemistry and physics. I had forgotten how to balance an equation, but went out and bought a college textbook on the subject, a history of discovery of the elements, and some model atoms, and in the next month we went off into a tangent of learning in which somehow we both learned college-level science. He has never returned to the subject, but to this day *retains every bit of it because it came at a moment in development and fantasy that was meaningful to him.*

I have underlined those words because they seem to me to answer, I would hope for all time, the question I have so often been asked by defenders of compulsory learning and compulsory schooling: "How can a child know what he needs to learn?" I have always said, but never with an example as eloquent and persuasive as this, that though the child may not know what he may need to know in ten years, he knows, and much better than anyone else, *what he wants and needs to know next*, in short, what his mind is ready and hungry for. If we help him, or just allow him, to learn that, he will remember it, use it, build on it. If we try to make him learn something else, that we think is more important, the odds are good that he won't learn it, or will learn very little of it, that he will soon forget most of what he learned, and what is worst of all, will soon lose most of his appetite for learning anything.

Some might say that in helping him make that map of the trees in Central Park, L was acting as a teacher to his son. I would say that he was not so much a teacher as an energetic, enthusiastic, resourceful friend and partner. This is what children really like best. Popular children are the ones who are always thinking up interesting and exciting things to do—and they are even more popular if, when someone *else* suggests a good project, they willingly throw themselves into that. A child will say of another child, "Aw, he's no fun, he never wants *do* anything." L is clearly not like that.

Some might read into L's letter the idea that learning means learning something out of a book, or having other people teach you things. I'm not sure whether L thinks that or not. I know I *don't* think it. Most of what I

know I was not *taught*, in school or anywhere else, and most of *that* I did not learn from books—though I love books, read a great many of them, and get a lot from them. I learn a great deal, and more every day, by seeing, hearing, and *doing* things, and thinking about what I see, hear, and do.

To A Dean

A good friend of mine is the Dean of the Dept. of Education of a major university—I hope soon to be able to say which one. He wrote me, not long ago, saying that he thought that home study should be one of the legal choices offered to parents. I wrote back, saying, in part:

I'm glad you feel as you do about home study. May I pursue the matter just a little bit further. You say that your main concern is "to make certain that the child ... is given the best chances for learning and developing." I have to say first of all that nobody "makes certain" that this is true of children going to schools. On the contrary, no amount of demonstrated brutality or incompetence on the part of the schools will enable children to get out of them. But beyond that, I wonder whether there really is any way to "make certain." If we say to people, in effect, "You can teach your children at home, as long as you can give some sort of absolute guarantee that this will be best for the child," the result will be that nobody will be able to do it. I think we have to say that people ought to be judged capable of teaching their own children unless someone can show, beyond reasonable doubt, that they are not capable. The burden of proof ought to be on the state to show that people cannot teach their own children, rather than the other way round.

Later you speak of "certain sensible and sensitive gate-keepers" to see that things work out OK. Here the problem gets very difficult. Plenty of judges and legislators would probably agree that many parents are indeed capable of teaching their own children, and even of doing this better than the schools. But they would surely insist that some are not capable. Who is to decide which is which? The trouble with giving this power to the schools is that it is a little like telling me that I can own any car I want, or even do without a car, as long as I have the approval of the local General Motors Dealer. The schools are by now a 120+ billion dollar a year business, based almost entirely on forced consumption, and they are not likely to make decisions which will let some of their unwilling customers escape.

In GWS #2 I describe a case in point. A mother in Iowa, certified to teach in that state, and with a great deal of teaching experience, was denied permission to teach her child at home by the local school superintendent (by all reports, a long way from anything you or I would consider a sensitive

gate-keeper), a decision later upheld by both local and state school boards. In all this, no one challenged or questioned her competence as a teacher or asserted that her child would get an inferior education. She had in fact been teaching the child at home, and the child was by the school's own admission a superior student. All the local superintendent could say in defense of his decision was that if he allowed this woman to teach her child at home it would set a precedent.

It is a serious problem. If we say to people, "You can teach your own kids at home if the local schools approve," we are effectively saying to the vast majority that, no matter what their qualifications or their plans, they cannot do it at all. But if we do not give school boards this power to decide who may teach and who may not, to whom will we give it? How will we judge?

I think of a boy I know, now twelve, who never went to school until he was eleven. When he first went, largely so that he could meet other children in a new town, he was given school tests, and tested at *12th grade* in reading! But he didn't even start reading until he was about 8! Now, after not much more than a year of school, he has recently won a city-wide competition (in a large city) for elocution in Spanish, a language he never studied until the last year or so. Yet obviously, if people had given him standardized tests at age 7, they would have said on the basis of these that his home education was deficient and that he should be returned to school.

In other words, the question is not only *who* decides who can teach their children at home, but *on what basis*. If we say, for example, that children can study at home as long as they do as well on all school tests as students or good students—in school, we change very little. The whole point of many of the people who dislike school is that they want to get away from its rigid timetables and dividing of the world into little water-tight compartments. All my experience leads me to believe that, aside from any of the other bad things it does, the school's way of structuring and ordering knowledge is *in itself* a massive obstacle to growth and learning.

I hope we can find a way out of this dilemma which will be acceptable on the one hand to people like myself, and on the other hand to professional educators as humane and enlightened as I believe you are.

From A Teacher

A reader, who has been doing some substitute teaching in a private elementary school, writes:

I found myself in 3rd grade for four days. The two teachers team teach and so I had to team teach. Both are old-fashioned dedicated types who push math and reading workbooks. I almost went wild. I couldn't figure out the questions and answers (I refuse to use the teacher's answer book) and the kids were frustrated and in pain sitting still. By the second day I could see these kids never had time to think let alone read as a pleasure—just word-grabbing, mind-reading workbooks. In their room were paperbacks, *Charlotte's Web* and many more goodies not yet touched, because apparently the kids "can't read well enough yet." I went to the principal and said I couldn't continue unless the reading time while I was there became silent reading. She agreed to it but was not very happy about me, I could easily sense. I told the kids new rules, "If you don't know a word and are really bothered by it, signal and I'll come whisper in your ear. No sounding it out, no vowels, no syllables, no questions, just the word." Very few asked after the first few minutes. But they asked for silent reading twice a day.

Jim Herndon makes much the same kind of report in his book *How To Survive In Your Native Land*. When he and one or two other teachers stopped asking the children questions about their reading, stopped grading them, stopped tracking them, *and just let them read*, they all read better, even the ones who had been very poor readers. But even that school could not think of anything so sensible and simple as "a reading program," and refused to learn anything from it.

Children reading for their own pleasure rarely stop to ask about words. They want to get on with the story. If the word is important, they can usually make a good guess about what it is. "He drew an arrow from his quiver." Easy to see that a quiver is some sort of gadget to put arrows in. More complicated words they figure out by meeting them in many different contexts.

People learn to read well, and get big vocabularies, from *books*, not

workbooks and dictionaries. As a kid I read years ahead of my age, but I never looked up words in dictionaries, didn't even *have* a dictionary. In my lifetime I don't believe I have looked up even as many as fifty words—and neither have most good readers.

Motive

Whenever I hear school people say, “The students aren’t motivated, how do I motivate them?” I think of the story about the American anthropologist (I think it was Margaret Mead) and the Balinese.

This took place in the 1920s, when very few Westerners had ever been to Bali. The anthropologist was talking to some Balinese, trying to learn about this strange and very different culture. At some point she asked about their art. The Balinese were puzzled by this question. They did not know what she meant by art. So she talked for a while about art and artists in Western cultures. The Balinese considered this for a while. Then one of them spoke. “Here in Bali we have no art,” he said. “*We do everything as well as we can.*”

It is a sad story. In the cultures of the West, by now the world culture, there are so few people who do everything as well as they can that they seem very special (even peculiar), and we have to invent special names for them, special places for them to work, special uses for what they make.

The point of this story is that very little children are like the Balinese. Just about everything they do, they do as well as they can. Except when tired or hungry, or in the grip of passion, pain, or fear, they are moved to act—or “motivated,” as the schools say—almost entirely by curiosity, desire for mastery and competence, and pride in work well done. But the schools do not recognize or honor such motives, cannot even imagine that they exist. In their place they put Greed and Fear. (To which the Peer Group, in its time, adds Envy.)

So when school people talk about motivation and not being able to motivate the kids, they are really saying, “What’ll we do? They won’t jump for our carrots any more, and they no longer fear our sticks.” I don’t know what to do about their problem. All I say is that it was a problem that didn’t need to happen, and happened only because they made it happen.

But what about people who have taken their children out of school, children who have been numbed and crippled in spirit by years of “reinforcement,” petty rewards and penalties, gold stars, M-and-M’s, grades, Dean’s Lists. How can unschoolers revive in their children those earlier, deeper, richer sources of human action? I don’t know. I suspect the best thing to do is be patient and wait. After all, if we do not constantly re-injure our

bodies, in time they usually heal themselves – if we don't pick at our scabs they grow back into healthy skin. We have to act on the principle or faith that the same is true of the human spirit. In short, if we give children (or adults, for that matter) enough time, free or as free as possible from destructive outside pressures, the chances are good that they will once again find within themselves their reasons for doing things.

On Saying “No”

Not long ago I visited a friend who had a beautiful, lively, affectionate year-old Husky pup. The dog, with no identifying tags, had just dropped in one day, and my friend had not been able to find his owner. But the pup was happy in his new home, and showed no desire to leave. He had only one fault. He loved to be petted, and if you had been petting him, and stopped, or if he had just come up to you, he would put his paw up on your leg, let it fall, put it up again, and so over and over until you did *something*. This dirtied clothes, scratched skin, and hurt. His new boss had tried now and then to break him of this habit, by scolding him, pushing him away, or whatever, but it hadn't done much good. He was too busy with his work to spend much time on it, and hadn't really made up his mind (or understood) that the dog was his for keeps. One day I thought that as long as I was visiting, had some time, and was fond of the pup, I would take a shot at breaking him of this habit.

So, every time he came up to me I would pat him for a while and then stop and wait, my hand poised to block his paw when it came up. When he raised it, I would catch it, a few inches off the floor, and lower it gently to the ground, saying at the same time, just as gently, “No, no, keep the paw on the floor.” Then I would pat him, say what a nice dog he was, and after a while stop again. Soon the paw would come up once more, and I would catch it and go over the whole thing once again. Sometimes I would do this with him sitting, sometimes with him standing. After a few repeats I would back away from him; then, as he came toward me, I would say in a gentle but warning voice, “Now, keep those paws down,” or, “Now remember, four on the floor.” I would have my hand ready to catch the paw when it rose, which at first it always did. But before long he began to get the idea, and quite often the tone of my voice, the sound of my words, and perhaps the position of my body and hand, would be enough to remind him, and he would keep the paw down. I was only there a few days, and won't claim that I broke him of the habit altogether. But he was much better about it, and usually only one warning and paw-catch would be enough to remind him.

The point is that even a little dog is smart enough to know that “no” does not have to be just a *signal*, an explosion of angry noise. It can be a *word*,

conveying an idea. It does not have to say, "You're a bad dog, but we're going to scare or beat the badness out of you." It can say instead, "You're a good dog, but that isn't what we do around here, so please don't do it any more." Even a little dog can understand that, and act on it.

And if a dog, why not a child? There is no reason why, except in rare times of great stress or danger, we cannot say "No" to children in just as kind and gentle a tone of voice as we say "Yes" to them. "No" and "Yes" are both words. Both convey ideas which even tiny children are smart enough to grasp. One says, "We don't do it that way," the other says, "We do." And most of the time, that is what they want to find out. Most of the time, except when overcome by fatigue, or curiosity, or excitement, or passion, they want to do right, do as we do, fit in, take part.

Not long after my visit with friend and dog, I visited two other friends, and their smart and altogether delightful fifteen month old boy. Around dinner time, in the little kitchen-dining room, I took out my cello and began to play. The baby was fascinated, as I hoped he would be. He stopped what he was doing and came crawling across the floor toward the cello at top speed. His parents looked a bit nervous, but I said, "Don't worry, I'll defend the cello, I won't let him hurt it." He came to the cello, pulled himself up to a standing position, and began to touch and pluck at the strings, below the bridge. At the same time, keeping the bow (which he might have been able to damage) well out of his reach, I plucked the cello strings above the bridge, and made nice sounds. Now and then I could see that he was being overcome with a wave of excitement, and that he wanted to bang on the cello, as little babies do. But when his hands began to make these impulsive gestures, I would catch them, like the paw of the pup, and slow them down, saying softly, "Gently, gently, easy, easy, be nice to the cello." When his motions grew smaller and calmer I would take my hands away. For a while he would caress the wood and pluck at the strings. Then he would begin to get excited again. But as soon as he did I would catch and slow down his hands again, saying as before, "Gently, gently, nice and easy." After a while he would crawl away, while I talked a bit with his parents. Then I would play some more, and he would come crawling over for more looking and touching. I might have to say, "Gently, gently," once or twice, but hardly more than that. Most of the time this tiny boy, still just a baby, was as gentle and careful with the cello as I was. And all this in only one evening, the first time he had ever seen such a strange and

fascinating object.

A Single Parent

Ann McConnell; 386 Prospect St., New Haven, Conn . 06511, writes, in part:

I am writing you in response to your note in the most recent issue of the *Radcliffe Quarterly*. As a feminist single mother I cannot help but wonder what exactly the implications are supposed to be for the real lives of my child and myself. The lives of mothers and children are not determined separately; for better or worse, our fates are bound up together. The fact is I do not know how I would survive if my daughter were not in school.

Here is my situation: I am deeply in debt, on account of having been in law school for the past three years. I decided to go to law school, as it happens, in response to the pressures of trying to support myself and my child through do-good jobs and welfare. My daughter is now 6 years old and attending first grade in the local public school. She is unhappy there, although the school is known as a “good” one, and regularly comes home outraged at all the indignities she is subjected to e.g., she is not allowed to go to the bathroom when she wants to, *or talk during lunch*, or draw on the reverse side of her school papers when she is forced to wait.

The italics above are mine. I interrupt to say that I hear quite often about schools, often “good” schools like this one, where children, even very young ones, are not allowed to talk at lunch. Is this the great “social life” the schools like to talk about? Convicted criminals in maximum security prisons are allowed to talk at lunch. Why not first graders?

I have some friends who are working in schools, or in schools of education, and who like to think of themselves as “educational reformers” or “humanistic educators.” I feel like saying to them, “Here is a modest goal for you to work toward. Try to change the schools just enough so that children will be allowed to talk at lunch. Until you can do at least that much, I don’t want to hear any more talk about all you are doing for educational reform.”

Ann McConnell continues:

She also does not seem to be learning to read or do arithmetic at anything

that seems to me to be a reasonable rate. And although it is clear to me that she has an extraordinarily logical and creative mind, she has begun to develop a sense that in her teacher's eyes she is actually "dumb." She begs me not to make her go to school. I am sympathetic—but the only alternative is to let her come to law school with me, and she dislikes that too (not without reason). Next year I have a job as Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Miami Law School, which will, unfortunately, mean I am busier than ever. (Ironically one of the courses I plan to teach will be "The Rights of Parents and Children.") Money will be a problem. So I certainly doubt that I will be in a position to hire any sort of mother/teacher surrogate. We also do not know any circle of friends who might take up the slack. (Sometimes I know such arrangements do work out, but one plainly cannot count on this.) What, then, can I realistically do to provide my daughter with an acceptable environment in which to live and learn? I frankly do not know.

It seems to me that although the details of my problem are unique, its general structure is almost universal. A scarcity of time and money, a need to cope. The trouble is not that I or other concerned parents are insufficiently "radical" in outlook. I was in fact quite prepared to drop out as long as it seemed to me that that was the most authentic means of handling human existence. But my practical and human need to live in a "public" social and economic world proved inescapable. I recognized, moreover, that my daughter's need was not to have a mother dedicated to creating an immediate 'ideal' world for her; she too has to ultimately live in the world I inhabit. This seems as though it would lead to a pat solution, but it doesn't; for it is never clear at what point one begins to rationalize the outrageous. Instead, I like so many friends find myself in a perpetual quandary.

The one thing I am certain of in thinking about my daughter now is that a "solution" to her problems will have to take mine into account too. I don't know whether I am saying all this to you in the hope that you will have anything immediately helpful to say, but since in the past you have had much to say that was useful, maybe if you recast your thinking about the lives of children as thinking about the lives of mothers-and-children, you would come up with something. I hope so, anyway.

A Reply

Dear Ann,

Thanks very much for your good letter. I understand your problem, at least a little, because for most of the eight years or so I've known her a good friend of mine has been in the same spot. For a number of these years she worked to support herself and her child. Then she studied to get a Master's Degree in Education, and is now in her second year at law school. During all that time it would have been very difficult for her not to have had her child in school though of course, like you, she had to make other arrangements when school was not in session.

However, I think I know her well enough to say that if at any time during those years her child had been really unhappy at school, or had been asking her not to make her go to school, or even if she had felt that school was doing the child real harm (as it does to most children), she would have made other arrangements, however difficult that might have been. As it was, because the child's father could and did pay for private schooling, she was able to send her to a quite nice elementary school, where the child was quite happy, and could learn about the world in her own way. One result of this is that (though her teachers were always worrying about her reading) she now reads four or five years ahead of most children her, age. Her last two years of (public) school have not been very interesting, but she has at least been free of most of the anxieties and pressures that torment other children, and by now has ways of finding out about the world on her own. She is also good at sports, and liked by the other children, which helps.

I gather that your own situation is more difficult, in that you are not able to afford anything other than public school. If this is in fact so, it seems that your only choices right now are either to take the child with you wherever you go, or to leave her in school. May I suggest that even now, and certainly in the very near future, you may have other choices.

To take first the matter of custodial care, I would agree, or at least would not dispute, that a six year old needs some sort of babysitter. But I would say most emphatically that this is not true of a ten, or even an eight year old. In other words, I think (because people have done it) that if you began to train and educate your child toward independence and self-reliance, in two years or

so (perhaps less) she would be perfectly able to spend large amounts of time at home by herself. By that time she would know who and how to call for various emergencies, how to provide for her own needs (getting meals, etc.), and how to occupy herself happily and constructively with anyone of a number of activities.

Of course, she may not want to do this. But, were she my child and I in your shoes, it is a choice I would want to offer her. In other words, I would say to her that for some time to come she was going to have one of three choices or perhaps only two – 1) To go with you wherever you go, staying out of other people's way and occupying herself as best she can 2) To go to public school, which will certainly be as bad as (or even worse than) the one she is in now 3) To stay at home, for much of the day and maybe all day, by herself. Then I would say, "If you want to take that third choice, you are going to have to get ready, practice, learn a number of things, like how to cook and take care of food, how to look up numbers in the phone book, how to talk to strange adults over the phone, and how to find interesting things to do all by yourself for many hours at a stretch. Do you want to do all this? It's OK if you don't, but then the only other possibility is school, and the chances are we won't be able to find a school you like any better than the one you are in now."

You can give her plenty of time to think about this, talk it over, and so on. But she will have to decide. If she decides to go for independence and self-reliance, you can start working on that right away. If this possibility interests you, perhaps in later letters we can talk more about how to do that.

I have put the choices rather extremely, go to school or stay home all day by yourself, to prepare the child for the worst possible cases. In reality, the choices may often not be quite that extreme. Thus, starting at whatever time of day school lets out, you will probably be able to make arrangements for the child to visit other children, or have some of them visit her. Or there may be other places she may be able to go to, one example being the children's room at the Public Library. After school lets out the child is no longer an outlaw and it will be safe, as far as truancy is concerned, to be seen in public places. If you are living in a large city, and she has learned to become self-reliant, which will mean among other things being able to use maps, find her way, and use whatever public transportation may be available, there may be a number of interesting places where she can go by herself.

Also, you may be able to find and afford people to be with the child not for the whole day but for a few hours, and perhaps in that time to take her to some places she might not be able to go to by herself. In short, once we get past the idea that there has to be an adult with her every minute of the day, the problem becomes more manageable. And you may even be able to find some people to do this without pay, perhaps on some sort of barter arrangement. I'm not sure what kind of skills you have to swap, but I suspect you have quite a few of them.

The other question is, can you, and without spending a ton of money, make your home, probably a small apartment, into a place in which your daughter *could* spend many happy, interesting, and fruitful hours by herself? You not only can, but you can make it into an environment far more varied and productive than anything she is likely to find at school. GWS will in part be about ways to do this. And are children in fact *capable* of spending long hours happily and productively without constant adult supervision and attention? Yes they are—after all, and not so long ago, large numbers of them used to do it all the time. You will have to respond generously to her need and requests for attention and friendship when you come home. But you will surely want to do that anyway. And it will be helpful if, as far as she wants to and you are able to, you let her share in your daytime life—something that will get easier as she gets older. My friend's daughter, at age ten, went a number of times to law school classes, and often found them quite interesting.

I hope some of these ideas may be of some use to you, and I would like very much to know, if you can find the time to tell me, how you feel about what I have suggested here.

Addition

In *GWS #1* there was a short piece on Counting, about ways in which parents could introduce numbers to little children, so as to avoid the panic and confusion they cause in so many people. Here I would like to take these ideas a bit further.

Sometime during first grade most children will be told, and asked to write down and to memorize, that $2 + 3 = 5$. This may be called “a number fact,” or “an addition fact,” or both. They will be given a list of such facts to memorize and repeat on demand. Their books and teachers will “explain” and illustrate this fact in different ways, such as showing a picture of two baby chicks, then one of three baby chicks, then one of five baby chicks—or some other “cute” thing that little children are supposed to like.

Another number fact that the children will be told is that $3 + 2 = 5$. They will almost always hear it as a separate fact, not connected with the fact $2 + 3 = 5$. Some children will wonder why the two number facts come out the same. Once in a great while, one of them will ask why. If the teacher is old (and fortunate) enough never to have much training in the New Math, she/he may answer something simple and sensible like, “They just do, that’s all.” If the teacher has had some of the New Math, the answer may be something like, “Because addition is commutative.” This is just putting a big mystery in place of a little one. If the child understood what “commutative” meant, it might say, “I can see that it’s commutative; what I want to know is, why is it?” But children don’t say things like that, they just slump back in their seats thinking, “One more thing that makes no sense.”

Meanwhile, they go about the dull rote work of committing all those unrelated facts to memory. To spur them on, there are plenty of tests, questions asked before the whole class, lots of opportunities for mistakes, humiliation, shame—the usual scene. After a year or so of this, a few children are good at parroting back those number facts, while most don’t know them and never will—they have already joined the giant Army of people who “can’t do Math.”

In second grade the children will be told two new “number facts” or “subtraction facts.” One is that $5 - 2 = 3$, the other, that $5 - 3 = 2$. Again, they will hear these as separate facts, not connected with each other or with the

addition facts they met in first grade. Again, their teachers and textbooks will give various explanations of what subtraction “means.” In one “good” school I taught in, there was a near civil war about this. One group of teachers wanted to say that $5 - 3 = 2$ means or can mean, “What do we have to add to 3 in order to get 5?” This is how people count change in stores—they begin with the amount of your purchase, then add change and bills to it to equal the amount of money you gave them. A perfectly sensible method. But the other faction in this school, including the head of the Lower School Math department, denounced this as “additive subtraction,” and told the elementary teachers that they must not use or *allow the children to use* this way of thinking about subtraction, that they had to think only in terms of “taking away.” For all I know, the school may still be doing this.

At any rate, there are the children, struggling in the face of growing anxiety (theirs and their teachers’) to memorize all these disconnected and meaningless facts, as if they were learning the words to a song in a language they did not know. Small wonder most of them never learn them. (In five fifth grade classes I taught, in “good” schools, less than half of the children could add and subtract reliably, even small numbers, without using their fingers, or making little dots on paper, etc.)

None of this is necessary. The truth is that $2 + 3 = 5$, $3 + 2 = 5$, $5 - 2 = 3$, and $5 - 3 = 2$, are not four facts but four different ways of looking at *one* fact. Furthermore, that fact is not a fact of arithmetic, to be taken on faith and memorized like nonsense syllables. It is a fact of nature, which children can discover for themselves, and rediscover or verify for themselves as many times as they need or want to.

The fact is this:

***** <====> *** **

If you have before you a group of objects—coins, stones, etc., which looks like the group on the left, then you can make them into two groups that look like the ones on the right. Or this is what the two-way arrow means—if you have two groups that look like the ones on the right, you can make them into a group that looks like the one on the left.

This is not a fact of Arithmetic, but a fact *of nature*. It did not become true only when human beings invented Arithmetic. It has nothing to do with human beings. It is true allover the universe. One doesn’t have to know any Arithmetic to discover or verify it. An infant playing with blocks or a dog

pawing at sticks might do that operation, though probably neither of them would notice that they had done it; for them, the difference between ***** and *** ** would be a difference that didn't make any difference. Arithmetic began (and begins) when human beings began to notice and think about this and other numerical facts of nature.

Early in human history people began to invent special names to talk about that property of a group of objects that had to do only with how many of them there were. Thus, a group of five kittens, a group of five shoes, and a group of five apples have in common only that there are the same number in each group, so that for each kitten there would be one shoe or one apple, with none left over. And it is a property of the number 5 that it can be separated into the two smaller numbers 2 and 3. It is another property of 5 that it can be separated into 4 and 1. And it is still another property of 5 that these are the *only* two ways in which it can be separated into two smaller numbers. If we start with 7, we can get 6 and 1, or 5 and 2, or 4 and 3; with 10 we can get 9 and 1, 8 and 2, 7 and 3, 6 and 4, or 5 and 5. Every number can be split into two smaller numbers in only a certain number of ways—the bigger the number, the more the ways. (There is a regular rule about this, a simple one, which you might enjoy finding for yourself.)

Once we get it clear in our minds that ***** = *** ** is a fact of nature, we can see that $3 + 2 = 5$, $2 + 3 = 5$, $5 - 2 = 3$, $5 - 3 = 2$, whether we put these in symbols or in words, (“plus,” “added to,” “take away,” etc.) *are simply four different ways of looking at and talking about that original fact.*

What good is this? The good is that instead of having dozens of things to memorize, we have only four, and those all sensible. Once a child can turn ***** = *** ** into $3 + 2 = 5$ or any of the other three forms, it can look at any other number, find out how it may be split into two parts, and then write down all the ways of talking about that.

Thus a child might take *****, find out by experiment that it could be split (among other ways) into ***** and **, and then write down $6 + 2 = 8$, $2 + 6 = 8$, $8 - 2 = 6$, and $8 - 6 = 2$ —and then do the same with 7 and 1, or 5 and 3, or 4 and 4. In short, all the number facts that children must now *be given*, and then memorize, they could discover and write down for themselves. The advantage of this is that our minds are much more powerful when discovering than when memorizing, not least of all because discovering is more fun. Another advantage is that so much of Arithmetic (and by

extension all Mathematics) that now seems mysterious and full of coincidences or contradictions, would be seen to be perfectly sensible.

One last point. On one of the times when I talked about this to some teachers, one man said that his school was already teaching Addition this way. It turned out that what he meant was that in their textbooks, for every “number fact” i.e. $4 + 3 = 7$, there was an illustration of four baby chicks, three baby chicks, and seven baby chicks (or whatever). But this completely missed the point I was trying to make, and am making here. $** \quad *** = *****$ is *not* “an illustration” of the fact $2 + 3 = 5$. $** \quad *** = *****$ is the fact, and $2 + 3 = 5$ only one of a number of ways of talking about it and putting it into symbols.

Ann Replies

Ann McConnell wrote back, in part:

My daughter and I have come to a solution ourselves. I agree with you entirely that she deserves to participate in any decision about whether or not she goes to school. Even at age 6 she is almost (but not quite) capable of taking care of herself during the day at least. So the possibility of letting her stay at home by herself does not seem ridiculous to me. I already sometimes leave her for an hour or two alone. She takes messages on the phone, makes peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and puts on phonograph records. Still, I don't think she could be happy spending the majority of her time in a solitary state, simply because she happens to be a very sociable person. That in fact is the basis of one of her primary objections to school: *the teachers there place too many barriers to interpersonal interaction*. (Ed. italics—in short, they prevent social life)

One idea I have had though about helping her to read in a non-school setting is to hire a nine-year-old I know who is a good reader to help her. (Ed. note: A wonderful idea, which I hope other readers will try out) The nine-year-old is the son of a good friend of mine and he is currently in trouble at the same school my daughter goes to because he has been choosing to read *A Tale Of Two Cities* under his desk instead of working on his workbook. The age difference strikes me as about right: C doesn't have to feel inferior due to the fact that A can read so much better than she, because he is obviously three years older. A seems to like the idea too. (His seriousness is being treated as a positive advantage, for a change) I'll see how this goes, but it is occurring to me that maybe I have hit upon a large part of the solution to my problem.

Next yea we will be moving to Miami. I will certainly have a lot more (money) than I have now. I will try to find some sort of reasonable private school for C to go to. (Though I shall certainly be discussing with her the possibility of staying home from school entirely.) There are several things that Miami offers a child that New Haven does not: a children's theater group, the chance to learn Spanish, and easy access to swimming. All of these opportunities interest C greatly. So the importance of school may not be so great there. I hope so anyway.

So do I. It will be interesting, next year, to hear how things go.

The workbook. The schools no longer surprise me, but they still amaze me. I think of a boy I knew who went off to a “good” boarding school. Until that time he had been interested only in Science. That was his path into the world. Literature, books, reading, unless closely connected with Science, did not interest him at all. The school “exposed” him to Dickens. He loved Dickens so much he started off on a project of reading *all* of Dickens’ books—quite a project for a thirteen or fourteen year old. Was the school pleased? No. They wrote scolding letters to the boy’s mother about his never having his English assignments done, even threatened to fail him in English.

Rub-On Letters

The *Growing Without Schooling* at the head of each issue, and the titles for each section, have been made with a gadget called *Rub-On Letters and Numbers* (E.Z Letter Quik Stik, P.O. Box 829, Westminster, Md. 21157). The letters are inked onto the back of a heavy piece of clear plastic. You put the plastic, ink side down, on a piece of paper, then rub on the top of the plastic, over the letter, with something pointed (but not so sharp as to pierce or cut the plastic) like the tip of the cap of a ball point pen. This forces the ink onto the paper. When you can tell from the look of the plastic (the letter looks more gray than black) that you have rubbed all the ink off, you lift up the plastic, and there the letter is, sharp and black on the paper, just as if it had been printed.

I took along a set as a present to an eight year old I was visiting. When I arrived, she and a friend were there. I gave her the present, and showed her how it worked. When I finally lifted up the plastic and showed the nice sharp black letter on the page, she and her friend said with one voice, "Neat-o!" They instantly fell to work, and soon had made signs for their names, my cello, and a number of other things.

I think it might be a very good way to make letters and/or words or signs for a small child just at the point of figuring out how to read. The letters look so *official*, not something made in the home, but part of the big world outside. They grab the eye more than letters made with a felt-tipped pen. They might be useful for older children too, learning to write letters, or perhaps having trouble with spelling.

You can get these at good stationery or office supply stores, or if not there, from the maker.

Teachers' "Skills"

Someone doing "educational research" recently sent me a long list of questions to answer about what "skills" teachers did or did not need. The first big question asked how important it was for teachers to have "communication skills." The first one listed was the ability to listen attentively and sympathetically. I thought, "So far, so good." But then the question went on to add something like, "i.e., as in Rogerian listening." I thought, "Aw, bleep!"

Right there, in a nutshell, is what is wrong with this research, and why research and researchers like this will never make teaching better, and will almost surely make it worse. Carl Rogers has said some very sensible and important things. *But he did not invent listening!* Good listening is not a trick. People have been listening to other people, often sympathetically and attentively, for hundreds of thousands of years. Human societies could never have endured, or even existed, if they had not. We are listening animals as much as talking animals. When "educators" try to make this universal and natural human act into a technique—above all, a *technique* which only specially trained people are supposed to have—they kill it stone dead.

Anyone who says to himself, "I am going to listen attentively and sympathetically to John, here, *so that I can get him to do something I want,*" is no longer capable of listening, least of all sympathetically. He is looking for weaknesses, openings, ways to get at me. Some of the most insufferable people I have ever met and spent time with have been people who prided themselves on being experts in "communications skills." That was exactly what was wrong with them. They did not make me feel that they were talking or listening to me, but that they were practicing their communications skills on me, which is not at all the same thing.

For years, teachers have been taught in their training to smile at children—little ones, at least—and give them lots of praise. And for just that many years children have known (see *How Children Fail*) that the least real and honest things about their teachers have been their smiles and their praises.

Calculators

About ten years ago the smallest and cheapest scientific calculators were about the size of a large office typewriter and cost about \$350. I used to tell teachers that in twenty-five years pocket-sized calculators costing less than \$50 would do all of the work now done in elementary and secondary math. Hell, it only took ten years, and some calculators costing only \$20 will do everything in elementary and secondary math and much more besides. The other day I bought for \$20 a calculator, Texas Instruments Model SR 40 (other companies make similar machines) which does all the operations of Arithmetic, plus Negative Numbers, the Trigonometric Functions, Logarithms, Roots, Exponents, and more. It can answer, in a flash, many more questions than I know how to ask it.

With one key the machine will do multiplication tables, of any number, small or large. Or, we can begin with a certain number, and then count backwards by ones, twos, fives, or whatever, so that we can do tables backwards as well as forwards. All kinds of games and contests can be made out of this.

Even if I were getting a calculator for a very young child—and I would get one for any child—I would get one of these scientific calculators rather than one which just adds, subtracts, multiplies, and divides. Seeing keys marked *sin*, *cos*, *tan*, *ctn*, *log*, etc. many children will sooner or later begin to wonder what these symbols mean. Here will be a chance to take a look at some parts of Math that the schools, chained to their timetables, will not talk about for years.

The other day I showed my calculator to a friend, the head of a private elementary school, who has always been interested in Math and Science. He was very excited by it. But when I suggested having some of these in his classrooms, his face fell. “We couldn’t do that,” he said. “They are too desirable. The children would steal them to take home.” Perhaps so. They ought to be in the homes in the first place.

In an airline magazine I just read that, in spite of fierce opposition from many teachers and parents (“a plain old pencil was good enough for me”), more and more schools are using calculators in their classrooms. But they all say (according to the article) that the children can be shown how to use the

calculators only *after* they have learned to do arithmetic with the old paper and pencil which for many children, as I learned as an arithmetic teacher, means never. No one seems to have thought that children might use the calculators to learn pencil arithmetic, that having played multiplication table games with the calculators, they might find one day to their surprise that they knew most or all of the tables, or that having learned to add with the calculators they would then want to learn to add without them.

But because schools are dumb about calculators does not mean that unschoolers have to be. Get a calculator for your own children. Let it be a tool for them to use for their own pleasure, a way of reaching out into the world of Mathematics. If some of them are not interested, that's all right too—they can find other ways of exploring the world, even the world of Math. As for those who like to explore it this way, let them explore it as far as they can. For not much more money, one can get programmable calculators, which lead into the world of computers and computer programming, a world so far closed to me, but important in these times, and very interesting to many young people.

Politics of Schooling

When rich and poor live in a country, the rich naturally want to make sure—or as sure as they can—that their children will not be poor. To be able to do this is one of the many fringe benefits of being rich. They have many ways to do this. One is to make knowledge, and so, access to interesting and well paid work, expensive, scarce, hard to get. This is part of what schools do.

Today, most people in the fast-growing field of solar energy do not have solar degrees. Much of the work, and of the most important work, is being done by backyard inventors, hobbyists, amateurs. The colleges and universities are only just beginning to give degrees in solar energy. Ten years from now many (but still not all) of the people in the field will have these degrees. When there are enough of them, they, or the colleges and universities which gave their degrees, will probably begin to try to get laws passed saying that you can't work in solar energy *unless* you have such a degree. They will, in short, turn one more field of human action into a “profession,” i.e. a legal monopoly, which only those can do who have had a lot of expensive schooling.

This, of course, has already happened in the law. Abraham Lincoln (like many others) did not learn law by going to law school, but by reading law books. People used to speak, not of “studying law,” but of “*reading* the law.” In those days poor boys (hardly ever girls) could become lawyers by reading the law, and then working in law offices, doing lowly jobs at first, but learning more and getting more responsibility as they learned, probably in the long run setting up their own law offices. No doubt even then the sons of the rich had an advantage. But the poor at least had a way in. Not any more. In many or most states, you can't practice law or even take the bar exams unless you have been to law school—and there are ten or twenty times as many people trying to get in as there are places for them. This is what the Bakke uproar is about; if people could become lawyers by reading the law on their own, that argument would probably have never come up.

Beyond this, the “good” jobs in law go, almost without exception, to the graduates of “good” law schools, who with few exceptions are graduates of “good” i.e. in most cases expensive colleges. A few poor kids make it

through this obstacle course, just enough to fool people into thinking that it is a fair race.

Much the same is true of the other “professions.” Almost everything that you now have to have an advanced degree to do, was once—often not so long ago—done by people without such degrees. Where did they learn what they knew? Like Abe Lincoln, by reading books, by using their eyes and ears, by asking questions, by working.

A man is now urging publicly that all teachers, including nursery school and kindergarten teachers, should be required by law to have a Doctor’s degree in Education. (Which means that they will have learned how to treat children like rats or pigeons, and if they don’t respond, to call them “sick.”) Who is this man? None other than the President of Teacher’s College of Columbia University. Not hard to figure that one out. One more legal monopoly. Some of these “educators” may soon be urging that without such degrees no one should be allowed to teach anybody *anything*.

Schools like to say they create and spread knowledge. No; people do that. What schools try to do is corner the market on knowledge, so that they can sell it at a fancy price. That’s why they want us to think that only what is learned in school is worth anything. But we don’t have to believe it.

An Important Decision

From a recent Boston Globe:

“The Supreme Court ruled yesterday that federal judges may play only a limited role in government decision-making on nuclear-power safety.

The justices served notice on lower courts to leave nuclear power regulation to the regulatory agencies established by Congress and the states. Unless judges find “substantial procedural or substantive reasons, they should not intervene, the high court said.

The court, *without dissent* (Ed. italics), overturned a federal appeals court ruling which held that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission had failed to consider adequately the dangers of nuclear waste in approving licenses to two power companies for nuclear reactors in Vernon, Vt. and Michigan.

In an opinion by Justice William H. Rehnquist, the justices rebuked the appeals court: “Nuclear energy may some day be a cheap, safe source of power or it may not,” Rehnquist wrote.

But Congress has made a choice to at least try nuclear energy, establishing a reasonable review process in which courts are to play only a limited role. Time may prove wrong the decision to develop nuclear energy, but it is Congress or the states within their appropriate agencies which must eventually make that judgment. The justices said the courts should set aside regulatory agency decisions only for substantial reasons specified by laws passed by Congress—and not because the court is unhappy with the result reached.

The Supreme Court’s decision comes when critics of nuclear power are turning increasingly to the courts to block or delay nuclear projects. The justices’ ruling seemed likely to limit use of the courts as a means of opposing nuclear power.”

I quote this decision for what it tells us about the way in which this present Court thinks, and will probably continue to think. The Supreme Court fears, and with some reason, that people will begin to think of the Federal Courts, and the Courts to think of themselves, as a kind of super-legislature, where

laws may be passed that neither Congress nor the state legislatures would consider passing. Pushed far enough, this would change our structure of government from one with three branches—Executive, Legislative, and Judicial—to one with only two, Executive and Judicial, with the Legislative playing a very inferior role.

I personally think that nuclear power is neither necessary nor safe. Nor do I much admire the present Supreme Court. None the less, I think that in the long run the position they are taking is a wise one. For courts to overturn policies approved by legislatures merely because they disagree with them seems to me a very bad idea for many reasons, not least of all because it gives the supporters of these policies nowhere, politically speaking, to go. If a majority of the people, through their legislators, approve a certain policy, and the courts throw it out, there is nothing for that majority to do but start talking about Constitutional Amendments—a very risky business.

We should remember, too, that it was not very long ago, during the time of the Great Depression and the New Deal, that a conservative or right-wing Supreme Court, the famous Nine Old Men, were throwing out important economic legislation that Congress and a large majority of the people favored. In the long run, there is no reason to believe that judges will be more liberal, enlightened, or humane than legislators. Moreover, if legislators don't vote the way we want, we always have a chance to vote in some new ones. But if Federal judges don't vote the way we want, there is almost nothing we can do—we are stuck with them for life.

In any case, it seems clear that this Supreme Court will not make laws about compulsory school attendance, or the right of people to teach their own children, which the state legislatures have not made. There is, I think, a good chance that if, in a state whose laws say that parents may teach their children at home, a local school board effectively makes that impossible, the Supreme Court may someday rule that the board has no right to do that. But the Court will almost certainly not rule that any states who have not yet passed laws allowing for home instruction ought to and must do so. It may hold school boards to whatever laws exist, but it will not make new laws. Which means in turn that in the long run if not the short, unschoolers are going to have to think about making friends and getting support in their various state legislatures.

A Poster

How ideas are born: I have been thinking about the best words for a classified ad, to use in various papers and magazines, the fewer words the better. For a while I considered, “Are schools making your kids stupid?” Not quite right—why put a fact in the form of a question? One day these words came to me: “Don’t *let* school make your kids stupid.’ Better—not just a statement but a call to act.

The other day, in Harvard Square, I saw a vacant store on whose windows people had put dozens of posters and announcements. I tried to imagine the GWS flyer up there (see *GWS #3*), and it occurred to me that it might be lost among all the others. What we need, I thought, is something that will catch the eye, even from across the street. Suddenly I thought of the classified ad. How would it do for a poster? OK, but something more was needed. What else are we saying that we want people to hear? Early one morning the other words came to me. In my mind’s eye I now see:

Your Kids Were Born
SMART
Don’t Let School Make Them
STUPID

I see the Letters of SMART in some bold, sharp-edged type face, slanting forward, maybe a little star over each letter. Behind the S, some very fine lines, to give the idea of rapid forward motion. I see the letters of STUPID drawn freehand, shapeless, fat, lumpy, leaning backwards, little curly lines around it to suggest something settling down in a cloud of dust. I even see them in color, SMART in some mixture of red, white, and blue, STUPID in dark brown. Then at the bottom of the poster, “Read *Growing Without Schooling*—for sample issue, send 50¢ to, etc.”

By next issue we hope to have a version in black and white to show you. Meanwhile, we’d be glad to hear any design suggestions or possible variations that you may come up with. I am excited by this idea, think it may help us find new friends.

Subscriptions

Using an IBM Memory Typewriter, on which we compose, correct, and layout the whole paper, we are not able to put out an issue every other month, and (barring accidents) plan to run on that schedule. A single subscription is \$10 for six issues; a 2X sub, \$12; a 3X sub, \$14, and so on up to 20X. After 20X, add \$1 for each additional sub. Thus, a 20X sub is \$48, a 21X, \$49, and so on. If you don't say otherwise, all subs begin with issue No. 1.

Please remember that when two or more people take out a joint subscription, all copies of each issue will be sent to one of them, who must then mail or deliver the other copies to the other subscribers. Sending all copies to one address is what makes it possible for us to sell joint subscriptions for less.

You may buy extra copies of Issue #1 for 50¢ each, or 25¢ each for orders of 10 or more. Extra copies of all later issues will be \$2 each, two for \$3, \$1 each for orders of five or more, 50¢ each for orders of ten or more. Please send checks (U.S.\$) made out to *Growing Without Schooling*. If sending a Canadian money order, please explain when buying it that it is to be cashed in the U.S.

People have asked whether, by sending in an additional \$2, they may convert a single subscription to a 2X, or a 2X to a 3X, etc. After some thought, we have decided that the *minimum* bump must be 3X, or \$6. Thus, by sending \$6, you may increase a single sub to a 4X, or a 2X to a 5X, etc. The reason we won't accept bumps of less than 3X is that it takes about as much time and work to change the number of a subscription as it does to enter a new subscription, and we can't afford to do that much work for only \$2.

Newsstand Sales

People have asked us what kind of special arrangements we have for newsstands, bookstores, health food stores, etc. who might want to sell *GWS* by the individual copy. We have no special arrangement. What they can do is take out a group subscription and then re-sell individual copies at whatever they think is a sensible price. With a 4X sub, a store could get *GWS* at about 66¢ per copy, and then sell them for \$1 each. With an 8X sub, they could get copies at 50¢ each, and perhaps sell them for 75¢. As they order more, the unit price will come down.

Unlike most magazines, *GWS* will not refund money for unsold copies. Too expensive and complicated. Someday we may be able to make special deals with newsstands and stores, but not now and probably not for some time to come.

Skates Needed

Sandy River School, Farmington, ME needs donations of children's ice skates in good condition for a commonly owned pool of skates and skis that children use or draw from every winter. Skates should have stiff boots and good blades that can be sharpened. Send to Mabel Dennison, Box 538, Temple ME 04984. Skates can be a tax-deductible donation – the school's number is E10109.

Secrecy

Some of the people who have written us wonderful letters—J and D in *GWS #2*, S in *GWS #3*, and others—have for various and good reasons chosen to keep their names and addresses a secret. The problem, though, was how other people could write to them. Here is how. If you would like to write to, for example, D (or the writer of “Money” in *GWS #3*), address your letter to D—*GWS #2* (or “Money”—*GWS #3*), c/o *Growing Without Schooling*, 308 Boylston, etc. Put “Please Forward” on the envelope. When we get it, we will put D’s (or “Money”’s) address on it and send it on.

If later D (or whoever) wants to write directly to the other person, say Smith, and reveal his name and address, he can do that. If not, D can write a letter to Smith, put it in a stamped envelope addressed to Smith, and put *that* envelope in an envelope addressed to us at *GWS*. When we open our envelope and find the letter to Smith, we will put it in the mail. (Of course, if people write *us* letters without putting down their address, which happens now and then, we are helpless—and frustrated)

Some may feel that all this secrecy is exaggerated and foolish. I agree that it is unfortunate, but in these times I don’t think it is at all foolish.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Growing Without Schooling 5

July 1978

A mother writes to Peg Durkee:

“You probably don’t remember, but one afternoon some months ago I called and asked for your help in removing our son from the public schools. My plea was answered on the spot with several suggestions on how we might gather information on which to base our decision.

I’ll skip over all the soul searching, the agonizing over alternatives, and get to the heart of the matter—“J” has been set free! He is enrolled at the Santa Fe Community School but is actually learning at home. As soon as the decision was made he seemed to be released from some terrible burden, he immediately began taking charge of his own life and learning, and began to approach everything with the zest and enthusiasm formerly reserved for his own nature study, sports and building projects. For example, he always hated math, and the necessity of doing math homework caused the most unhappy and miserable hours in our household. Now he has set himself the task of getting math and is proceeding to do so with none of the emotional overtones formerly present.

We owe you a great big “THANK YOU.” If you had not responded in such a helpful way, the idea might have died right there. It’s not an easy task for a poor working-class family to attempt this kind of thing -in fact it’s a bit terrifying. Yet, I feel strongly that working class kids are most hurt by public schools and most in need of being set free. (Admittedly not too many parents I know would agree with this right now.) Anyway, we need all the help we can get, and we appreciate your willingness to give it.”

A Learning Exchanger

From the Member's Feedback section of the newsletter of the Learning Exchange, P.O. Box 920, Evanston ILL 60204, this letter from Derrick White, a Learning Exchange member from the South Shore neighborhood of Chicago:

I am a pack rat.

In actuality, that's not so unusual. America is full of them. As a nation, we collect everything from rare coins and stamps to beer cans. However, I collect an unusual commodity: information. Unused, unobtrusive information.

You may ask, what do I do with the information I collect? My favorite thing is to come home and reach back into the recesses of my imagination and record whatever it is I pull out. In other words, I am a writer—at least I fancy myself as one.

One of the organizations that has helped me perpetuate this pastime is The Learning Exchange. When I first heard about it two years ago, I was writing a script for an amateur movie, another hobby of mine. Through The Learning Exchange, I found another moviemaker who was extremely helpful in the project.

I owe an immeasurable debt to The Learning Exchange for the amount of aid, information and advice I've received. When I wrote a play that included a sequence about magic, I found two magicians through The Learning Exchange who were very helpful in giving me information that enabled me to write it. Later, I wrote a screenplay that included a fencing battle. Through The Learning Exchange, I discovered two fencing champions and became so interested in the sport that I soon will be starting lessons in the Spanish style of fencing.

What's my real success in actually selling some of my works? Fair. I have a teleplay currently searching for a buyer. And I have finished a novel that a publisher is interested in. But whether or not they actually are sold, it really doesn't make any difference. I'm 17, not even out of high school yet. So, what if immortality holds off for a while? I've still got two, three more good years left. Pack rats are known for their patience.

The Child Finders

A reader from Anne Arundel County in Maryland has sent us a pamphlet put out by the local schools, which I reproduce in full.

(Cover page)

We're looking for children with special needs." (Then, a drawing of a cute little girl the children in these kinds of pamphlets are always cute-looking up impishly and seductively, supposedly at her adult helper.) Please help us find them.

(Next page)

CHILD FIND (in large letters) is the name which has been given to the all-out effort to locate children who will be in need of Special Programs in the Anne Arundel County Public Schools. (Picture of more cute children)

Please join the search. The sooner we can find the children, the sooner we can plan an adequate program. To learn more, read the detailed information inside. Then contact us."

(Next page)

The purpose of CHILD FIND is to locate and identify children ages birth through 20 who may be in need of special services, and to solicit the help of parents, friends, agencies, medical personnel and others in this effort. Upon receiving a referral on a Child, the Anne Arundel County public school system will assess the needs the child appears to have. We hope through this procedure to be able to identify all pupils who will be in need of special services, so that we may make adequate provisions for their coming to school. After reading some of the guideposts below, you may find you wish to refer a child to us. You may do so by completing and mailing the form which is part of this brochure, or by calling 224-7689 and relaying the information by telephone. Please help us identify the children who need extra help. Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

We want to know if you have a child, or know of a child, who ...

Has trouble seeing or hearing.

Appears to be learning much more slowly than other children.

Is listless, tired, or overactive.

Is not understood by people outside the family. Does not understand simple stories as told or read.

Has ear aches or running ears.

Talks in an unusually loud voice.

Turns the same ear towards a sound he/she wishes to hear.

Frequently rubs eyes or complains that eyes hurt.

Sometimes or always crosses one or both eyes.

Every child can learn. Education can be broken down into the smallest units, so special children can understand, learn, and develop a sense of self-worth and go on to become self-sufficient adults. (Ed. note: This phrase, which appears in one form or another in much of the propaganda of the compulsory helpers, is code for "If you don't pay to have them fixed up now, you'll have to pay to keep them on welfare later.") These are the goals for each child. Your criteria when determining whether a child may need special help should not be limited to those listed above. Any condition which gives you cause for concern can be a basis for referral. We will evaluate the child's need once the referral comes in."

(Next page)

(Blanks for the following questions:)

1. Child's Name 2. Date of Birth 3. Parents' or Legal Guardian(s)' Name 4. Child's Age Grade 5. Address 6. Phone No. 7. Person Referring 8. Relationship to Child 9. Phone No. 10. Is the parent or legal guardian aware of this referral? (Ed note -this is code for "Do

you wish your name to be kept secret?') 11. What type of special help do you think the child might need? 12. What things have you noticed that caused your concern? 13. Is the child now receiving help for your area of concern? If so, where?

(Then another picture of children, which I will describe later. On the back of this page is the return address: Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Division of Special Education, 2644 Riva Road, Annapolis, MD 21401. This whole back page, folded, becomes a postage-paid return envelope. The schools want to make it as easy as possible to turn in your neighbor's children. No waiting around while you look for an envelope or a stamp.)

At a conference not long ago I described this pamphlet to a man from North Carolina. He said that there were many such programs in his state. I asked him, as I now ask *GWS* readers, to send any and all information you can find about such programs, including copies of pamphlets similar to the one described here. Some of the things the schools are asking people to look for are innocent and sensible enough, signs of bad vision or deafness. Nothing wrong with wanting children with bad vision to have glasses, or deaf children to have hearing aids. But there are surely ways of doing this without setting up this elaborate spy system, this mini-CIA. The school system must have spent much money to distribute this pamphlet. Why not spend the same money to say to the general public and to parents, "Here are some signs of bad vision or hearing. If you notice them in your children, have their eyes and/or ears examined. If you need the names and addresses of doctors who can do this, or need some help in paying for such examinations, let us know, and we will be glad to give such information or help." Something like this could be put on posters, which could be put in many public places.

What this pamphlet says, in addition to what it seems to say, is, "Parents can't be trusted to look after the needs of their children. Only we trained professionals know enough, and care enough, to do that." A great deal of what professional educators say and write carries this same message -it is one of the things that student teachers are trained to believe. We alone know. We alone care.

It might be very much to the point, in any school district having such a turn-in-a-kid program, to ask, publicly, some of questions for schools that I proposed in *GWS #4*. How successful have the schools been in meeting the special needs of children who have already been identified?

Worth noting here that a recent issue of *Today's Education*, the official magazine of the National Education Association, which goes to all members of the Association i.e., probably three quarters or more of the teachers in the U.S., had a special issue on Learning Disabilities, in which they said, among many other absurdities, that while the experts did not know the cause of "learning disabilities" they did know that they *could not be cured*, but only "compensated for." In plain English, what this means is that if your child is having trouble learning to read, he must have a reading learning disability, which in turn means that he will *always* have trouble with reading. The only remedy they offer is to tell him that it is not his fault, and to try to think of good substitutes for reading. Such is the wisdom of the schools. *GWS* will have much more to say about "learning disabilities" in later issues.

Meanwhile, as I say, we can and should make very strongly, to the general public, the point that schools that do not know how to solve the learning problems of the children they already know about, have no call and no right to demand that people start turning in each other's children. I would not grant them that right even if they did know how to solve all of children's learning problems. But a great many people who might not agree with me on the broad issue of the rights of citizens vs. compulsory helpers can probably be persuaded to agree on the narrower issue, that schools should not claim they can solve problems unless in fact they can solve them.

I said I would describe the picture at the back of the pamphlet. It is of eight children, four girls and four boys, in a classroom. They are young, eight at the oldest. All are cute, except perhaps one—a fat boy, with glasses. Even he is fairly cute. Seven of the eight are looking at the teacher, all of them smiling. The other is a boy in a front desk, reading, head resting on one hand. ("That Billy! Always has his nose in a book!") Of the seven looking at the teacher, one is a girl, standing by her desk, holding a book out of which she is reciting something. Of the other six, five have their hands raised, and the other one, a girl in a front row desk, looks as if she knew. In other words, a teacher's dream of a class—little children, all cute, all smiling, all knowing the answer. Two-legged talking puppy dogs. Just what so many people wish

children were.

The cover of the issue of *Today's Education* which deals with "learning disabilities" is also of a cute, smiling, faintly wistful, little boy. I stress this point because the sentimentality of schools about children is only the reverse side, and indeed a root cause, of their habitual hostility and cruelty to them. They don't see them as people but as pets, to be patted as long as they obey, but quickly scolded or beaten if they do not.

What They're Selling

The May 1978 issue of Mother Jones, 607 Market St., San Francisco CA 94105, printed, under the heading "The New Pepsi Generation," the following story:

The Pepsi-Cola Company is sponsoring what it calls a "learn and earn project" in hundreds of U.S. schools—a project encouraging kids to sell the company's soft drinks at school functions in return for class credit.

The project is sponsored jointly by a group called the Distributive Education Clubs of America, or DECA. Participating students sell Pepsi-Cola at pep rallies, basketball games and other school functions. Then, each spring, the students write up their Pepsi-selling success story for a chance at national prizes—shares of stock in Pepsi-Cola.

According to literature the company sends to teachers, the project helps "strengthen students' broad understanding of business." Pepsi doesn't mention however, that it also helps strengthen the company's sales figures.

Another company reportedly involved in the education game is Savannah Sugar Refining Corporation. Savannah puts out a booklet for students that might make a dentist weep. The booklet, called *Sugar Through The Ages*, includes statements such as "Scientists have found that generous amounts of sugar are a valuable part of well-balanced diets for growing children."

Fan Letter

An old friend, Dave Armington, writes, in part:

A note to say how delighted we are with *GWS*. I told (a friend) about *GWS*, in case he hadn't heard already, reminded him not to miss the easily miss-able logo for the "Pinch Penny Press" (what a super name!), and told him (by way of high praise) that *GWS* is the only stapled-together, squinty-eye-print, no illustrations, read-me-if-you-dare tract that I have ever been willing to read, have enjoyed reading, and want to go on reading when the next issue arrives, which it will sooner or later depending on how much the editor feels like writing and on how much other people feel like writing to him, and in either case it will be a surprise when it arrives, which is another good reason for subscribing because why should anyone send out a paper if he doesn't have anything to say? And I would have mentioned already (but didn't because I didn't have time) a sneaky feature on the back page called "Directory" which is where the editor will put your name if you want him to put it there, for no special reason except I suppose that some people just like to see their names in print and here's a chance to get some free publicity so why not take it, something like the guy who put an ad in the paper which said, "this is absolutely your last chance to send \$1.00 to Box so-and-so, Chicago (or wherever)," and retired on the proceeds.

Well, many thanks for kind words. We like the name Pinch Penny Press, too. We started using it before we began to publish *GWS*, but were only printing a lot of inexpensive reprints. The logo was designed by Peg Durkee's cousin Jim Hayes, who is a painter and man of many talents. I think Dave is the first person to mention either name or logo.

As we said in *GWS* #4, we will probably be coming out about every other month. But we don't promise this. If, as may well happen, I get very involved in writing another book, I may well skip a month or two here and there.

As for the Directory, it has another purpose. I really hope that now and then people listed in the Directory will write to each other—as some already have. If they live not too far apart, or other circumstances bring them within reach of each other, they may meet, become friends. Or their children may become friends, visit back and forth. In *Escape From Childhood* (av. fr. *GWS*) I said that even in a society where many adults despise, fear, and even hate children, there might slowly built up a mini-society, a network of people who liked, trusted, and respected children, and that these people might create a community (extending all over their country or countries) in which their children could grow up, move about freely, and have access to much of the world. *GWS* and the Directory may in time help to do this.

Other possible uses. People in the Directory might actually swap toys, equipment, etc. Or, several families might join forces to buy for their children something that by themselves they could not afford, like an electric portable typewriter, with each family having it for a certain part of the year. This might be better even where money was not a problem, as kids tend to get bored with something when it is around the house all the time, and might be more interested in it if it showed up every once in a while. I can imagine doing something like this with a good telescope, or an electronics construction kit, or even books.

Dave also asked what we will do when the Directory gets so big that it crowds everything else out of the magazine. Well, we are already only printing the full Directory in every third issue. When it gets beyond a certain size, we will shrink the Directory type even smaller. (No complaints, please, think of the phone book.)

And if you like *GWS*, please tell your friends. They don't necessarily have to be unschoolers (Dave isn't), might want to read the magazine just because it (or part of it) is interesting. In the long run, word of mouth is probably what will bring us most of our readers.

Time Of Our Own

A mother writes in part:

When we met you last fall, we had just begun our first year of keeping the children out of school, and I promised to write when we were a little further into it. Now I would like to share some thoughts and observations.

The decision to keep the kids, 5 and 7, out of school this year was somewhat forced down our throats. There were no other options. But when we started swallowing, we found it slid down rather easily, and when we returned from our summer in the mountains, we found the first issue of *GWS* waiting in our mailbox. We knew we were on the right track.

We entered the year with no preconceptions or plan of action. I just figured life would go on, and so it has. We go to bed each night and wake up each morning, the day passes and the necessary work gets done. I know that I live in a healthy environment and that I continue to grow as a person, and I trust that is so for my children, as well, though I haven't been "monitoring" their "progress," nor can I point to any tangible proof of "achievement."

About ten days a month I go to the city to work in a print shop. It is my habit, generally, to wake up early and spend an hour or two quietly planning my day according to what needs doing and what I feel like doing. But on my "work" days I find it very difficult to "get into" that kind of contemplation. Such a large chunk of the day is already planned for me. If I go to work several consecutive days, by the fourth or fifth day I feel very removed from the core of myself, and find it much easier to contemplate doing what at other times would seem irresponsible to me. I seem to have less energy for recycling, conserving fuel, paying good attention to my husband and children, etc. When I abdicate the responsibility for structuring my own time, a certain moral strength seems to be lost as well. Who can guess at the degree of personal alienation we as a society cause our children by structuring so much of their time for them? I am beginning to think the greatest harm is not in the "what" or the "how" of this structuring, but in the very fact that five days out of seven, nine months out of twelve, six hours out of the center of those days, we remove from children the responsibility for their time. Perhaps it is not even the length of the time that is crucial, but simply the fact of the interruption. I know from my own experience that even a small interruption

—a dental appointment, say, or a meeting or lecture I have to give—can halt the flow of my own creative energies for a length of time much greater than the interruption itself. Once I change from active to passive participant in structuring my time, a certain numbing takes place so that it is much easier to stay passive, “killing time” until the next prescribed activity, like fixing dinner or whatever. I have noticed that the only periods of real “boredom,” when the children complain of having nothing to do, are on days when a chunk of time has been planned *for* them. There is certainly nothing wrong with planning things to do together, but I have grown wary of too much planning *for*, and of removing it from its natural niche in the unique pattern of a particular day to an artificial projection into the future of anonymous days: “every Tuesday we will ...”

I have never known how to “stimulate” the children. I know that as a parent I should be raising my children in a “stimulating” environment, so that they will not be “dulled” or “bored,” but what is more stimulating: a roomful of toys and tools and gadgets, bright colors and shiny enameled fixtures, or a sparsely furnished hand-hewn cabin deep in the woods, with a few toys carefully chosen or crafted, rich with meaning, time, and care, and intimate with the elements of the earth? The only world I can show them, with any integrity, is my world.

Perhaps that is why field trips were such a disappointment for us. We started off in the fall doing “something special,” i.e., “educational field trip,” once a week. After about a month we all forgot about taking these trips. They were fun, certainly interesting, but I think we were all sickened by the phoniness. Everyone knew the only reason we all trooped into the city to the aquarium was because Mom thought it would be a “good experience.” Of much more continuing interest and, probably, greater educational significance in the truest sense, are the weekly trips into town to do the errands—to the bank (where we all have accounts and are free to deposit and withdraw as we please), the post office, grocery store, laundromat, recycling center (a source of income for kids outside of parents), drugstore and the comic book racks—and the evenings at the library and swimming pool. Those things are real, things I would do even if no one joined me, that just happen to be important activities for all of us.

When I am trying to “stimulate their interest” in something, the very artificiality of the endeavor (and rudeness, really—I have no business even

trying) builds a barrier between us. But when I am sharing something I really love with them because I also really love them, all barriers are down, and we are communicating intimately. When they also love what I love—a song, a poem, the salmon returning to the creek to spawn—the joy is exquisite: we share a truth. But our differences are also a truth. Common thread and fiber we share, but not the whole piece.

And so I do my work each day, work which is full of meaning for me, and offer to teach it to them: cooking, sewing, splitting wood, hauling water, keeping house, writing, reading, singing, sailing on the lake, digging in the garden. Sometimes they are interested, sometimes not. But if I were to try to “stimulate” them, sugar-coating various tasks, making games of various skills, preaching, teaching *me* to them, they would not have the time—great, empty spaces of time—in which to search deep within themselves for what is most true about them.

And neither, then, would I.

Who can explain the chemistry of creativity? I can sit at a desk in a well-lit room, with paper and typewriter in front of me, a subject clear in my head, yet the results of my efforts are merely mediocre. But when I am in a spot of my own choosing, a spot in which strands of fantasy, imagery, memory, and emotion, and perhaps some other deeper, indefinable essence converge, I am able to produce an immensely satisfying piece of work. Sometimes when I am writing I appear to be wandering aimlessly through the woods, or sitting idly on the bridge, dangling feet and tossing pebbles into the slowly moving water. But all the while my mind is working, trembling with the tension of an unarticulated thought, until I find the linear expression for that formless entity. Knowing these things about myself, how can I guess at the workings of my children’s minds? And not knowing, how can I presume to interfere, to lock them into sterile rooms, to lure them away from “idle” moments?

I have no idea if the year at home has been “good” or “bad” for the children. I know of no “standardized” test to measure the strength of one’s spirit or the integrity of a self, yet these would be the only measurements that would interest me. I did discover myself to have a learning disability—in thirty years I still have not learned that one’s friends cannot be trusted, and therefore I was surprised, though I’m told I shouldn’t have been, when a “friend” in whom we had confided turned us in to the school district. I don’t have the time or energy to devote to locking horns with some “attendance

officer” right now, so we are opting, instead, for a lower profile, forcing us to give up, at least for now, the easy openness with which we are most comfortable in relating to others.”

From Oregon

“The “school” I was talking then of trying to organize never materialized, mainly because there wasn’t anybody who wanted to organize it. Which makes me all the more sure that schools are artificial to life anyway and that there are other ways we can figure out to do exciting things with our kids. So I spent the rest of the year on my land, building on my house and weaving and sewing dolls for the Christmas fairs. After the turn of the year, I turned to what I hoped would be more lucrative for the time I put into it, as money was becoming more and more necessary, and I joined a tree-planting crew with the Hoedads, a tree-planting co-operative working out of Eugene. The crew I am on is officially called Sprouts and is a “school crew”—that is, it is made up of parents, and a few non-parents who are interested in kids, who wanted to plant trees and still be with their kids. So we have a co-operative “school” worked out where we take turns planting and keeping the kids. So far we have been perfectly free with each other to do whatever we want to do with the kids, so some kid days turn out to be super-fun; others fall flat. I myself put a low emphasis on reading and math on a group basis; I had rather spend my time in the woods with the kids. But I find that any theories of teaching and learning that I may have or have had are constantly being challenged just by who the kids are and what they are teaching me.

I have a beautiful and deep friendship with one of the kids, an eight-year-old girl. One day she and I were building a dam on the creek in order to create a pool to submerge in after taking a sweat in the newly-built sweat-lodge. She said to me, “isn’t it amazing how much I am teaching you?” That made me laugh; all this time I had been spending with her I had been patting myself on the back for what I had been teaching *her*! But I had also been aware of all that she was teaching me—only, it wasn’t anything else she thought she was teaching me, but something intangible about teaching and learning and children and living.”

Nobody Sees Backwards

A few years ago a national magazine (I think *Time*) ran a full page ad for some outfit with a name like American Society for Learning Disabilities. At the top of the ad, in large letters, were the words, “SEE HOW JOHNNY READS.” Then a photo, of an open children’s book printed in very large print, large enough so that people reading the ad could read the book. The story was of The Three Little Pigs. But many of the letters in the story had been shifted and turned around in odd ways. Some were upside down or backwards. Sometimes two adjacent letters in a word had been put in reverse order. Sometimes a word was spelled backwards. Then, beneath the photo, again in large letters, the words, “THINK HOW JOHNNY FEELS.” Then some text about all the children suffering from “learning disabilities” and all the things the Society was doing to cure or help them.

The message was plain. We were being asked to believe that large numbers of children in the U.S., when they looked at a book, saw something like the photo in the ad, and so, could not read it. Also, that the Society could and would do something about this—it was not clear just what—if we gave it enough support.

I looked once more at the children’s book in the photo. I found that I could read it without much trouble. Of course, I had two advantages over the supposed “learning disabled” child who was looking at this book. I could already read, and I already knew the story. I read it a bit more slowly than I ordinarily would; now and then I had to puzzle out a word, one letter at a time. But it was not hard to do.

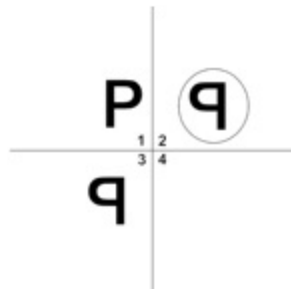
This was by no means the first time I had heard the theory that certain children have trouble learning to read because something inside their skins or skulls, a kind of Maxwell’s Demon of the nervous system (look up this Demon in an elementary Physics text, or perhaps encyclopedia or dictionary of science, if you are puzzled and curious), every so often flipped letters upside down or backwards, or changed their order. I had never believed the theory. It failed the first two tests of any scientific theory 1) that it be plausible on its face 2) that it be the most obvious or likely explanation of the facts. This theory seemed (and still seems) totally implausible, for many reasons. And there were and still are much Simpler and more likely

explanations of the facts. (more on this later)

What facts did this theory set out to account for. Only this, that certain children, usually just learning to read and write, when asked to write down certain letters or words, wrote some letters backwards, or reversed the order of two or more letters in a word, or spelled entire words backwards—though note that most children who spell backwards do not at the same time reverse all the individual letters.

I never spent much time thinking about how to prove that this theory was wrong. I was busy with other work. For a while I taught in a school right next door to what was then supposed to be one of the best schools for “learning disability” (hereafter l.d.) children in New England. I began to note that in that particular learning hospital no one was ever cured. Kids went in not knowing how to read, and came out years later still not knowing. Nobody seemed in the least upset by this. Apparently this school was felt to be “the best” because it had better answers than anyone else to the question, “Once you have decided that certain children *can’t* learn to read, what do you do with them all day in a place which is supposed to be a school?” Later, when I was working full time lecturing to groups about educational reform, I had other contacts with l.d. believers and experts. The more I saw of them, the less I believed in them. But I was still too busy to spend much time arguing with them or even thinking about them.

Then one morning in Boston, as I was walking across the Public Garden toward my office, my subconscious mind asked me a question. First it said, “The l.d. people say that these children draw the P backwards because when they look at the correct P they see it backwards. Let’s put all this in a diagram.



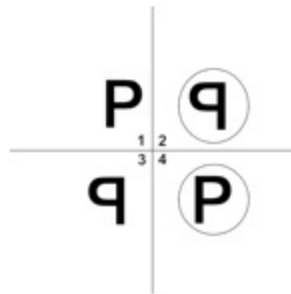
In space #1 is the correct P which the child is asked to draw or copy. In space #3 is the backwards P which he draws, because (we are told) this is the way he sees it. In space #2 is what the child supposedly sees when he looks at

the P in space #1. (The wavy line represents perception)”

Then came the \$64 question.

“Now, what does the child see when he looks at the backwards P in space #3, that he has drawn?”

I think I stopped walking. I may have said aloud, “Well, I’ll be damned!” For obviously, if his mind reverses all the shapes he looks at, the child, when he looks at the backwards P in space #3, *will see a correct P*. So our diagram would wind up looking like this:



This imaginary child, if he did what the l.d. experts say he does, would look at #1, see #2, draw #3, and *looking at that, see #4*. What he had drawn would not look to *him* like what he was trying to copy. He would think, “I’ve made a mistake,” and draw his P the other way round. That is, he would if his drawing was, as the l .d. experts’ claim, an accurate copy of what he was perceiving. Even if his mind reversed every shape it saw, *a backwards P would still look backwards to him!* To put it still more broadly and fundamentally, we cannot tell by looking at the shapes people draw whether they perceive shapes backwards or not, *since they would draw the same shapes in either case!*

So the “perceptual handicap,” “he-draws-backwards because-he-sees-backwards” theory goes down the drain. It does not explain what it was invented to explain. Nor does it explain—anything else—this event, the child drawing the letters backwards, is all the evidence that supports it. Why then does this obviously false theory persist? Because, for many reasons, it is very convenient to many people—to parents, to teachers, to schools, to l.d. experts and the industry that has grown up around them, and sometimes even to the children. The theory may not help anyone learn to read, but it keeps a lot of people busy, makes a lot of people richer, and makes almost everyone feel better. Theories that do all that are not easy to get rid of.

The first time I gave this proof of mine, that the sees-backwards-draws-

backwards (hereafter SBDB) theory is false, was to a meeting of psychologists and others in New Jersey. I invited them to draw themselves, on a handy scrap of paper, the diagram reproduced above. By the time I told them what to put in space #3, a few people, perhaps half a dozen, began to laugh, with the delighted surprise that truly smart people feel when they meet a completely new idea. They smiled at me, I at them; they had already got the point. When I said to the others, "Draw in space #4 what the child sees when he looks at space #3," I could see from their faces that they were getting the point. Some laughed, some shook their heads wonderingly, as if to say, perhaps, "Why didn't I see that, it's so obvious." Quite a few people's mouths literally fell open.

But I must add that this was not a meeting of l.d. specialists. They had no vested interest in the SBDB theory. When I went through this same demonstration before 1000+ people at a l.d. conference in Montreal, they did not seem to respond at all. They sensed, quite rightly, that I was setting some kind of trap for them, and were putting all their mental energies into not falling into it. As far as I could tell, few even drew the diagram. But more about this group later.

But then, why *does* the child draw the P backwards? If he is not reproducing the shape that he perceives, what is he doing?

The answer is plain to anyone who has watched little children when they first start making letters. Slowly, hesitantly, uncertainly, and clumsily, they try to turn what they see into a set of instructions, a "program," for their hand, and then try to make the hand carry out the instructions. This is what we all do. We are not walking copying machines. When we try to draw a chair, we do not "copy" it. We look at it a while, and then we look at the paper and "tell" our hand to draw, say, a vertical line of a certain height. Then we look at the chair again, then back at the paper, then "tell" our hand to go halfway up the vertical line, and from that point draw a horizontal line of a certain length, or a line slanted at a certain angle. Then we look back at the chair for more instructions. If, like trained artists, we are good at turning what we see into instructions for our hand, we will produce a good likeness of the chair. If, like most of us, we are not good at it, we will not.

In this way, the child looks at the P. He sees there is a line in it that goes up and down. He looks at the paper and tells his hand, "Draw an up and down line," then draws it. He looks back at the P, sees that at the top of the up and

down line there is another line that goes out to the side. He looks at his paper, tells his hand to go to the top of the up and down line and then draw a line out to the side. This done, he looks back at the P, sees that the line going out to the side curves down and around after a while and then goes back in until it hits the up and down line again. He tells his hand to do that. It may take him two or three tries to get all the way around the curve. Sometimes he will have trouble remembering which way the curve has to go round. But eventually he gets his line back up to the up and down line.

At this point, most children will compare the two P's, the one they looked at and the one they made. Many of them, if they drew their P backwards, may see right away that it is backwards, doesn't look quite the same, is pointing the wrong way—however they may express this in their minds. Other children may be vaguely aware that the shapes are not pointing the same way, but will see this as a difference that doesn't make difference, just as for my bank the differences between one of my signatures and another are differences *that don't make any difference*.

But I suspect that most children who often reverse letters do not in fact *compare* shapes. I suspect that, like so many of the children I have known and taught, they are anxious, rule-bound, always in a panicky search for certainty. What they do is turn the P they are looking at into a set of instructions, memorize the instructions, and then compare the P they have drawn *against the instructions*. "Yes, there's the line going up and down, and there's the line going out sideways from the top, and there it is curving down and around and coming back into the up and down line again. I followed all the instructions, obeyed all the rules, so it *must* be right." Or perhaps they try to compare shapes, but are too anxious to see them clearly. Or perhaps by the time they have shifted their eye from the P they were looking at to the P on their own paper, they have forgotten the original P, or dare not trust the memory of it that they have. This feeling of suddenly not being able to trust one's own memory is common enough. Now and then I find myself looking up a phone number two or three times in a row, because each time I start to dial the number I have the panicky thought, "Did I really remember it right?" I can usually only break out of this foolish cycle by saying to myself, "Right or wrong, dial it anyway." It usually turns out to be right. But I can understand how a certain kind of self-distrusting person (by no means rare) might go through this process a great many times.

It is possible, too, that a child, making up a set of instructions for his hand, might try to use the ideas of Right and Left, but might also have some of the confusions I talked about in *GWS #4*, so that “right” when he was looking at the P might mean the opposite of “right” when he was drawing it. The fact remains that whatever may be children’s reasons for drawing letters backwards, there is no reason whatever to believe that seeing them backwards is one of them.

Teacher Story

A student teacher writes:

Reading has never been my best subject. When I was little, and even now, I never read for fun or enjoyment. When I was in the fourth grade we had got into our reading groups and I was called on to read. As I read I came across a word that I couldn't pronounce and the class laughed. I was so embarrassed that I ran out of the room. Well, from that point on whenever we were going to get into our reading groups I would pretend to be sick and leave the room. After about two weeks of this game the teacher and my mother had a conference. The teacher realized what I was doing and why. They both talked to me about the situation, but I never felt the same."

We can only wonder how many people have been made, and are being made to feel this way, every day. The same student teacher goes on:

I worked in a child care center last quarter for a class I was taking ... a class of three, four, and five year olds. I thought then and I think now that it's very hard for a teacher to teach different age groups. It's hard to know what level to gear your unit. I do agree with you, though, about it helping the children. The three year olds were reading better than some of the five year olds. The older children were reading to the younger children and this was motivating the older ones as well as the younger ones. The young children wanted to be able to read like their peers, and the older children felt they were important. So, you see, *I agree that this situation helps the children, but my question is, what does the teacher do about planning her lesson? Who or what level should it be geared to?*" (Ed. italics)

This is a sad story, again, probably repeated tens of thousands of times every year. It makes me think of one of those Walt Disney nature films—but run backwards, the butterfly turning into a caterpillar. This young, smart, observant, perhaps even potentially gifted teacher is being turned, *by her training*, into an incompetent. She *sees* the children teaching and learning from each other, sees that it works, that they learn better. But her head has been stuffed so full of nonsense about "methods," "lesson plans," and "gearing her unit," that she cannot make use of what she has been told by her

own experience. She has been made immune to experience, even her own. Unless good luck—hers and ours—takes her out of the classroom, she is well on her way toward inflicting on bored and resisting children forty years' worth of units and lesson plans.

Reading Readiness

A while ago I wrote a letter to the New Schools Exchange Newsletter, which they printed, as did (later) the magazine Green Revolution. I wrote, in part:

Our professional experts on the “teaching” of reading have said a great many foolish things, but none more foolish than the notion that the way to get children “ready to read” is to show them a lot of books full of nothing but pictures and ask them a lot of silly questions about them. This is standard practice almost everywhere, as far as I know.

The proper analogy can be found, as is so often true, with children learning to speak, that extraordinary intellectual feat we all accomplished before the adults got it into their heads that they could “teach” us. Children get ready to speak by hearing speech all around them. The important thing about that speech is that the adults, for the most part, are *not* talking in order to give the-children a model. They are talking to each other because they have things to say. So the first thing the baby intuits, figures out, about the speech of adults, is that it is *serious*. Adults talk to make things happen. They talk, and things *do* happen. The baby thinks, feel this is a pretty serious activity, well worth doing.

When I was a kid, I taught myself to read, as many children do. Nobody taught me, and as far as I can remember, nobody helped me very much or read aloud to me. When we were a little older, a grandmother read aloud to my sister and me, but by then we were already skillful readers. She read the Dr. Doolittle books by Hugh Lofting, and to sit on the sofa, one on each side, was a very happy scene, all the more so because she read these stories with the greatest seriousness, without a touch of sentimentality or condescension, no “cute” inflections in her voice.

One of the things that made me want to read was that in those days (long, long ago) children’s books had very few pictures in them. There were a few illustrations here and there—magnificent ones, many of them painted by Andrew Wyeth’s father, N.C. Wyeth. Pirates, knights, Scottish highland chiefs—great pictures. But there weren’t enough of them in any one book to give me any idea of what the stories were about, so I realized that to find out what those pictures meant I was going to have to read the book. Which I soon

learned to do.

What children need to get ready for reading is exposure to a lot of print. Not pictures, but *print*. They need to bathe their eyes in print, as when smaller they bathed their ears in talk. After a while, as they look at more and more print, these meaningless forms, curves, and squiggles begin to steady down, take shape, become recognizable, so that the children, without yet knowing what letters or words are, begin to see, as I once did myself, after looking at a page of print in an Indian type face, that *this* letter appears *here*, and again *here*, and that group of letters appears *there*, and again *there*. When they've learned to see the letters and words, they are ready to ask themselves questions about what they mean and what they say. But not before, just as, when I am learning a foreign language, there is no use telling me that such and such a word means such and such a thing until my ears have become sharp enough to pick it out from other people's talk.

All of which leads to a concrete suggestion. I propose that schools, or people not sending their children to any school, or anyone who wants to make it easier for children to *discover* how to read, use as one of their "reading readiness materials" the large print edition of the *N.Y. Times*. The print is large enough for children to see and recognize. The paper is clearly a part of the adult world, and therefore attractive. It is serious. It has real information in it. It can be put up on walls, etc., but is not so precious that one has to worry about its being torn, defaced, etc. A year's subscription brings enough printed material so that it could be shared out among many schools, families, etc. In low income communities, it might actually be put up on the walls of buildings or the windows of stores, for children (and others) to look at. In some cases it might be defaced or torn down. But not, perhaps, if everyone knew what it was up there for. Beyond this, I would suggest that we put into the visual environment of young children, both in school and out, and not just in the pre-reading years but for a while thereafter, all kinds of written stuff from the adult world. Thus, among other things, timetables, roadmaps, ticket stubs, copies of letters, political posters, bills, various kinds of official forms, copies of bank statements, copies of instruction manuals from various machines, copies of contracts, warranties, all those little throw-aways that we find in banks, etc. In short, lots of stuff from that adult world out there where all those people are doing all those mysterious and interesting things. Oh, and old telephone books, above all, classified telephone books.

Talk about social studies; a look at the Yellow Pages tells us more than any textbook about what people do, and what there is *to* do.

Note, too, that all this stuff is free, so there is no problem in its not being available to low income kids.

I have sent copies of the large print *Times* to some families I know. What they did with them, if anything, I don't know. One family said that the children liked the paper, used it in many different ways, and that one child became very interested in the crossword puzzles, which I had not expected. But then, one can never guess what children may be interested in.

On Class Bias

A mother and teacher recently wrote me a letter, to which I replied, in part:

“You say, ‘the only people who can hope to get their kids out of the schools safely are upper or middle class whites.’ Not so, or at least not necessarily so. Some of the people who right now have their children out of school are not middle class at all. Only a week or so ago I talked with a woman who some years ago ran a paid tutoring service in San Francisco for parents whose children were not in school. She told me that about 70% of her clients were working class families. I do not yet know whether these people had taken their children out of school with the school’s consent, or whether they had simply hidden their children from the schools. I remember her saying ‘It seemed as if every bus driver in the city had his kids out of school.’ I did ask her why these parents had taken their children out. She said that in almost every case the schools were not helping these children learn and were saying that they were incapable of learning. Some families simply refused to accept this and began teaching or having their children taught at home. I will find out more about this, and will write about it in *GWS*.

You also say, ‘If the children are young, it means in most cases that their mothers must stay home instead of working.’ Well, that depends on what you mean by young. Another mother wrote about this. In my reply I said that six year old children probably needed an adult with them for most of the day, but that ten year olds and probably eight year olds did not, at least not if they had been trained and prepared for independence and self-reliance, which seems to me perfectly possible. Since all this is coming out in *GWS #4*, I won’t repeat it here.

Later you say, ‘working class, and especially Black, parents who take their children out of school are likely to be hounded by the authorities to the fullest possible extent.’ Well, again, this depends, for one thing, on whether the authorities *know* that the children are out of school. Is this an easy thing to conceal from the authorities? In large cities, I would say that it was. As we all know, very high percentages of the children enrolled in big city public schools are truant every day. The *Boston Globe* reported not long ago that, on an average day, only about 70% of the children enrolled in the schools here are actually in school. If it is that easy for kids just to hang out in the

streets, it ought to be even easier for them to be at home doing something interesting and worthwhile. You are absolutely 100% right when you say that if push comes to shove and the parents get into a really open dispute with the authorities, poor people, especially non-white, are going to have a much harder time of it than middle class whites. No argument about that at all. What I am saying is that most of the time it should be possible to avoid such disputes.

Later you say, “poor kids need a high school diploma more than middle class kids do—they have a much harder time getting a job without it.” True. But kids can get high school diplomas without *going* to a high school, for example by taking high school correspondence courses. Also, people can stay out of schools for quite a number of years, and then go back in. No one has to decide to leave schools forever. They can step off the school track whenever they want, and get back on it when they want—in all probability, ahead of the people who stayed on it.

You say, “A related problem is that working class parents have less confidence in being able to teach their own kids (because if you’re so smart why ain’t you rich?), and therefore in fact *are* less able to teach their kids.” True enough. But this is almost equally true of college graduates. It really is. In any socio-economic group, the number of people who think that they are capable of teaching their children and doing a better job than the schools is *extremely* small. We have to begin with them, show what’s possible, and hope that other people will make the effort. In every case, it takes a kind of leap of faith.

On the matter of “overthrowing the social structure,” see my little article “On Social Change” in *GWS #1*. The word “overthrow” simply does not describe any series of events that I can possibly imagine, certainly not in this country. I not only would not agree that it is impossible to get profound social change by small gradual steps, but would insist that that is the only way.

You speak later of building “anything more than a small group of white drop-outs from society.” It is certainly not the intention of *GWS* to make “dropouts.” Quite the reverse. I am interested in helping young people to find ways to live active, responsible lives in society, to find work worth doing.

You say, and I agree 100%, “we should help each other teach our kids, teach each other’s kids; arrange our lives so that larger numbers of people than just nuclear families share the responsibility of de-schooling (may I say

unschooling) and educating children. I am thinking, for example, of neighborhood discussion groups about what the schools do to children and why. What experiences have people had with the schools, and what do these experiences show? Parents can give each other advice about how to fight in various situations, and help each other construct alternatives. I do not at all mean that we should water down what we say in order to be more acceptable to more people. I think we should be absolutely straight forward with as many people as we can who are oppressed by schools, and I think we will find many people who agree and have a lot of experience and ideas to offer.” And I agree with your next observation, “also I think this kind of support would help kids and parents who are not yet ready to pull out of school to at least see their school experience in a psychologically healthy way. It would help them to direct their anger at the schools rather than turn it inward and blame themselves as the schools want them to.” Absolutely; in fact I first made that point in the early part book *What Do I Do Monday*.

You later speak of “a decision, which, if we make it, (my husband and I), may get us into a lot of trouble.” I believe very strongly in avoiding any and all such troubles if you possibly can. I see no point in direct confrontations with the authorities if you can avoid them, certainly not until we are a good deal stronger than we are now. I am not interested in heroic defeats. I think we ought to think of ourselves, if we have to use a military metaphor, like pilots who have parachuted down behind enemy lines in time of war. The thing to do is to be as inconspicuous as possible.

P.S. You speak of being “worried” about overdoing the bookishness. I think we have to lock horns with this issue. There was a time, fifty and more years ago, when poor and working class people in this country were not afraid of books on serious subjects. To people who asked me about helping their children, I would say something like this, “You have to get over the idea that books are for rich people, and not for you. Your children will not think of books as an interesting and useful way to find out about the world unless you yourself do.” So I would have no hesitation in asking people to read this or that, whatever it might be. Most of my books are written in very simple language; if there are things which people don’t understand, they can ask you, or me. That is part of the process of getting smart, not being afraid to ask questions when one doesn’t understand something.”

No Comment

From a story in the New York Times, May 7, 1978:

The minimum competency movement has built on earlier trends such as the “back to basics” movement, and the cumulative changes in the approach to the teaching of reading were evident here in the millions of dollars of new instructional materials on exhibit (at a conference of more than 10,000 teachers, reading specialists, and others at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association) in Houston’s convention center.

From a Mother

My daughter, 6, has attended schools on and off for a few years and *always* learns more in the “off” times!

After several months in public school her formerly perfect numbers are often backwards.

Because of a teacher’s remark to her in kindergarten, “If you’re such a good reader, why are you poor in Math?” !!!

After months of “cooling it” about Math and lots of manipulative counting “games,” she’s enjoying Math again—but still thinks she’s *bad* in Math.

I can see—“socialization” creeping into her ways and I want her out of school!

As a “welfare mother,” I get additional hassles about schooling for my kids. As a former English teacher, I may be able to arrange some “home study” deal, but am afraid to ask the authorities for info, which could lead to my entrapment. They are already questioning my child’s tardy and attendance record, so I’m trying to keep as low a profile as I can.

A few months later:

I got in touch with a free, open school which I had heard good reports about—the X School. They agreed to take my daughter on their enrollment as a correspondence, home-study student. When I asked if they wanted to send her workbook sheets to them for supervision and checking, the teacher said, “Is she addicted to workbooks? (Ed. note: Many children are.) We’ll get her through withdrawal with some ditto sheets, until she gets creative again.” I loved it!

Since mine is the first such arrangement they have made, I want to wait a while before spreading the news—until we see how well it works.

One day I decided to take out of school (after several weeks of one-or-two days per week attendance due to various complaints—headache, bellyache, sore throat) I walked into the “open” classroom, with its Science Corner, its Library nook, its Life Science (animals) areas, etc. and felt a wave of uncertainty. “Can I provide as rich and diverse an environment? Will she resent being taken away from her peers?” Then I noticed that I have *never* seen anyone working independently or in a group—in any of these nifty study areas! Then I noticed that 5 little boys (excluded from the “group

singing”) were writing “I Must Behave In Class” ten times on pieces of paper.

That did it!

I told the teachers and principal that we would soon be moving and that L would be enrolled at the X School. Transfer papers were rapidly issued and we walked out—free!

L went through a few days of sadness about leaving “her” school, but soon began doing math games, drawing great pictures, reading a biography of Thomas Jefferson and a book on Astronomy (she’s 6!).

We lie low in the morning and then if she’s asked why she’s not in school, she says she’s “connected to” the X school. Soon we’ll drive there (about 1 hr.) and meet the teachers and set up whatever needs doing to keep the authorities off us.

If I’m accepted at the University, we’ll be moving there and I’ll “neglect” to enroll her anywhere, continuing her X School thing. Another option possible is to make my home a “field school” of the X School and me their “delegated teacher.” (Ed note—this is a new idea to me. Sounds like something we ought to try in some other places)

I feel great about the decision and L seems so much less tense and hyped up. The secret, think, is to not ask anyone for permission—then no one has to say no.

Guess what! She’s not writing any numbers or letters backwards anymore!

You were right—the Calif. State law is very lenient regarding private schools and very vague about what constitutes one. Thank you again for your wonderful encouragement and excellent newsletter.

Access To D.C.

We are a family of three, mother, father, and daughter Susan, age 8 years this May, who have been home tutoring each other for 2 years. After we had watched our beautiful daughter's life, liberty, and creativity systematically destroyed by kindergarten teachers, Susan decided she wanted to stay at home the next year. The last chapter of *Instead Of Education* gave us strength, especially the last paragraph. For us, schools are foreign lands that are difficult to imagine. Our life is free and our work and learning are directed at goals that we hold dear to our own needs, not the goals of society. We have taken control over our lives, we have attained power to run our own affairs. Susan takes care and responsibility for herself, she stands on her own two strong legs, she speaks clearly, thinks clearly and answers only to her conscience. She is happy, talkative, interesting and interested and can choose for her life any damn thing she pleases.

We live in Washington, DC. on Capitol Hill about two miles from the museums of the Smithsonian Institution. Susan and her mother walk there almost every day, observing, playing, meeting people, going to movies, listening to music, and riding the merry-go-round. They see a fantastic variety of nature movies. They know art and history museums exhibit by exhibit. Susan can drag you through the history of the universe, through natural history, on up to the latest Mars landing. They eat lunch near the water fountain, see the latest sculpture, take pictures of their favorite spots, and marvel at the beautiful spring and fall days. They attend mime shows, tape record jazz concerts, ride the double decker bus to their favorite "explore gallery" where things can be played and jumped in. Tuition is very cheap, we all have fun, and we all learn a great deal.

Susan lives in a world of marvelous *abundance*; her resources are unlimited. She has not been "socialized" by school to think that education is a supply of scarce knowledge to be competed for by hungry, controlled children. She doesn't play dumb "Schlemiel." Our home and neighborhood are like a garden full of fresh fruit to be picked at arm's length by all who want to.

She likes to paint, draw, color, cut out and paste. She compares her work to that in the museum. We give our comments and ideas when requested.

We have hobbies in astronomy and camping. Her father is a pediatrician who enjoys working with her in constructing electronic gear. She has excellent soldering techniques and has soldered many connections in our home brew electric computer now used in his office.

Her mother works with Susan on home art projects and nature studies. They cook together, shop together and are much envied by her father.

In D.C. home tutoring is allowed by law. Biannual reports are required by a B.A. or equivalent home tutor (parent or friend). Fifteen hours per week of instruction. We are interested in contacting other people in the DC area who home tutor their own children and who are interested in their own continued learning about the world. We are interested in people who want to help children take power over their own lives and future.

Sincerely, Robert and Sharon and Susan Dickey
From a later letter:

Susan has always had small, very well-coordinated hands and began working with circuit boards at the age of five, wiring and soldering transistors and resistors. The inner workings of televisions, radios, stereos, and other electronic devices seem to mystify not only children but most adults, and this activity has served to de-mystify Susan along with bolstering her confidence in her ability to do something of significant value and to be able to do it with a man on an adult to adult level. Since our tutoring at home is completely legal with the District of Columbia government, I openly admit to most people that Susan doesn't go to school and that she's tutored by us at home. I am so independently secure in my thinking and am having such a positively rewarding experience from home tutoring that I can only view the feedback I get from other people as amusing. It's amazing that grown adults with education and experience in the world will admire and envy what we are doing, yet they view themselves as completely unqualified for home-tutoring their own children...Our experience with Susan has only been positive and rewarding and to see her in action, to view her productivity, and to speak with her gives testimony enough for the positive.

From Julia

One of our readers (J in GWS #2) wrote to another (D in GWS #2), saying in part:

Last spring and summer as we put together our plans to take the kids out of school, we decided that our best excuse (as far as the school system was concerned) was that we were going to be transferred in the middle of the school year, possibly to England. We said this in writing twice: once in our initial letter in May, 1977, and once in a long essay I wrote in August to explain our reasons, philosophy and capabilities. After several phone calls, letters, and a visit by us to the superintendent, he finally relented and sent us his letter of approval. We could hardly believe that in his letter, which we always thought and still do think is the only important document in this whole mess, he said not a word about tests for our children or other educational requirements (except that we were to use the Calvert course, as we had planned). The letter also said that if we did not receive final orders for duty outside the country the children were to be re-enrolled in public school.

But this is what the superintendent forgot—that we can write and type letters even better than he can. A total of seven letters have passed between his office and us since March 3; his four, terse and authoritative; our three, long, impassioned and detailed. One of ours was three single-spaced typewritten pages, with four Xeroxed enclosures, and we sent all of this, all seven pages, not only to him but to all the other people (school system lawyer, head of Department of Pupil Services, and two school principals) he was sending carbon copies to.

One of the people I contacted for support was a Board of Education member; I asked her if there was some way we could appeal to the Board of Education. She called me right away and assured me there was a long red tape procedure that would have to be followed before our case could leave the school system and be given to the Juvenile Court. A pupil personnel worker would have to contact us, forms would have to be filled out (slowly, she suggested), and a decision would have to be made. If we didn't like the decision, we could appeal to the Board of Education. She urged me to check out the grievance procedure in the Board of Education policy manual, which I did (there is a copy in the Public Library). I asked her if she thought the

superintendent might try to cut the red tape in our case in order to make an example of us, and she didn't see why he should since no publicity has attended our case.

So what it all comes down to is partly what you've been giving an admirable example of in GWS (Ed. note: She is referring to D here.), *knowing* the laws and regulations that apply; but it also helps if you can think like a bureaucrat. In Maryland, if your children aren't in school, the worst that can happen is a \$50/day fine. No one is precipitously arrested; children are not separated from parents. (Ed. note: These things have happened in Ohio, Connecticut, and perhaps other states.) So at least you're physically safe while you waste your time and theirs writing letters. Apparently very few people end up being fined.

In a letter to GWS, J goes on, saying in part:

The following is taken from a newspaper article on truancy in Anne Arundel County: "Out of 3,000 cases referred to the pupil personnel department last year, Miller (head of the department) said, 300 went to juvenile services for hearings. Miller indicated that it is difficult to enforce the attendance law, citing 25 requests for formal hearings last year that were denied by the courts. Under the law parents could be fined up to \$50, but Miller implied the law has been difficult to enforce. In the last 15 years, he said, there have been no more than six or seven cases where a district court judge fined parents.

My husband talked with this Mr. Miller on the phone once this spring; the conversation was cordial, like two old antagonists meeting again. He said he was following the superintendent's orders in calling to tell us we would have to put the children back in school. When my husband said that we wouldn't and once again explained why and then asked what the next step was, Miller said he didn't know; he would have to go back to the Superintendent to find out what to do. Except for a letter confirming the telephone conversation, we never heard from them again.

Regarding The Final Report: *Legal implications of Compulsory Education* by William Aikman and Lawrence Kotin of the Mass. Center for Public Interest Law (see GWS #3), it is not easy to find a copy of it. I had my local library conduct a search for it through the state library system, without

success. Last summer. I wrote to the Mass. Center for Public Interest Law and never received an answer. Recently I wrote to the National Institute of Education and received from them a "Directory of ERIC Microfiche Collections (Arranged by Geographic Location)" and a form for ordering the Aikman-Kotin report. The report is not available except in microfiche and it costs 83¢ plus postage, which would be 85¢. (Ed. note: She wrote 85¢—could she mean 98¢?) Write to ERIC Document Reproduction Service, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210. Order ED number 130387 and specify microfiche. Most public libraries probably have microfiche readers. Or call the nearest university, community college or state or local department of education, ask if they have an ERIC microfiche collection and if you may search through it for this report. Many of these places (according to the Directory) have facilities for reading and reproducing pages from ERIC documents.

Please use our names in GWS and put us in the directory; we'd be glad to hear from anyone now or after we move in July. Our new address will be:

Dennis and Julia McCahill

Staff/Cincusnaveur

Box 69

FPO New York 09510

P.S. This spring there is a series of six lectures being held at the public library all about how the judicial system of Maryland works. It is being presented by the Committee on Public Awareness of the Judiciary of the Maryland State Bar Association. I think any unschooler who thinks he may have to face court proceedings would do well to find out whether his own State Bar Association offers a similar service. They may be quite willing to answer requests for information. In any case, it is comforting just to have some idea how the courts work.

Thanks for another very helpful letter. Let me second the advice about dealing with bureaucrats. Bury them in paper. Send copies not only to people in the bureaucracy, but newspaper editors, political people, anyone you think might be interested. If the b'crats send you forms to fill in, fill them in slowly and I would suggest, a little bit incorrectly. Some of you may know *The Good Soldier Schweik*, for me one of the great comic novels, about an

ordinary Czech who frustrated, not to say maddened his Austro-Hungarian rulers and bosses by pretending to want to cooperate with them, all the while making as many and as serious mistakes as he dared. (An American version might be Step'n'Fetchit.) B'crats like to explain. Pretend to listen very intently—but then misunderstand. This stratagem may not be for everyone, but if it appeals to you, go as far with it as you can. Even if you don't want the particular report Julia is talking about, it might be a good idea to look into the ERIC facilities in your area anyway. It may be a way of getting hold of important books that have gone out of print. I will be talking about one such book in the next *GWS*.

To A Reader

P.S. As you can see from the enclosed Radcliffe Statement, I don't believe in the idea of "education" either. I think the idea of education is a deeper one than the idea of schooling, and on the whole a much worse one. I don't want to be understood as saying that I think that education is a wonderful thing but schooling a bad way to achieve it. I don't like the notion of *doing things* to people to make them better, whether or not we do these things in places called schools.

You say that the need to pass on human knowledge is a "social problem." That's like saying that the need to get oxygen in the bloodstream is a physical problem, which we "solve" by breathing. You and I don't breathe to "solve" the problem of getting oxygen in our bloodstream, we breathe because it's natural. A healthy society transmits knowledge without thinking about it, as it lives and does its work. When it begins to think about the "problem" of transmitting knowledge, it's already a sign that something is seriously wrong.

To describe learning as "an organic part of a holistic, human-scale community" seems at first reasonable enough. But there is still something seriously wrong with it. In such a community, nobody would even think about "learning." Life would be what it always has been—work, play, ceremony, politics, (large-scale or small), family, friends, sex, birth, sickness, old age, death. Merely to *talk* about "learning" is somehow to separate it from all of these.

It's like the old story about the man with the long beard. He had an enemy, who thought for years about how to do the bearded man in. Finally he said one day to the bearded man, "When you go to bed at night do you put your beard under the covers, or outside the covers?" The bearded man had never thought of it before. That night when he went to bed the question came back into his mind. He put the beard outside the covers, but that didn't feel right, and he couldn't get to sleep. He put it underneath the covers, but that didn't feel right either, and he still couldn't get to sleep. He tried it half in, half out, tossed and turned all night trying to figure out what to do with his beard, and soon died of insomnia. I think it is often a very dangerous business to raise unconscious processes up into the level of consciousness, to turn natural acts into "skills" which can only be learned by being taught.

Later you say “All this requires ‘teachers’ of tremendous humility and sensitivity to their potential power in a school situation.” Who are these “teachers,” who have nothing else to do? A healthy community wouldn’t have anybody in it who did nothing else but “teach.” All human beings are teachers. Teaching, like learning, is an integral part of all human life, and when we make of it a special and separate kind of activity, we instantly and inevitably corrupt it.

I think “free education” is a contradiction in terms.

From a Father

Mike Murphree writes from Florida, saying, in part:

My wife and I wanted to say that while we enjoy GWS, all the talk about lawyers and going to jail only makes us paranoid. We are low profile people and don't believe in confrontations. Our little girl just turned 7 and would normally be in the first grade, but we never registered her and haven't had any problems about this. Right now, we live in a married housing section of a university, which is a fairly liberal area. Our friends know that we don't send our daughter to school, though we haven't publicized this. They just shrug their shoulders and don't worry about it. When we move from here in June we will continue our low profile and don't expect trouble. We're also not going to look for trouble by telling the schools we don't want to send our children there. If anyone asks why our daughter doesn't go to school we'll probably just tell them that she has a private tutor and change the subject.

My wife and I also both wonder about all the talk about home study courses. We're not interested in *teaching* our children (we also have a boy who is 16 months old). The idea of sitting down for a half hour a day and going over a workbook with my daughter is very unappealing. We are interested in her learning, but we thought that was done by providing access to the world, conversations, doing things and just being involved in living.

It seems to me that some people are still hung up about having their children be winners (as is discussed in *Instead of Education*). I'm not a very ambitious person myself and if my children do not become lawyers, doctors, or molecular biochemists that's fine with me.

My wife and I do not want to send our children to school, because we wish to see a saner society develop and we feel this is a step in the right direction. It is the same reason we subscribe to *Mother Earth News* and are looking around for a farm to buy. We feel that GWS can help promote a saner society. This is what we would like to see in GWS, the affirmation of a way of life where everyone cheers when the SORRY man reaches home. (Ed. note: See "Capable Children" in GWS #3.) Nancy Plent mentioned in GWS #3 that she would like to hear about people who didn't go to school. While talking together on a show on PBS Rudolf Serkin and Isaac Stern (Ed. note: A very famous classical pianist and violinist, for those who don't follow that music.)

both revealed they never went to school. Neither seems any the worse for it.

I just remembered a story about some Navajo children in a reservation school. Whenever a group of them were sent to the board to do an arithmetic problem, they would all finish at the same time. The fast ones would wait for the slower ones to figure it out so as not to embarrass them. (Ed. note: The schools combat this with all their strength.) This is something we should all strive for. The continual ranking of children that schools do is one of their worst activities. (Ed. note: But one of their real purposes, one of the things which the general public *insists* on.) If you don't want to send your kids to school, then you shouldn't worry about their progress or compare them with other children (favorably or unfavorably).

My wife feels that you got a little carried away with the right-left discussion. The point to be made is that it is possible to grow up and live a happy and productive life without having a clear understanding of right and left. It is basically an academic distinction. It just doesn't seem good to make such a big thing out of it. If your conclusion is to have faith in the kids and basically let them work it out for themselves, why go into such detail?

Your idea about the rug with right and left footprints on it is a good idea, but it sounds like something they would have in a progressive school (excuse me for the cheap shot). It goes back to what I said about *teaching* children. I don't want to spend my time thinking of cute, non-threatening ways to teach them academic ideas. While some things like the rug might occasionally be helpful it is very easy to get carried away. Just give them the fiddle and let them join in the playing.

There certainly is a tendency for teachers who are good at thinking of clever ways to teach things to get carried away with it. I recognize it in myself. More comment on Mike's good letter in the next section.

A Reply

I'm sorry all that talk about lawyers, etc. makes you anxious, but this is a part of the political world within which we unschoolers have to work. People are in cold fact threatened with jail, or in some cases even sent to jail. One of the things *GWS* wants to do is to prepare people as well as possible for what may happen if they begin to take their children out of school. I agree with you that simply not telling the schools about children is one way, and a good way to proceed. But it is not everyone's way. As Nancy Plent rightly points out, if you live in a small town you are just not going to be able to keep your kids out of school without the school finding out about it. Other unschoolers, also living in small towns, and planning to live there for a long time, want to live as regular members of the community and not a kind of outsider or outlaw, and therefore feel that it is important that their unschooling be out in the open. People will disagree on such matters of tactics; *GWS* aims to be as useful as possible to all of them.

As you will have seen in *GWS #4*, it seems to be very easy for people in Florida to call their own home a school. In other states this is very difficult.

I agree entirely with what you say about teaching your children. Other readers of *GWS* may not agree. What I am trying to say is that if you are going to get into teaching your children, there are ways of doing it that are much better than others. Also, as in the case of "J," (*GWS #2*) using some approved home study program may be an unavoidable part of the deal that some people have to make with their local schools.

I'm sure you are right about some people being hung up on wanting their children to be winners, though they might speak in terms of a "happy, productive, etc. life.' Others might say that, while they don't particularly care whether their children become prominent in society or not, they are eager *not* to close off any such possibilities, should they prove to be what the child wants. Such people would say, "If my child decides someday that s/he wants to be a doctor or a lawyer, I don't want to have made that impossible by unschooling her/him.' That seems to me fair enough.

I had and have a number of reasons for putting in the article about Right and Left. For one thing, some of the people who read *GWS*, and I hope as time goes on more and more of them, are teachers, educators, teachers of

teachers, educational psychologists, etc. I want them, as well as any parents whose children may be having trouble with right and left, to consider very seriously that the difficulty may lie *in the world* and not in the child. There is nothing more guaranteed to get children stuck with one of those fancy sounding school labels than showing some confusion about right and left. Some people, now or in the future, who read *GWS*, may have children who have had such labels stuck on them, and may themselves believe that those labels are valid. I want to persuade them that they are not.

Also, there is the legal question. I don't think we are going to persuade the courts for a very long time to come to allow people to escape from compulsory schooling merely by showing that most schools are cruel, inhumane, everything you yourself believe them to be. But we may be able to get our children out of school if we can show that in important matters the schools are simply incompetent, don't know how to do their work, and that these diagnoses that they are constantly slapping on children have no basis in fact. The stupidity of schools, in connection with this matter of right and left, is or may be part of the legal case which we will someday build against them. As far as the little right-left reminder goes, if it doesn't appeal to you, skip it. *GWS* is not a Manual about "How To Teach Your Child At Home." It is a collection of suggestions for people to use if they think they may be useful. If you don't care whether your children know the difference between right and left, that's fine, I think I would agree with you. But some people do or may care. I want to speak to their needs as well.

I want to return again to the point of the piece entitled *Mixed Allies*, in #2. A lot of very different people, with very different ideas about children and the way to bring them up, are going to be reading *GWS*, and for very different reasons. I don't want the newsletter to be useful to a very small group of people who agree with me—or you, or anyone else—about *everything*. I agree with you about helping to promote a saner society. Since I think that schooling is one of the important things that makes the present society unsane or downright insane, I think unschooling is an important part of that process. But I don't think there is any reason at all why all unschoolers, or all readers of *GWS*, should agree with me on what constitutes a saner society or the best ways to get there.

We have thought about dating each issue of *GWS*, but don't plan to do it. For many reasons, we think it is helpful both to the readers and to us if all

subscriptions start with Issue #1. We are not, after all, printing stock market quotations or baseball scores or other news that goes quickly out of date. Most of what we print in *GWS* will be as useful in five or ten years as on the day we print it, and we don't want people who like the magazine to miss any of it. Nor do we want to have to reprint things for the sake of people who may come in later. In short, we don't make the distinction you make between current and back issues. All issues are equally current. But, feel free to put your own date on any issues as they arrive. I can't imagine that we will ever print *anything* more important than, say, the articles in *GWS #1* about Jud's girl staying out of school, or about counting, or the little study tip, or etc. I want everyone who reads *GWS* to read those pieces. In that sense, the word "newsletter" may be a little bit misleading. What we really are, I guess, is a reference book published a piece at a time.

The Therapeutic State

I recently wrote Erwin Knoll, editor of The Progressive (Madison, Wisc.), saying in part:

The term “Therapeutic State” was coined by Dr. Thomas Szasz, as far as I know. I define it thus. In the Therapeutic State (hereafter TS), if A, usually some sort of “professional” or “expert,” wants to do something to B that he thinks would be good for B, and can persuade enough other people, C, O, E, F, etc. that it *will* be good for B, he doesn’t have to persuade B. In fact he doesn’t even have to *ask* B. The TS is built on the idea-of Compulsory Help. The TS’s official helpers have the power to say to anyone, “you need our help, whether you admit it or not, and we are going to help you whether you want it or not.” In the TS, no one has a right to refuse what the professional helpers have decided he needs.

The TS inverted the greatest anti-libertarian device of the last 300 years. It is to call unwanted behavior, not “crime,” but “sickness,” and the means to prevent and control that behavior, not “punishment” but “treatment.” With this little invention, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and all of the legal and political defenses which people have struggled to create against tyranny over hundreds of years, disappear in a puff of smoke. All the professional helpers have to do is certify that someone is “sick,” and they can do anything they want to him that they think will make him “well.”

You are surely familiar with the fundamental legal principle is of the “Assumption of Innocence,” which holds that people must be judged innocent of crime or wrong until they have been proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. There is no comparable Assumption of Health. The professional helper does not have to *prove* to me, or to a jury of my peers, that I am “sick” and in need of “treatment.” All he has to do is assert it.

It is a great deal more than a strange coincidence that in Russia today opponents of the regime are classed as “mentally ill” and sent to “mental hospitals” where they are “treated” until the state judges that they are “sane” enough to be let out. Our psychiatrists, etc., get very indignant about this—when it happens in Russia. But in this country, when something more than a million children, and perhaps much more than that, are forcibly dosed with extremely dangerous psycho-active drugs, like Ritalin, to “cure” them of

imaginary diseases like “hyperactivity,” etc., hardly anyone complains.

In the pre-Therapeutic State, it was relatively hard to use the law to control people’s behavior. First, one had to get laws passed saying that certain acts were illegal. Secondly, these laws had to survive tests in the courts. Thirdly, some government agent had to formally accuse a citizen of committing the illegal act. Fourthly, in a process which was in itself difficult and time-consuming, the government had to prove that the accused person had actually carried out the illegal act. Even with all we know about the difference in justice for rich and poor, this system put a heavy burden on people who wanted to tell other people what to do and what not to do. But in the TS, all these cumbersome steps can be avoided, by the means I describe. Just call the unwanted behavior “sick,” and the proper experts can do anything they want in order to “treat” it.

Quite a good deal has been written about the abuses of the mental illness system, about the trivial reasons for which people can be put in mental hospitals and kept there for very long periods of time, and about the terrible things that can be done to them. I won’t add to this. But I do want to point out that compulsory schooling is another example of the TS, in which children are forcibly “treated” for the “crime” of ignorance. In order to prevent this “crime,” society says, with the support of virtually everyone, that we can take children for as many days a year as we want, compel them to be at certain places, usually within certain rooms and even certain seats, where for the most part they are not allowed to move or even to talk, and there can do to them anything we want, including what in any other context in society would be called torture. Small wonder that after twelve or more years under such a regime most young people don’t take very seriously the idea of rights or civil liberties, their own or anyone else’s, and do not protest when the government or the police or the professional helpers make still further inroads into them. These ideas may come as something of a shock and may even seem absurd. For reasons I have never really understood, the political left and civil-libertarians have always had a very soft spot in their heart for compulsory schools. I don’t fool myself that this will be easy to change. But I hope what I’ve written here may perhaps induce you to think about it in a slightly new way.

I urge most strongly that you read and give serious thought to the Schrag-Divoky book *The Myth Of The Hyperactive Child*, which goes into many of

these matters in greater detail. (Available from GWS, \$2 + 30¢ postage) And in general, I would ask all libertarians and all those on the political left, “How can we expect to treat children like slaves for the first eighteen to twenty-one years of their life, and suppose that they will then magically turn into free and independent citizens?”

A Speech Defect

A parent writes that his son, who is not in school, and is in other ways a very happy, active, growing child, has a speech defect (involving mostly vowels) that makes it hard for others to understand him. The parent has not taken the child to any local professional speech therapist, fearing that such therapists might want to consult with the child's schoolteachers, and finding that he had none, might report him to the school authorities. But he is also afraid that if he does not take the child to a therapist, and later on the schools do track him down, the fact of his not having sought "professional help" will be used against him by the schools and/ or courts. He asked what I thought about this. I replied, in part:

"I think I agree that if the schools catch you they will in fact be looking for any nail to hang you on. There is a very real possibility that they might try to use your "failure" to "seek professional help" for speech difficulties as some kind of further evidence of unfitness. After all, in more than one place the schools are trying to hang a "neglect and abuse" charge on parents for merely failing to send children to school.

Therefore, I think it would indeed be prudent to "cover yourself" by consulting with a "professional," providing this does not entail the even greater risk that the "professional" would turn you into the schools. It might be wise to look up some of the literature on speech therapy, and write some letters to *distant* speech therapists, who would presumably have no interest in turning you in to your local school authorities. In other words, if one day you could show a court a whole lot of correspondence you had had with speech therapists in different parts of the country, to seek out the most effective therapies, I think it would probably be enough to free you of any charge of neglect. And if the speech therapists are like any other kind of therapists, they are so full of disagreements about the best way to treat various kinds of defects that you could say quite honestly and convincingly that you had sought opinions from a great many different sources in order to get some kind of consensus of opinion.

In this correspondence you might also say to these distant experts that since you live in a fairly isolated rural area and were not close to experienced speech therapists, you were eager to find out all you could about ways of

working on it that you could practice in your own home. It is perfectly possible that absolutely none of the people you corresponded with might give you any encouragement on this, but would all say, "Don't try to do it yourself, seek out professional help.' But if you could get a couple of these distant experts to say that the techniques were in fact perfectly simple and that they could be carried out by you in your own home, this would be still further protection.

I agree with you that the problem is urgent, and I think you would be wise to make a strong effort to convince your child of this. I assume here, as always, that children are intelligent and responsible human beings, who want to understand how the world around them works. Were I in your shoes, I wouldn't hesitate to say to A that even if he wasn't worried about his speech defects, I was very worried, for all the reasons you have mentioned. I would not hide from him at all the fact that, whether he noticed it or not, other people, both adults and children, were either making malicious fun of his way of talking or were upset and even angered by it. I would add that I thought there was a real chance that someone hearing him talk this way might report him to various authorities, school and otherwise. I would go on to say that if this happened, those same authorities might very well use this speech defect, and the fact of your not having gone to a professional, as a reason to try to take A away from you altogether. There are solid reasons for you to be afraid of this situation, and I think you have every right to convey to him as strongly as you can the strength and depth of, and reasons for, your fear. I would say, "This may not seem like an important problem to you, but it does to me, and I insist that we solve it and solve it quickly, or we may all be in very serious trouble.' This is one of the places where I would intervene quite forcibly to protect the child from a danger that he could not understand, just as I would not let him drink or eat everything he found in the medicine cabinet. In short, here is a position in which I would not hesitate to impose a good deal of adult authority.

There's no reason why this should take a long time. Children are good linguists, as you know. They very quickly pick up foreign languages. Once A is convinced that something really has to be done about this, you should get his speech straightened out, using the tape recorder, in a matter of months, or maybe even weeks. After all, learning to re-pronounce old words is in no way different from learning to pronounce new ones, and he is picking them up all

the time. The thing is to make him aware that he is saying things differently from you (and by extension other people) and that this is a bad situation which has to be changed quickly.”

Research

We can tell a good deal about how smart a particular group of experts is—or is not by the kinds of research they do—or do not do.

In World War I we first began to see evidence that prolonged anxiety, stress, and fear can have great and destructive effects on the human nervous system. The trenches were a kind of satanic laboratory of stress. More soldiers than ever before lived for much longer times than ever before in cold and wet, under the constant threat of death, often under continuous heavy bombardment. Under these conditions many men suffered a condition or disorder to which doctors gave the name “shellshock.” Some went stone deaf; some went totally blind; some became paralyzed, shook all over, lost all control of their muscles and limbs. The authorities first suspected faking, but it was soon clear that the affected soldiers were not faking. The only cure for these ailments, which in many cases looked like “physical” disorders, was to take these men out of stress, away from the front. After some time in a safe and calm place, they regained (in varying degrees) their sight, hearing, use and control of their limbs. Some—I don’t know how many—may even have gone back to the front. In World War II this happened again. Many of the British troops who spent days on the beaches at Dunkirk, totally exposed to continuous bombardment from both guns and planes, broke under this stress in exactly the same way. The doctors of World War II called their condition “psychoneurosis.” The cure was basically the same—to remove the afflicted men from the scene of stress and danger. There was some argument about how they should then be treated. One military psychiatrist (perhaps one of many) claimed that soldiers would recover more quickly from psychoneurosis if they were kept under strict military discipline and made to feel that their duty was to get back into action as quickly as possible. Others—I believe the majority—disagreed.

The point is that we had very strong evidence that stress can cause what seem to be gross physical disabilities. I myself began to see, not only among the children I taught, but in myself as I struggled for the first time to learn a musical instrument, that anxiety could make it much harder for the children, or myself, to think, to remember, or even to see. In *How Children Fail*, which came out in 1964 and has by now been read by a good many millions

of people in the education business, I described how one day, under pressure, I totally lost (for a short time) the ability to see meaningfully. Later, in *The Lives Of Children*, George Dennison described, in the most painful and almost clinical detail, the effects of stress and fear on one of his pupils. So it was reasonable to suppose, when educators began to claim that some children might be having trouble learning this or that because they had “perceptual handicaps,” that they might look for possible connections between such inferred “handicaps” and children’s fears and anxieties. So far, as far as I have been able to learn, very few of them seem to have done so.

Not long ago I was one of many speakers at a large conference of specialists in “learning disabilities.” Before more than a thousand people I reviewed the evidence for a connection between anxiety and stress and perceptual or other learning disorders. I spoke of the medical experience of two World Wars, and of my own experience as a teacher and as a beginning learner of music. Then I asked for a show of hands response to this question: “How many of you have heard of—only heard of, not done—any research on possible connections between perceptual handicaps in children and their anxiety, however measured? How many have heard of any research to find whether and to what degree lowering measurable anxiety in children might lessen the incidence of perceptual handicaps?”

In that roomful of over a thousand experts in this field, *only two people* raised their hands. What the others may have known, I do not know. But only two raised their hands.

I asked them what they knew. One told me of research I had long known about, done by a very original and controversial educator who, at least until very recently, had no degrees in Psychology and no standing whatever in the educational “establishment.” He had found high correlations between perceptual handicaps and children’s anxieties, and that lowering the anxieties did indeed greatly lower the incidence of such handicaps.

The other man who raised his hand did not speak. But later, he wrote me a letter. He is, and has been for some time, a Professor of Education at a leading university in the very city in which this conference was held. He too had suspected the kind of connection I talked about, had worked out a way of teaching reading that he thought might lessen this anxiety, had used this method to teach a group of students officially labeled “perceptually handicapped,” and had found that after quite a short time in his class, in the

opinion of their regular teachers, his students were much less handicapped than they had been before. This, I would add, in spite of the fact that his classroom was nowhere as stress-free as others I have known, seen, and written about, or as he himself might have made it if he had had more time, had not been under pressure to show some fairly quick results.

There were other questions I have asked at other places and times, but did not think to ask there. When I first heard that boys were supposed to be four or five times as likely to have “perceptual handicaps” or “learning disabilities” as girls, I asked, in a letter published in a national magazine, whether any research had been done to look for possible connections between this four or five to one ratio and the sex of the teacher. I have yet to hear of any. And it would surely be interesting to see what connections there might be between the incidence of “perceptual handicaps” in children and the measurable anxiety *of their teachers*. But again, as far as I know, no such research has been done.

We will have much more to say, in future issues of *GWS*, about this whole matter of “learning disabilities.

Skinner's Gun

A friend of mine, when still a student at Harvard, told me one day that he and a few friends had just had a very interesting conversation on the library steps with Prof. B. F. Skinner, famous for “inventing” behavior modification and operant conditioning.

But first of all, he did not “invent” behavior modification. The idea of using bribes and threats, rewards and punishments, to get people to do what we want, is very old, and is not made new by calling these rewards and punishments “positive and negative reinforcements.”

On the other hand, operant conditioning is a new invention, or at least a very new twist on an old one. It is a way of getting other people (or dogs, rats, pigeons, etc.) to do what you want, *without ever showing or telling them what want*. Very briefly, it works like this. If you have, say, an animal moving about at random, and if you give it a jolt of pleasure every time it moves, however slightly, in direction A, and a jolt of pain every time it moves, however slightly, in the opposite direction, after a while that animal will move almost directly in direction A, as far as it can. If you are watching human beings, and reward them every time they change their behavior, even in the slightest degree, in the direction of something you want them to do, after a while they will be doing that something you want, without your ever having told them to do it, and, what is even more important (and sinister), without their ever even having *decided* to do it. This is part of what Skinner means when he says, as he does all the time, that the human experience of willing and choosing is an illusion—all that has happened (he claims) is that without being aware of it we have been getting some kinds of reinforcements rewards or punishments—from the outside. Control those rewards and punishments, he says, and you control human behavior.

Oddly and ironically enough, this is exactly how, as I will describe in a later GWS, the behavior of schools as institutions is controlled.

Anyway, on this particular day, Skinner (so my friend said) told the students that if he could just find a way to gain total control of human behavior, he would feel that he had not lived in vain. In other writings he makes clear why he wants this control. He wants to use it, and thinks he could use it, to make some sort of “ideal” society, without war, poverty,

cruelty, or anyone of a thousand other ills. This dream, ambition, delusion, is kindly enough. But it makes clear that Skinner (like most of his true believers and followers) is an exceptionally foolish man.

Now, believing in an absurd and mistaken theory about how humans think and feel does not of itself make Skinner foolish. The history of Science, after all, is a catalog of mistakes, a list of *wrong* answers, not right ones. But some very bright people have had very good reasons for believing (at least for a while) in some of those wrong answers. Even wanting to have control over all human behavior, though a rather grandiose ambition, does not of itself make Skinner foolish. What stamps him as foolish is thinking that if he *could* find a way to control all human behavior, *he* would be the one who would then be allowed to control it.

I have often imagined myself saying to him, “Fred, suppose you *could* invent what for metaphorical purposes we might call a Behavior Gun, a device such that, if you aimed it at someone and pressed the trigger, Z-Z-Z-AAAPP, that someone would thereafter do exactly what you wanted. What makes you think that *you* would be allowed to point and shoot the gun? How long do you think it would be before large strong hands would gently (or perhaps not so gently) pry your nice new Behavior Gun out of your hands, while a voice said, “Excuse us, Professor, we’ll just take that gun, thank you very much, if you don’t mind.’ Has the thought never occurred to you that someone, someday, might point and shoot that Behavior Gun at *you*?”

In a recent magazine article Skinner asks sadly why we don’t use what we already know about controlling human behavior. Oh, but Professor, we do! The trouble is that the “we” who are doing this controlling—military and political leaders, big businesses, advertising men and propagandists, the bosses of the mass media, tend to be people that Skinner (and I) do not much like or agree with. They do not seem to be particularly interested in using their power over human behavior to make a better world—though they probably have high-sounding words to justify whatever they want and do. They are (of all things!) mostly concerned to keep what power they have, and if possible to get even more. And any little tricks that Skinner and his equally woolly-minded behavior-modifying colleagues can think of to control human behavior, these people will be delighted to take over. Go, Professor, go!

What we (and he) would do better to think about is how to help people gain better control over their own behavior, and to resist better all those other

people—leaders, bosses, and experts of all kinds—who are trying to control it. This is one part of what *GWS* is about.

Let me now answer a question that no one has yet asked, but that some surely will. Why bother to condemn Skinner in *GWS*? What have his ideas, good or bad, to do with taking children out of school?

Just this. Everywhere the schools say (often in a court, to which they have brought some unschooling parents), “We are the only people who know anything about teaching children. Unless you do it our way, you’re doing it the wrong way.” But their ways of teaching are heavily influenced by Skinner’s theories. Many schools, and more every year, admit, no, *boast* that they are using behavior modification techniques in their teaching. So anything we can do to show that behavior modification and operant conditioning are the inventions of an essentially shallow and second-rate thinker may someday help people to persuade some court to let them teach their children at home.

School Story

In The Way It Spoized To Be, (Simon & Schuster, reprinted with permission) Jim Herndon tells about his first year of teaching, in a ghetto junior high school. Around November, the school mixed up his records, and told him that he would have to stop teaching until they could straighten them out. So, until after Christmas he worked at the Post Office, while a substitute teacher took his place. When he went back to his classes, the students had much to say about the substitute, Mrs. A.:

Mrs. A was a better teacher than I, she was a real teacher, I wasn't no real teacher, she really made them work, not just have them old discussions every day; no, man, they were learning spelling and sentences and all they was spoized to. Moreover she was strict and didn't allow fooling around—all in all they felt they'd been really getting somewhere. I looked in my grade book, up to now pretty empty of marks, and saw, sure enough, a whole string of grades after each name mostly, however, F's and zeroes. Many of them had nothing but zeroes, which I took to mean they had been busy not-doing this important work. I pointed this out to the class, but it didn't matter. They had been back on familiar ground; strict teacher, no fooling around, no smart-off, no discussions about how bad school was, and plenty of work. That was, after all, what school was and they were in favor of it.

7H was in a similar temper. They too had tales of plenty of real work, strict discipline, no talking, no gum, reading aloud every day, everybody—and then they came out with a long list of all of them who had been sent to the office for talking or chewing gum or refusing to read or laughing or getting mad at the teacher. Mrs. A gave them work on the board every day, they screamed, and she made them keep a notebook with all this work in it and they were spoized to bring it every day to work in and get graded on it. That was what real teachers did, they told me. I asked to see some of the notebooks; naturally no one had one. What about that? I asked. No use. She made us keep them notebooks, they all shouted. The fact that no one had kept or was keeping them notebooks didn't enter into it.

No, it didn't, and it still doesn't. What people want schools to do is make children learn things. Whether they actually learn them, or remember or make use of them, is not important.

(*The Way It Spoiled To Be* avail. from Holt Assoc., \$1.25 + 30¢ postage.)

A Legal Strategy

Nat Hentoff writes a regular column for the Village Voice, 80 University Place, New York, NY. 10003, in which he often attacks (among many other injustices and wrongs) so-called “corporal punishment.” Not long ago I wrote him, saying in part:

Just read your column about the kid being beaten in school with an oar. Thinking about it, I had an idea for a completely new legal strategy in this matter. Since the Supreme Court (not surprisingly) has decided as it has on the Constitutional question, that road is closed, at least until we get some new justices (pray Heaven we do!) or can think of another approach. Maybe I wrote this before, but I am absolutely convinced that the Supreme Court is not going to make any decision which will have as one of its results that the Federal courts are flooded with suits on these questions.

The legal strategy I’m thinking about is to sue the schools for *negligence*. I can imagine a parent saying, more or less, “When I send an undamaged and healthy kid to school in the morning, which I am compelled by law to do, I expect to get a healthy and undamaged kid back in the afternoon. It is a part of the school’s legal responsibility to see that this happens, in so far as it is within their power to do so. Naturally, if the kid is running downstairs and slips and hurts himself, or injures himself playing baseball, or something like that, this is beyond the school’s reasonable control. But when a kid comes home seriously injured because a teacher hit him with an oar for chewing gum, I say the school has been negligent. Questions of discipline have nothing to do with it. It is not my responsibility to solve the school’s discipline or gum chewing problems. All I insist is that they find ways to solve them which do not injure my child. If they cannot or will not do that, I claim they have been negligent, and demand that they pay me damages.

I suspect that some lower courts might sustain such an argument, and that if they did, the upper courts would not overturn them, precisely *because* they don’t want to raise the Constitutional issue. In short, what worked against us might be made to work for us.

The J-Bomb

By the time this issue arrives, readers will probably have read more than enough about the Jarvis amendment, or Proposition 13, in California. What it does is limit property taxes to 1% of the 1975-76 market value of homes, thus reducing current property taxes on the average from \$12 billion to \$5 billion a year. California may be able to make up for some of this lost revenue out of a large state surplus, and may also pass some new state taxes, though these now require a two-thirds majority in the legislature. We can expect this so called “taxpayers’ revolt” to be followed in many other states, most of which do not have a large state surplus and many of which will not want or be able to pass additional taxes.

As a result, most schools and school systems in such states will have less, often much less, money to work with. Some, like the schools in Cleveland and 13 other cities in Ohio, where voters turned down emergency tax levies, may be thrown into severe crisis, may not even be able to stay open for as long as state law requires. What this may lead to, whether it will put an end to those taxpayers’ revolts, no one can tell.

Meanwhile, we unschoolers and deschoolers (for the difference, see *GWS #2*) may have some new opportunities.

1) One thing we may be able to do is get a number of state legislatures to lower, or even do away with altogether, the minimum age at which people may take the state High School Equivalency exam. This lower age limit varies from state to state; in many, it is 19, 20, or even 21. Clearly, the purpose of the law is to keep young people in school, even though they may have long since learned what the school says it is trying to teach them. School people are quite open about this; when a bill to lower this minimum age was before a committee of the Mass. legislature, many educators said to the committee, in effect, “If we let kids take this exam earlier, we’ll have a lot of them running around on the streets.” The legislators promptly killed the bill. With Jarvis in mind, they may be much more ready to hear us when we say, “Why spend good (and scarce) tax money to keep young people in school when they have learned what the school is trying to teach them? Why not let them out, to get further schooling or to do useful work?” For less money than schools cost, we could find ways to do this. In other words, paying \$15 to

\$20+ thousand a year to people to babysit teenagers may be a luxury that most states and communities can no longer afford.

2) We may also be able to get at least some state legislatures to state much more explicitly that, subject only to broad and reasonable requirements, parents ought to have the right to teach their children at home. We may even be able to get them to see that the requirement (in many states) that parents must have a teacher's certificate in order to do this is in fact nothing but a way of protecting teachers' jobs, and that taxpayer-voters may not like having their tax money used for this.

3) In general, we may be able to interest both legislatures and school systems in less rigid and expensive ways of sharing information and skill, that make more use of what ordinary, non-professional people know and can do like the Learning Exchange of Evanston, Ill. and many other communities.

4) People whose local school systems will not let them take their children out of school and teach them at home may be able to get the general public to put pressure on the schools, by saying something like, "With taxes as high as they are, and the schools hard pressed for money, how is it that Superintendent X is willing to spend so much time and money to prevent us from teaching our own children, when by doing so, we would be taking some of the load off the school system?"

I think we would be wise to pursue and exploit these opportunities as far as we can. Let us know about any steps you take in this direction.

In A Boat

The following letter, from Janet Howell, 1081 Kingsway, Alliance, Ohio 49601, may make some people say, perhaps angrily, “How many people can take their families on a cruise?” Not many. But a boat is a small place, and many things that can be done on a boat could be done just as well in a camper, or a mobile home, or even in a small city apartment. She writes, in part:

Are you planning an extended cruise with your family? What will you do about your children’s education? How does education take place with young people on a boat? Is formal schooling necessary? If not, does education just happen? Are there ways parents can foster learning? Are there ways we can create a learning environment? (Ed. note: The world is a learning environment. So is a boat.) Is there any special equipment needed?

Naturally, your arrangements with your own school district are of primary importance if the children do not want to miss a year of school. For high school young people, the state usually requires a certain number of credits for graduation. If your teen-ager does not want to lose any school time, he may have to avail himself of correspondence school courses. If this is his choice, the University of Nebraska offers not only a wide variety of subjects, but competent and caring instructors who make the courses as personal as the written word can be. (Ed. note: I forgot to ask Janet, but interested readers may if they want to, whether the family was living in Nebraska when they took these courses, or whether the University will send them to people in other states.) Our school system was extremely adaptable, allowing my husband and me to construct and supervise all learning experiences for our 11 year old as we saw fit.

Looking back and reflecting on a year’s cruising with our 16 and 11 year old boys, I would rate our overall learning experience as 9 1/2 on a scale of 0 to 10. Some of the areas of learning we experienced growth in were mathematics, science, history, geography, English, boat maintenance, people, problem solving, family living, and spiritual awakening.

We had some science books on the earth, the ocean, and the atmosphere. Keith, 11, became the teacher, and *mother became the pupil* (Ed. italics). Mother was assigned her first test shortly after the switch. These were the

instructions: 1) Study work text for unit test. 2) Test will start immediately after lunch. 3) No studying during lunch -that's family time. 4) Test is a "closed book" one. 5) Good luck on your test.

We discovered that almost all cruising families have a library on board, and one of our favorite things to do when we met other families was to exchange books. We had many books on board ... some we particularly enjoyed sharing and discussing after we had all read them were *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* by Victor Hugo, *The Camerons* by Robert Crichton, *Wind From the Carolinas* by Robert Wilder, *Those Who Love* by Irving Stone, and *Stars in the Water* by George Condon. We read the latter aloud as we crossed the New York Barge Canal, most of which duplicates the old Erie Canal.

Another project Keith initiated and developed was a new brochure for the Charlestown Landing restoration. We had visited this historic spot, and Keith had later observed that he thought their brochure needed updating and could be made more interesting to children. With minimal suggestion and direction, he wrote to the Charlestown Landing Foundation. They replied in a very personal letter that they were updating their brochure, and any suggestions he had would be considered. Keith proceeded to spend many hours designing a brochure, including the language and the art work. He eventually was presented with several of the new brochures containing some of his ideas, a year's family pass to the exhibit, and a Charlestown Landing patch to wear proudly on his jacket. Keith wrote several other letters to individual and company persons as part of his learning experience, and each one replied personally to his inquiries. We believe that he may have learned from this that people do pay attention to what others think, and that as an adult he may continue writing letters to the editors, to his Congressmen, and to his President.

Paul, the 16 year old, was working independently on a correspondence course of advance math. He, his younger brother and his father worked together on navigation problems. They sharpened their knowledge and teaching by trying to teach me. The boys spent many hours studying about, and then applying their knowledge, in boat design. This involved much mathematics and much debating and sharing. Most significantly, we learned how to live together.

I learned many years ago that one of the best ways, may be the best ways, to study for a test is to make up a test. Pretend you are the teacher, and make up a test, as much as possible, in its form, like the ones the “real” teacher gives. Make up True-False questions, identifying questions, completion questions, short essays—everything you usually find on a test. Make the test as hard as you can, and longer than the one you will have to take. Give it to a friend (mother or otherwise). If you have friends taking the same course, test them and have them test you. It really works. Parents who are trying to help children who are stuck in school can do so, among other ways, by having the children make up tests in each course, which they, the parents, will take. The last part is important. Making up a test won’t be much fun for most children unless someone else is actually going to take it.

A good way of learning or understanding something is to teach it or try to explain it to someone else—a volunteer, of course, someone who really wants to learn it. I studied Accounting one year in college, and was able to go through the motions enough to get as good a grade as I wanted to get. But I understood nothing at all of what Accounting was really about, how it worked, what it was *for*—until, years later. I tutored a boy in it, who was going to study Hotel Management in college and wanted to get a little jump on it. Then it all fell into place—for me, at least.

Children On Film

Some years ago a good friend of mine, Peggy Hughes, then living in Denmark, decided she wanted to make a 16mm. sound film about the Ny Lille Skole (New little School), a small school in which she was working, which I describe in *Instead of Education* and mention elsewhere in this issue. She had done a small amount of black and white photography, but had never even owned a movie camera, let alone made a film with sound.

In time, working almost entirely alone, with occasional advice from the more experienced, she produced a film, about 45 minutes long called *We Have To Call It School*. I am not unbiased about the film; she and I are old friends, I loved the school and the people in it, and for some of the footage I was her sound man. But I think it is perhaps the most vivid, touching, and true film portrait of children that I have ever seen. Readers of *GWS*, and indeed anyone who likes, enjoys, and respects children will surely be charmed and delighted by it and may learn much from it.

Why should unschoolers want to see a film about school? The answer is in the title. Early in the film is a shot of the children arriving at school in the morning. Over this we hear the voice of one of the teachers, Erik, saying “We have to call it school. The law in Denmark says that children have to go to school, and if we didn’t call this a school, they couldn’t come here.” But this is not a school in any way that we understand those words. It is a meeting, living, and *doing* place for six or seven adults and about eight children, aged about six through fourteen. It is more like a club than anything I can compare it to. The children come there—when they feel like it, most of the time during the winter, not so often when spring and the sun arrive—and, sometimes with the adults, sometimes by themselves, do and talk about many things that interest them. In the process, they learn a lot about themselves, each other, and the world.

I think the film is important for unschoolers for many reasons, among them this one. What we need in our communities is not so much schools as a variety of protected, safe, interesting *spaces* where children can gather, meet and make friends, and do things together. Such spaces might include children’s libraries (or sections of libraries), children’s museums (a wonderful one in Boston), children’s theaters (children *making* the drama as

well as watching it), children's (or children's and adults') art or craft centers, zoos (also a wonderful one in Boston), adventure playgrounds, and so on. One such space was the Peckham Center for families which existed in London in the 1930s, and which I also describe in *Instead Of Education*. (People are now working to get a new version of Peckham going in a small city in Scotland.) And another such space would be the Ny Lille Skole. It's not a matter of copying it exactly, but of catching the spirit of it.

You can rent or buy the film for Holt Associates, Inc. To rent it costs \$100 per day of use plus postage (allow two weeks for delivery); to buy it costs \$350 per print. You may use it in two ways. One is simply to rent it, show it, and then discuss it, or draw what conclusion for it you will. The other is to have Mrs. Hughes come with the film (if her schedule allows), show it, and then discuss it and answer questions about it. We know from experiences that people who see the film have a great many questions about the school. Mrs. Hughes' fee is \$200 per day, plus expenses.

We hope some of you may be able to see it.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Growing Without Schooling 6

September 1978

The label or address on your *GWS* (or envelope) will have on it a symbol like 1 06, 3 12, etc. The *second* numeral is the number of the *last* issue of your subscription you like *GWS*, as we hope you do, please renew. You may renew for one year, two, or three. The latter will save you money and help us. Many thanks.

A reader from Florida, who is teaching her two children at home, writes, "As far as neighbors or strangers are concerned—everyone has thought it great that K and L are home and that we're working and learning together."

A new subscriber writes that she saw *GWS* (or something about *GWS*) on the bulletin board of the children's section of her public library. Other readers might see whether their library would post *GWS* on one or more of their bulletin boards. Or, subscribers might take out an extra sub for their library—though it might be a good idea to show *GWS* to the librarian first, and ask if they would like to have a sub.

The group subscription record has moved to Temple, ME, where readers have taken out a 16X sub.

Donnelly/Colt, Box 271, New Vernon, NJ 07976, sells a number of bumper stickers and buttons, mostly on anti-nuclear themes. But the button I like best (50¢, 15¢ ea. For 2 or more) just says "QUESTION AUTHORITY."

When ordering books from us, please make check out to Holt Associates, Inc. This will save us the work of transferring the money from the *GWS* account. Postage on all orders, 30¢ for first book, 15¢ each additional book.

News Item

A friend sent a clipping from the New York Daily News, May 28, 1978. It may be worth noting that the News is a popular tabloid, generally more Right than Left in politics and aimed at the “man on the street.” The story reads, in full:

SCHOOL’S OUT FOR FAMILY

Grand Rapids, Minn. (AP)—An Itasca County *jury* has found a Deep River couple innocent of violating the state’s mandatory school attendance law in refusing to send their children to public schools.

The jury agreed Friday with Joseph Palmer’s argument that his wife, Ann, was capable of teaching the children, aged 8 and 10, at home.

In their two-day trial, the couple maintained that public schools were a corrupting influence on children and said the education provided by Mrs. Palmer, who has had one year of college, was adequate. *Palmer is a custodian in the Deer River school system.* (Ed. note: Italics mine.)

Equivalent

Friends of ours live in a rich suburb with “good” public school system. Last winter one their boys broke his leg and had to wear a huge cast, which made it impractical to send him to school. The family (not unschoolers) told the school they wanted to be sure the boy kept up with his class. The school said, no problem, we’ll send around a tutor, which they did, every week—*for an hour and a half*. It was enough.

Einstein Said

It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty. To the contrary, I believe that it would be possible to rob even a healthy beast of prey of its voraciousness, if it were possible, with the aid of a whip, to force the beast to devour continuously, even when not hungry, especially if the food, handed out under such coercion, were to be selected accordingly.

From A Parent

A parent (from MO) writes, in part:

I have found your newsletter increasingly interesting and valuable. As I Wrote to you about a year ago, I will not be sending my children to school (the oldest, now five, would normally be entering Kindergarten this September). He has been reading now for about a year. I would not have believed anyone who told me a child could make the kind of progress D has made. He is interested in Space Travel and Astronomy and *we have made available to him all literature on the subject we could find.* (Ed. Italics) He gobbles it up at incredible speed and begs for more. He reads books about the planets and can discuss intelligently the effects of gravity on the various planets and moons (e.g. that the moon has no air because it has insufficient gravity to hold the air, on that on Jupiter he would be squashed flat). Needless to say we are delighted, and more convinced than ever that this is the way to go.

Tx for good letter. D and others who share these interests might want to read (if they are still in print) a number of science fiction novels by Hal Clement (one title I remember is *A Mission Of Gravity*), all of them about what happens when living creatures from one kind of planet try to explore a very different kind of planet. In one, a group of aliens from a planet much hotter than Earth land here, and the story is about how they try to deal with our (to them) incredible cold. Worth looking up.

Before long, of course, it of will be possible to show D (and other children like him) how they can look up and find *for themselves* literature on whatever interests them, and ask others the questions their parents can't answer.

The Child Takers

From the Juvenile Rights section of the 1977 report of the ACLU:

In the past year, the ACLU's Juvenile Rights Project secured a major victory in its struggle to prevent the state from arbitrarily and unnecessarily separating children from their parents. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit upheld a lower court decision forbidding the state of Iowa from using its parental termination statute to sever the relationship between Charles and Darlene Alsager and four of their children.

The appeals court ruled that the state cannot "terminate" parents without proving that they are harming their children in substantial and serious ways. For the first time a court recognized that there must be a more compelling reason for separating families than the state's assertion that it is "in the best interests of the child."

Relying on the *Alsager* decision, the ACLU then challenged a Virginia statute which authorized the temporary separation of children from their families in "emergency" situations. The case, *Ives v Jones*, was successfully settled, and as a consequence the Virginia law was changed. No longer may children be withheld even temporarily from their parents unless clear and substantial danger to the child is shown. Moreover, parents whose children have been taken under a so-called emergency are entitled to an immediate hearing at which they may have counsel and other due process rights.

The *Alsager* decision also prompted a federal court in Alabama to rule that the state's neglect statute was unconstitutional because of vagueness and amorphous definitions of "child neglect."

Of all the threats that schools make to unschoolers, the most terrifying is the threat to take their children away. The decisions cited in the ACLU report suggest that, in some states at least, the courts may not allow the schools to carry out that threat. But of course this depends on whether these courts would rule that unschooling children was harming them "in substantial and serious ways," or constituting a "clear and substantial danger" to them. In the politically so-called "conservative" states cited, the courts might so decide; what they are refusing to allow is the state taking children away from parents

on what might be called psychological grounds i.e. because (as in the Alsager case) the parents had low I.Q.s.

I suspect that for some time to come we will not be able to get the ACLU or other civil liberties organizations to oppose compulsory schooling on Constitutional grounds. But we might be able to get these organizations and/or their state and local branches to say that unschooling children ought not to be grounds for the state to take them away from their parents. This in itself would be an important step. Let's look further into this. Do tell us what you find out.

Good News From Vt.

Catherine Lowther, R.D.2, Hardwick, Vt. 05843, wrote us, in part:

I am sorry to hear that so many people are having such a hard time taking their kids out of school. I thought you might like to balance the scales a little with a positive story.

I never sent my kids to school. They are 9 and 7 and I have always taught them at home. I have been approved by the State every year, the local authorities have been friendly, supportive, and even enthusiastic. The local school board has bought all our books and materials, to be returned to them when we are finished with them.

I noticed in *GWS #4* you said that the burden to prove that a program is not equivalent to public school should rest with the state. In Vt. it does. (State Supreme Court decision.)

I also know three other families in Vt. who have taken their kids out of school without harassment.

Along with the letter, C.L. sent a copy of Vermont state law. Title 16, V.S.A., Section 1121(b) as amended Mar. 30, 1967, reads as follows:

Attendance by children of school age required

a) A person having the control of a child between the ages of seven and sixteen years shall cause such child to attend a public school continually for the full number of days for which such school is held, unless such child is mentally or physically unable to attend; or is otherwise being furnished with equivalent education.

b) The determination of equivalency referred to in subsection (a) of this section shall be made by the State Department of Education and certified to the school directors.

(Ed. note: I take it that school directors are the local school board.)

Subject to this law, the State Board of Education approved a process for looking over and approving alternatives to public schooling. Within the State Dept. of Education there is a Committee on Equivalent Education which

reviews private schools and also home instruction plans. The State says that home instruction plans shall be built around the Calvert Home Study Plan for the elementary years, and approved correspondence courses for secondary.

I asked C.L. whether the state watched her very closely to be sure that she was using the Calvert materials. She wrote back saying, in part:

Thank you for writing and sending *GWS #5*. I've liked every issue better than the one before it. Especially appreciated your "The Therapeutic State" and "To A Reader."

You may use my name and address and any part of my letters you wish. I will be glad to answer questions from you or anyone so long as they send postage—our income is quite beneath the imagination of most in this culture..

The State prefers to have people use the Calvert course because it is, of course, tidier for them, but they cannot enforce this. In our case, we chose to use Calvert for the first two years after our daughter turned seven (legal school age here) because we didn't feel qualified to take on teaching her without experience or guidance. However, we found it becoming very limiting by third grade. It was like inviting public school standards into one's home. Greta was memorizing names and dates to pass tests and get grades and was getting more and more miserable under the absurdity of it. So for last year, fourth grade for her, first for our son, I devised my own curriculums which I submitted to the State on their application form and they approved it. I arranged that the local elementary school would review the children's work quarterly during the school year to comply with the State's request for a "reliable means of showing evidence of learning." The Town funded us \$200 (my estimate of our costs) for materials. Public money for this is contingent upon State approval and will not be given for anything connected with religious purposes.

For the coming year, I have again written my own plan. Based on our record of having accomplished more than public school classes (according to the principal who reviewed our work), I am asking to report directly to someone in the State and that we show our papers only once at the end of the year. It is unnecessary and inconvenient both for me and the teachers who have to look over our work to spend any more time on it than that.

No officials have ever been to our home. I have voluntarily gone to the State twice and to the local superintendent often for information, and a variety of other reasons. I like to be out front and get along and feel that the

people in authority may also be benefitted by an open, cooperative attitude. Example lays the groundwork for trust. Everyone I have met has been friendly and respectful of our rights.

As for what I actually do with my kids, I seem to be more inclined to books than most of the people I've read or heard about (who may, quite understandably, be over-reacting to compulsory and oppressive academics). We feel that facility with the symbols of communication is an invaluable tool without which the children would be handicapped in the world as it is today. We have done approximately a grade level's work in English and Math every year. Other than that, we pursue our own concerns. Both kids are fascinated by Science experiments and demonstrations, enjoy Geography, Anthropology, History, Art, and practical skills. We have a serious discussion of principles and values almost every day and we do go out to museums, concerts, hikes, etc. every Saturday.

One of the hardest parts of setting up our own curriculum has been seeing beyond the mold that growing up in this society put me in as far as determining what is important for my kids to know. They have helped me a lot with that. Their inspiration adds a lot of life to our plans and participating in choosing their path automatically fosters enthusiasm while following it.

Thanks for very good and encouraging letter. I have seen enough of Vermont to say that it is a very beautiful state. The winters are long and hard, but if they don't mind (or even like) that, unschoolers might find it a very good state to move to.

Doctor

When I go to conferences, meetings, colleges, etc. to give lectures, the people who meet me always call me “Doctor.” When I tell them I am not Dr., just Mr., they are very surprised. They can’t believe that anyone (other than a politician, athlete, or TV or movie star) could write a book or give a speech, unless s/he was a Dr. Some of them even say, “Oh, I just assumed that you ...” and their voices trail off. (A few then say, “Congratulations!”)

School has taught us to think that only people who have spent a lot of time in school can have anything worthwhile to say except now and then, when the educated talk to the uneducated to find out what “they” think, as an anthropologist might talk to a remote tribe. We read eagerly what a distinguished (and compassionate) psychiatrist reports of the words of a housemaid. But suppose the housemaid had written down her serious thoughts about the world, and taken them herself to a publisher, and said, “Will you publish this book?” She would have been shown the door.

In his essay, “Intellect,” Emerson wrote, in part:

Each mind has its own method. A true man never acquires after college rules. What you have aggregated in a natural manner surprises and delights when it is produced. For we cannot oversee each other’s secret. And hence the differences between men in natural endowment are insignificant in comparison with their common wealth. Do you think the porter and the cook have no anecdotes, no experiences, no wonders for you? *Everybody knows as much as the savant.* (Ed. italics) The walls of rude minds are scrawled all over with facts, with thoughts. They shall one day bring a lantern and read the inscriptions.

Years ago, in a Penguin collection of modern poetry, I read two poems by Edwin Brock. They made such an impression on me that when I read, the other day, an ad for *Invisibility Is The Art Of Survival* (New Directions Books, 333 Sixth Ave., New York 10014), a book of poems by him, I ordered it. My old favorites were in there, and many others I loved just as much—

direct, powerful, bleak, marvelous poems. Reading the short foreword, I was surprised to find that when he had written many of these poems, Brock had been a London policeman. I was also surprised and disappointed by my surprise. Why not a policeman-poet, or musician, or painter, or philosopher, or anything else? No reason at all; we have just got used to thinking it can't happen.

As a matter of fact, when he first met the editor who had published some of his poems, Brock himself was a bit apologetic about his work. If he were to be taken seriously as a poet, he asked, shouldn't he find some other kind of work? The editor (good for him) said no, not at all. But it is hard for most people, even policeman-poets, to shake old school-trained habits of thought.

No Comment

The Boston Globe, June 12, 1978, ran a story that said in part:

AMHERST—The registrar's office here at the University of Massachusetts is preparing to mail out 10,000 grades to students, the result of a decision by some faculty members, who have been protesting stalled contract negotiations with the administration, to release the unsubmitted grades to the registrar on Monday.

The executive board of the faculty union, the Massachusetts Society of Professors, voted Friday to release the withheld grades. According to John Bracey, union vice president and chairman of the Afro-American Studies Program, the administration "has made a 180 degree turn in attitude."

"We feel the withholding of grades was effective in hastening the return of the administration to the bargaining table earlier this month," said Bracey.

The withheld grades had been turned into the faculty union office and placed in a safe deposit box in a local bank.

The World At Two

The mother of the now two-year-old boy described in “A Baby” (GWS #2), writes of his further adventures:

One thing he gets mad about is being left behind by anybody. However, we just went on a trip ... I was quite nervous about leaving J with friends as he had been doing his falling down pass out tantrums for our benefit all week whenever anyone went to town without him (in spite of having the other parent on hand). But he just waved Bye Bye and went in the house and had a really good four days. As B (his father) said obviously he would only bother to pull the tantrum bit for us. He was very calm and very full of new games and words when we got him back, and I know he made progress on all fronts as a result of being away from us and with other interesting people.

Around the farm he usually stays on the road or a few beaten paths. But within those limits he goes quite far and stays away as long as an hour and a half, playing with the goats mainly (we have four babies and three moms right now). Once he went into the trees and I couldn't find him because he was sitting down out of sight and playing quietly. I had about a five minute panic realizing the size of the national forest, but I found him about 10five away.

A couple of weeks ago I took him camping with friends while B was away working. It was J's first outdoor trip. We had to walk half a mile to get to a little lake that was beyond the reach of people in cars and J walked it all the way with a look of pure wonder on his face at the new sights, forest, adventure. He carried a pack, which mother made for me when I was a child, that had his pampers, some potatoes, and a can of beer in it, and was super excited by that. He stayed out of the lake, sang to us at the camp fire in Spanish tones of lalalala, lay in the tent for about an hour with his hand holding his chin, admiring the lake . He was so super he turned everyone on and everyone helped take care of him and was glad to have him along.

Then two days later we were to go on a long trip down the river so we left him with some friends, but decided at the last minute our boats weren't sufficient to carry us and our gear on that rugged and remote a trip, so we picked up J and just went camping on the river, taking our boat and going on short hops along stretches of the river where the road was. Again he was

super and loved being with grownups who ate with their fingers and mushed all their food up in one cup just like him. B wanted him to go in the boat so he put him in a life jacket then tied a rope between them. J hated that and had all kinds of misgivings as water sloshed into the boat and he got wet and cold, but he didn't complain. Amazingly he just sat there and looked pissed off for about two hours. I think he was so glad to be included that he bore with the misery.

Earlier on that trip I was bathing him in the river and while I turned away for at least one second he fell in face first and started to sink in about two feet of water. I hauled him out spluttering (Ed. note: Those mountain rivers are *cold*.) and managed once he was OK to take him right back in the water with a sort of limp "wasn't that fun" which worked, because he didn't panic or do much more than be a little cautious. He's got floaties now that go on his arms for swimming and he's been in a pool half a dozen times since then. He absolutely loves it and doesn't mind whole waves washing into his mouth, though we stay very close.

Wonderful letter. (Lucky J!) But I should say that part of what his mother and I have been writing back and forth about is that at home this little boy is not always "super", but often just as stubborn, angry, and difficult as two year olds are supposed to be. The point of this letter is that when he feels himself in a serious grown-up occasion, treated more or less as an equal, he very often rises to the occasion. I have found this to be true of many children.

A Family Game

Julia McCahill (now in England) writes, in part:

I'd like to tell you about the monopoly game C and M and I played a little while ago. I bought the Monopoly game in the spring and the kids took to it right away. It was before we got busy with moving and I had some time to spend with them—one day we played all day, from breakfast until I had to stop to fix dinner—but they enjoyed it so much for a while they usually played it without me.

At first they played it in a rather free-form way; the times that I entered the game I insisted on knowing the rules. This was okay. They quickly learned that when they landed on Income Tax it was usually more advantageous to pay 10% than \$200 and were willing to learn how to calculate it. There were other rules too that forced them to do more mental calculating than they had been doing on their own and they took them in their stride. I just realized today, however, that I had made one jump too many ahead of them. I had discovered last spring if when you buy a property you improve it immediately with three houses the first rent you get covers this initial investment. They understood this immediately too and used it often. In fact, C wiped me out with it when we played last night. *But*, whereas they used it only when they felt like it or when I strongly advised them to, I used it ruthlessly.

I wonder how many people were touched by the account in one issue of GWS (#3) of the mother and children who helped each other reach the goal in "Sorry!" I certainly was. I've been looking inward at my own competitive streak ever since. And I think this is one of the startling things that happens to you when you resume responsibility for your children's environment. The very first reason I had for thinking of taking (at first) our daughter out of school was a concern with the values she was being exposed to in fifth grade. (Her teacher had asked her to complete another child's Iowa Achievement Test answer sheet with random marks just so it would be full.) Values! I didn't know how many values there were, or how seriously I would be questioning my own habits.

I should have taken my cue from C. When, during one of our first Monopoly games, she would want to give away some of her money, even

when nobody was going broke; but I said there was nothing in the rules to allow that and made her stop. Fortunately, she forgot that restriction during the hiatus caused by our moving and when we unpacked the game yesterday went back to her generous ways. She beat me anyway, with assets totalling over \$5,000, compared to my \$1180. Today I reduced her and M to tatters - even though I didn't want to and I kept giving away money as C had done! It wasn't until we were finished that I realized I didn't have to buy all that property and charge all those high rents—at least not any faster than they were.

So there you are. There's an anecdote for you; you got it instead of my journal and I got what I always get when I write something down, a clearer understanding and a firmer memory of what has happened.

Tx for wonderful letter and most instructive story. I hope to persuade Julia to send *GWS* some pages from her journal. I can't think of anything that would be more interesting and valuable to me and many other readers. Makes no difference if it is in rough and unorganized form; if anything, so much the better. And I hope nobody else will hang back from telling us an interesting story because they don't feel they can get the form just right. Just write it down as it comes to you.

Life in School

A friend of mine, now in fifth grade, with whom I have been corresponding for a couple of years, wrote recently:

I was wondering if you knew anything about group pressure. You see, I'm the only one in my class that doesn't have a pair of Levi's.

Also, kids in my class are getting "Clothes Allowance"—that's when they get money when they want to buy clothes. And they can buy as much as they want.

I've asked my father but he says no. Do you know what I should do?

This group pressure *does* affect schooling, I bet. I couldn't concentrate on my work for the last few days.

Since her next letter to me was on a very different subject, I don't know how this problem worked itself out—if it did. If anything, the pressures will probably be stronger next year.

Her Own Money

Our leading Canadian correspondent has just written us a letter (one of many good ones), saying in part:

H and M have just bought themselves ponies with their own money. You'll be pleased to learn (Ed. note: Indeed I am.) that H (who is 10) wrote a check for hers.

I don't know what other banking practices are like, but at our credit union any child can have a full-fledged account (and must be a share-holder in the corporation in order to have an account). Living in the country, we mail-order shop quite a bit and H's checks have never been questioned. But perhaps the people who receive them don't know her age! I don't suppose they would ever dream that they were accepting a check from a 10 yr. old. If they knew, I wonder whether they would refuse to accept it or ask for countersigning?

Since H has a fully-personal account, not an "in trust" one, we as her parents are not even allowed to touch her money. We found out the hard way! We went to the credit union to take some money out of her account and they wouldn't let us. They pulled out her file card and showed us her signature saying that only she was able to handle the money in that account. She had signed it when she was 5! I remember distinctly "letting" her sign it, thinking condescendingly how "nice" the experience was for her. Little did I know I was providing her a degree of absolute financial independence.

M (8) doesn't write checks cause he doesn't want to learn how to sign his name yet. I suppose that could be gotten around, but the hassle's not worth it. So we've told him his account will remain "in trust" till he can Sign his name."

I love this story. I am so glad to hear that someone is doing what I have long felt many parents ought to do. Cheers for Louise! And cheers for H, too, deciding at 5 that her money was to be *her* money.

I think Louise is quite right about M's account. I can't think of a better way for him to learn the meaning and importance of being able to sign his name. When he learns to do it, as he soon will, it will not be to get praise from parent or teacher or a good mark on a report card, but for his own very

practical reason.

The first school I taught in had an institution called the Student Bank, run by the school business manager. It was a kind of Petty Cash fund for students. Probably had something to do with the fear that if students had much cash around their rooms (it was a boarding school) there might be problems of stealing.

At the beginning of the school year the parents of each student would make a “deposit” in the student’s account in the Student Bank (the amount was just added to the parents’ bill). When the student wanted some cash, or to buy books, supplies, etc. from the school, s/he would write out a fake “check” and give it to the business manager, who would then give the student the cash, supplies, athletic equipment, or whatever. The manager kept a separate account for each student, just like a real bank, and was also supposed to see that each student kept her/his “checkbook” balanced. The idea was to give the (teen-aged) students some practice in keeping track of their own money and in finding out how banks worked.

During the year I was business manager I had to run the Student Bank. It damn near drove me crazy. Here we were, a few hundred yards from town *where there was a real bank*. Why not have the students open up accounts in the real bank, write real checks, get real statements, instead of wasting a lot of my (or someone’s) time running a pretend bank?

Obviously in some families the children have so little money that no nearby bank will let them have an account. Nothing to be done about that. But I feel quite strongly that any child who has enough money so that a local bank will give her/him an account, ought to have one. It is real, grown-up, interesting, part of the big world out there.

An Adventure

A family I know has been traveling around the country in a converted bus, staying for a while in towns that interest them or where they know people they like, then moving on. They write, in part:

“We are on our way to Y. For now we have used up X. The kids are doing things over. It’s often a tough decision. When we stay somewhere for a while we accumulate one thing and lose another. Security sets in. You know what to expect from the environment and there are fewer surprises each day, but surprises are a turn-on if you don’t get scared and they keep you sharp. I happen to believe that people stay good at problem solving by staying busy at problem solving. F is beginning to say “I don’t have anything to do.’ That’s nonsense—unless what he is really saying is “I don’t have anything new to do.’ Kids seem to know the difference. Adults forget as routine becomes master. We know where to find everything now so the joy of the hunt is gone. We know the people now so we don’t have to negotiate new relationships.

We spent a couple of days finishing off some work commitments and packing the rig. F bought a bicycle with money he earned and I bought another one for the rest of us. I welded up some racks to attach to the boat to carry them. We are getting heavier.

We are looking forward to getting to the cooperative. It’s been a while since the kids have been there. They only remember pounding on big chunks of clay a potter gave them. Oh, also putting pennies on the railroad tracks to be flattened.

We got there in the afternoon. Everybody yelled when we turned the corner and they saw it. A number of old friends are here and an equal number of new people. We are welcomed and people find places to park the boat and bus. The coop is a true school with artists and craftspeople doing their workplay and making a living. There are lots of hugs and hellos for the first few hours and D makes a point of saying how delighted she is to have some kids around. I think maybe too many places don’t have any kids. The Schools have them all and they don’t even appreciate them. Maybe if more workplaces could have kids and more kids could have workplaces it would be a happier world.

K found the ducks first. L has three grown mallards and a little pond by

her trailer—one is sitting on a bunch of eggs. Someone lived here a year ago and the sculptor and the blacksmith built her a vertical house out of steel pipe and giant wood spools. G and F surveyed the place from atop it. I saw that the height was sufficient to kill, had to squelch my desire to say, “Get down” and settled for “Be careful.” Soon kids returned from the tracks with squished pennies. We had a brief lecture from me on relating to railroad tracks and trains. That led to a discussion about panic -how much space is there under a train, etc.

A friend had just become “owner for a week” of a grocery store because the owner needed a vacation. S decided he would capitalize on the opportunity and try to get a month’s worth of “ownership” out of a week. He hired me to do several electrical and carpentry jobs while the boss was gone. An impression must be made. Many improvements. Check-writing power—hire—fire chief for a day! We had to be there early and work before the store opened. I shook the kids up at six, we unplugged, battened things down, and were off. The kids followed me into the store toting tools. S said they could play in the store and the idea of having a supermarket all to yourself carried quite a charge. Supermarkets almost always come fully equipped with people -most of whom are adults. Children who are there are seldom wanted or welcome. They are usually being admonished by mother for handling the sacks of candy placed carefully within their reach by knowing management.

Well, not the case this morning—the store was theirs. They roamed the aisles for a while contemplating the space. G pushed back and forth through the swinging doors to the back about thirty times. The forbidding sign “EMPLOYEES ONLY” had lost its terrible power. He was now an employee. Perhaps he was the manager. I didn’t ask him.

F handed me tools for a while and C played shopper. She pushed a cart around putting things in it and then she put them all back. I was surprised to see her choose that activity because she has done so much of the real thing, but, as I recalled, she never had the kind of choice making power she had now. When we go to a supermarket for shopping about 90% of the shelves are passed by. Within half an hour everyone felt at home and C sat down with K at a table in the deli and started reading her a book they had brought from the bus.

S arrived in a panic! The fresh juice making operation in the back room was two hours behind because the shipment of containers hadn’t come. A big

selling item for the store was fresh made juices of several kinds and they were made from fresh produce early each morning. Panic—the crowds would hit and there would be no juice. Money would be lost, good will would slip. Being “owner for a week” S had fewer learning sets than your average supermarket manager so he said, “Who wants a job?” F and G were low on funds—“We do.” “Wash your hands and come with me.” They went back to the little juice factory in the back room and S introduced the new help to the juice man.

I stopped by about half an hour later and saw an amazing operation. I have never seen F and G work so hard with such enthusiasm. F was filling bottles with carrot juice and G was wiping, labeling, and pricing. The juice man was pouring bushels of carrots into a big peeling machine and then on to a grinder and then to a two ton hydraulic press. Gallons and gallons of carrot juice were flowing and the boys’ eyes were wide and their hands were a blur. Before today carrots existed either one every few inches in a row in the ground or in one pound plastic wrapped bundles. These machines ate carrots like a giant dinosaur. The pace was intense. The juice man had his routines down pat and the kids picked up the rhythm. It was a dance and you had to keep in step. Commands came in three word sentences and they were obeyed. No time for discussion or explanation real work—a real product—a real classroom. Sacks of carrots became 85¢ bottles of juice in minutes. G said, “I don’t care if S pays us or not, this is fun.”

Three hours later I was done, the store was open and they were still having fun. Three large garbage cans of dry carrot pulp sat outside the juice room door. F’s shirt and pants were orange and drenched. G was re-stamping a case of bottles he had marked 58¢ instead of 85¢. No hassle over the mistake—just stamp them again. After all, the juice man had to throw out a whole batch of carrots that got to the shredder before they were peeled. Mistakes are part of what people do. Unfortunately in schools full of desks, they are forbidden.

I was having my breakfast on the bus when they finished and they popped in, each carrying a fist full of three dollars. They had worked harder in that three hours than I had ever seen them work before and they were ecstatic. They had new knowledge, new dignity (they saved the day) and some negotiable legal tender. My prize was to have been there to see it.”

Wonderful story! Reminds me of something that Peter Marin wrote many years ago, about the need of young people (and not so young, either) to feel “alive, useful, and needed.”

Greenleaf

This is the title of a new, unique, and beautiful book, by Constance Bernhardt (pub. by Trunk Press, Hancock, MD 21750, av. here, \$5). It is the story of a child's growing up, written by an adult, but told as the child—Constance herself—might have told or written it, year by year. When she first told me about the book and asked me to read it, I had grave misgivings, feared that the book would be full of adult ideas put in a child's mouth, or perhaps sentimental and idealized notions about “innocent” children. But, as I wrote in the preface to the book,

As I read, my misgivings gave way to astonished delight. Page after page, the book rang absolutely true, true to all my adult experience of children, true to all I could remember of my own childhood. I read on, now pleased, but still fearing the inevitable misstep, particularly when the child grew older. The misstep never came. To the very end, she never struck what seemed to me a false note.

The book is written in chapters, The Year Four, The Year Five, and so on, up through Thirteen. Let me quote a few bits from The Year Four, to give some of the flavor of the book, and (I hope) to tempt you.

I like the willow tree.

It is where I take my naps.

It is very green under the willow tree.

It is like a castle.

I like to pull on the leaves.

I pull hard but can never pull them off.

I want to climb the willow tree.

If I run to the tree real fast

I can run up it,
but when I run to the tree
it gets bigger.
It is a very big willow tree.
I can't reach around it.
I try.
I think I can reach around it
if I try some more.

I have a sister
and she is the one thing smaller than me.
Her name is Karen.
There is no place bigger than my back yard.
I bake gravel pies.
Karen eats them. Daddy calls her "pie-face"
because her face is a big circle.
Karen has a big mouth
and her eyes are big circles.
Daddy picks her up and calls her "pie-face."
She just looks at him

because she knows her name is Karen
but she doesn't know who "pie-face" is
and who Daddy is talking to.

Karen is dumb.

She doesn't want to make lines on paper.

She can't say my name right.

I tell her my name.

I get mad at her.

I am bigger

so she is scared.

My name is Connie.

I make her say it slow.

It is hard for her.

I don't know why it is hard for her.

I don't know why it is hard.

In the preface I also wrote, "One thing, among others, that struck me as extraordinarily true and right was this child's view of her (two years) younger sister. Little children are not sentimental about their younger brothers and sisters. They don't think they are cute. They may get on well with them, even be quite fond of them. But even in their affection there is much tough-minded exasperation. Why are they so silly? Why don't they straighten up and fly right?" In this line, here are two other quotes, the first from The Year Eleven,

the second from The Year Twelve:

In the morning Karen and Jill and Julie (sisters) and I
meet and go to school.

We walk to the corner to take the school bus.

I don't see Jill at school

but we ride home on the bus together.

Jill is quiet and Julie is friendly.

Julie talks a lot and is always joking.

She sometimes tells Jill what to do.

I think this is strange

because Jill is older and knows more.

I tell Karen what to do.

She could never tell me what to do.

I interrupt to say, what volumes are written in those words! Then, in the next chapter, these words, which how many billions of people must at one time or another have said to themselves about their younger brothers or sisters:

Karen is in the fifth grade.

I think it's strange that she

always seems younger than I was

when was her age.

It is tempting to go on. (I am sorry that these narrow columns break up to some extent the lines, and so the rhythm, of the book.) As I wrote in the preface, I can hardly imagine that anyone who has any deep liking or sympathy or respect for children will not enjoy and even love this book. I do, and more each time I read it. I hope you will try it.

Teaching Without School

A reader writes:

Back in '70-'71 I was reading all the school reform literature but something kept bothering me. I didn't realize what it was until I read *How To Survive In Your Native Land* (av. here) where James Herndon said something to the effect that the trouble with school reform is that no matter what you do the fact still remains that school is irrelevant to real life. So I quit thinking about school and began concentrating on real life. But something made me pick up *Instead Of Education* in the library the other day and I was delighted to find that you had articulated, in a way I could not, my own feelings. I also want you to know that you helped me immensely in a personal crisis of self-confidence and self-respect resulting from my living according to my feelings and still trying to maintain good relationships with parents and others who feel that without degrees and other educational system prizes any learning and skills are worthless and wasted.

My husband, G, is a teacher (see "From A Teacher", this issue), and it may be helpful for people you talk with to know that we, a family of four, survive quite well on earnings from his part time teaching. G teaches music (guitar, drums, banjo, vibraphone, and theory) privately in a studio in a music store in T- (pop. 5,000) and A- (area pop. 19,000). The unemployment rate around here is usually about 9%, but G has a waiting list. Our net income (most work expenses are car-related) is around \$4000 a year—G could take on more students, but our view of the good life does not include working at *anything*, no matter how well-liked, more than part time. We live quite well on that income because we live very simply. We built our own home, a simple cabin, we provide much of our own food, and almost all our own entertainment. We are still paying for our land (15 acres) and our car (1975 Honda Civic).

Alternative life styles are important for those who do not take the usual educational paths; as long as you don't tie yourself to the system you can be free of it. I would like to point out that we lived in Boston (Mattapan) for two years, "70-"72, and managed to have a very simple, inexpensive and happy lifestyle there too. (Ed. note: Boston is perhaps the most expensive of all U.S. cities to live in.)

G wants me to mention that he never planned on being a teacher. He just

was always into music from the age of seven on and he was lucky throughout his life to have teachers who, as it turned out, served as models for him. Berklee College of Music there in Boston was in many ways a school, at least when G was going there (70-72) and in their non-degree program.

You might also be interested to know that in this very rural area there are a lot of attitudes very similar to yours though I don't know if the people who hold them would agree to that. Farmers will sometimes say about School learning, "That kind of knowledge is OK too, I guess.' But what is really respected is doers, and whenever there is a problem or project there is much sharing of information and skills. You get a lot of comment like, "Well, The Brains say you should do it this way, but the way so-and-so did it was ...". Many of G's students are the children of farmers.

By the way, our kids go to School. They want to at this point—first and second grade all their friends do—we'll see what happens in the future.

Tx for very interesting and encouraging letter.

I used to say to teachers (and probably scared many of them in doing so), "Suppose, instead of working for a school, you rented a little office and hung out a shingle saying TEACHER. What do you know, what can you teach, that is so interesting or valuable that people would come to you of their own free will and pay you to teach it to them?" Most of them, of course, had no answer. It is nice to hear about someone who is actually doing that, and not only "surviving," as the saying goes, but leading an interesting and satisfying life.

A City As Teacher

A good friend of mine in London, Leila Berg, has written many wonderful books for children and about them (one of them, Look At Kids, I hope to add to the list of books we sell here if the British publishers will let me). When I first told her about GWS, she wrote back, in part:

I've always been very interested in education without schooling. As a child (Ed. note: She grew up in a poor family in a poor working-class district.), I got my real education from the Manchester concerts (with their marvelous program notes), the gramophone record shops (where they were always so kind as to let this naive child spend two hours every time playing records, pretending she wanted to buy one and never doing so), the magnificent Manchester Reference Library which seemed to have every book published on open display, all the Manchester theatres where I sat up in the gods (Ed.—the highest balcony) for one and six, all the trade-show cinemas where I managed to scrounge free tickets.

When J had just left school and hadn't yet managed to get into drama school, and I thought she might have a whole year off (and her schooling had been ghastly!) I fixed her up with a program of all kinds of fascinating things to go to, out of London's resources (including the London Youth Choir, an experience that had a creative effect on all her future).

Though Britain, despite all we read in the papers, is a much richer country now than it was then, it would probably be much harder, and in many cases impossible, for a poor child to do in Manchester or any other big city what Leila did as a child. For one thing, as she herself has pointed out in her books, people are generally less kindly to children. Also, the prices of plays and concerts have gone way up.

But there are still a great many interesting things for a child to see and do in a city. One problem is that most poor children don't know about them. GWS will have more to say about this in later issues. A good book about this is Colin Ward's *A Child In The City* (see elsewhere this issue).

News Item

A GWS friend and reader from CA has just sent us this clipping from the San Francisco Chronicle of 2/31/78:

Woman Who Started Her Own School—Yacolt, Wash.

For Trisha Smith, 11, and her sister, Sarah, 8, school is as close as the converted garage at their house. Their teacher is their mother, and that has the state upset.

In the fall of 1974, Patricia Smith decided she could not rely on the public school system to educate Trisha and took her out of the second grade.

“I found that the public schools were encroaching on my religious beliefs. I believe in a supreme being. And the religion I was teaching at home was being aborted in the classroom,” said the quiet-spoken woman.

Mrs. Smith, a Mormon, said, “You know, you don’t have to be a Bible thumper or a fanatic,” to want to mix religious training with education.

She said a major concern with public schools was that the theory of evolution was being taught as “fact, not fiction.”

She began teaching her daughters at home, but was soon confronted with a lawsuit brought by the state.

Her school meets state law by holding classes five hours a day, five days a week, but with only two years of college, Mrs. Smith does not have the required teaching certification.

She received a suspended fine of \$100 and was ordered to comply with state law.

Clark County prosecuting attorney Jim Carty said he would take action upon receipt of a complaint from the school board which he expects when school resumes this fall.

“I understand she has some jail time hanging over her from that previous action,’ Carty said.

Mrs. Smith said her school is incorporated through the state of Washington and is associated with the National Parents League Inc. of Portland.

The head of National Parents League, Mary Royer, said it helps people like Mrs. Smith set up schools to educate their own children. She said the organization has worked with 275 schools in 28 states, including 20 to 22 in Washington.

Mrs. Smith said her children take the Stanford Achievement Tests at the end of each school year, and that Trisha showed a seventh-grade level of comprehension as she completed the fifth grade this past school year.

Gordon Ensign of the state Superintendent of Public Instruction’s Office in Olympia said the Stanford test is generally recognized as an acceptable means of measuring student achievement.

While it is “pure joy’ to teach her daughters, Mrs. Smith said, she spends hours a day preparing for classes.

Trisha said some of her friends envy her not having to attend public school. “They think I go to school in pajamas,’ she said.

She sees friends after school and says she does not miss public school.

Trisha has another impression. “I don’t think the kids in public schools learn as much as we do.’”

I am going to write the National Parents League, to find out what I can about them. They may prove to be a very useful ally to unschoolers. Meanwhile, if any readers know something about them, I’d be grateful if they’d tell us.

Facts and Theories

The schools might save themselves much trouble if they would learn and understand the differences between facts, observations, reports, and theories, which they tend to roll into one big lump. A piece of meat in the store is a fact, and so is its weight. When the butcher weighs it on the scale, what he sees is an observation. How close his observation is to the fact depends on how accurate his scale is and how accurately he reads it. When he tells you, or writes on a sticker, that the piece of meat weighs a pound and a half, that is a report, which may or may not be accurate, depending on how honest and/or generous the butcher is. If you take the meat home and weigh it on your kitchen scale, and get a different weight, you may invent a theory to account for the difference—your scale is off, the butcher’s scale is off, he read the weight wrongly, he is a cheat.

In science, the only things we can call facts are objects and events *out there*. From the facts we get observations and reports, which are never 100% accurate or complete, and from these we make up theories. Einstein knew, and wrote, that scientific theories were not facts, but what he called “constructs,” which is to say, inventions, stories, or as Mrs. Smith would have it, fiction. The point and virtue of a good scientific theory or story is that it seems to explain, connect, make sense of many or all of the observations or reports we have at hand. Someone said of Einstein that when an astronomical observation seemed to confirm his Theory of Relativity, someone congratulated him on having been proved right, to which he correctly replied, “A thousand experiments can never prove me right; a single experiment can prove me wrong.”

Some scientific theories, or fictions, are quite testable, as in much of Chemistry. Others, as in Astronomy, where people try to “explain” events that took place millions of years ago, are not testable at all. Evolution is another such theory. It is a story that many people accept, mostly on faith, because it seems to make sense of the world for them. Others reject it for almost exactly the same reason. I have heard and read a number of “scientific” criticisms of the theory of evolution, at least the shallow version taught in schools, that make a lot of sense to me. There are a great many questions it does not answer and observations it does not explain.

I only mention all this because the schools, in their legal attacks on unschoolers, are likely to present themselves as the defenders of reason and science against superstition, and we must not let them get away with that. Most of what they teach is not so much science as a kind of uncritical science-worship, in which scientific inventions are looked on as miracles, and very tenuous theories are called facts.

Jobs, Careers, Work

The April 5, 1978, issue of Manas (see GWS #3) quoted, from a collection of Paul Goodman's writing titled Nature Heals (pub. by Free Life Editions, 1977), these words:

Brought up in a world where they cannot see the relation between activity and achievement, adolescents believe that everything is done with mirrors, tests are passed by tricks, achievement is due to pull, goods are known by their packages, and a man is esteemed according to his front. The delinquents who cannot read and quit school, and thereby become still less able to take part in such regular activity as is available, show a lot of sense and life when they strike out directly for the *rewards* of activity—money, glamour, and notoriety. And it is curious and profoundly instructive how they regress, politically, to a feudal and band-and-chieftain law that is more comprehensible to them. The code of a street gang has many an article in common with the Code of Alfred the Great.

It is disheartening indeed to be with a group of young fellows who are in a sober mood and who simply do not know what they want to do with themselves in life. Doctor, lawyer, beggar-man, thief? Rich man, poor man, Indian chief?—they simply do not know an ambition and cannot fantasize one. But it is not true that they don't care; their "so what?" is vulnerable, their eyes are terribly balked and imploring. (I say "it is disheartening," and I mean that the tears roll down my cheeks; and I who am an anarchist and a pacifist feel that they will be happier when they are all in the army.)

Paul Goodman was writing here about poor boys. But, even in the more hopeful Sixties, it was just about as true of affluent kids. In those days I was quite often asked to speak to high school assemblies, mostly in rich suburbs of big cities. I almost always talked about the difference between jobs, careers, and work. A job, as I defined it, was something that you did for money, something that someone else told you to do and paid you to do. Probably not something you would have done otherwise, but you needed the money, so you did it.

A career was a kind of stepladder of jobs. If you did your first job for a

while, did what you were told and didn't cause any trouble, whoever gave you that job might give you a new job. This job might be slightly more interesting, or at least not so hard-dirty-dangerous. You might not have to take orders from so many people, might even be able to give orders to a few. You might be able to make a few more choices, and would probably get more money. Then, if you did that job OK for a while, your boss might then give you a still better job, until you had gone up the job ladder as far as you were going to go. This adds up to a career.

By "work" I meant (and mean) something altogether different, what people used to call a "vocation" or "calling"—something which seemed so worth doing for its own sake that they would have gladly chosen to do it even if they didn't need money and the work didn't pay. I went on to say that to find our work, in this sense, is one of the most important and difficult tasks that we have in life, that unless we are very lucky we cannot expect to find it quickly, and indeed, that we may never find it once and for all, since work that is right for us at one stage of our life may not be right for us at the next (which has happened to me more than once). I added that the vital question, "What do I really want to do? What do I think is most worth doing?" is not one that the schools will often urge us or help us to ask of ourselves; on the whole, they feel it is their business only to prepare us for employment -jobs or careers, high or low. So we are going to have to find out for ourselves what work needs to be done and is being done out there, and which of that work we most want to take part in.

As I said these things, I looked closely (as I always do) at the faces of my hearers, to try to get some sense of how they felt about what I was saying. What I saw, and what I usually heard in the question periods that followed, made me feel that most of those students were thinking, "This guy must have just stepped off the space ship from Mars." Work worth doing? Work that you would do even if you didn't need money, that you would do *for nothing*? For most of them it was not just impossible, but unimaginable. They did not know, hardly even knew of, any people who felt that way about their work. Work was something you did for external rewards—a little pay, if you were like most people, or wealth, power, fame if you were among the fortunate. I found myself thinking often about something else that Paul Goodman had written: "Ours is the first civilization in history that has imposed on the elite of its younger generation a morale fit for slaves." To which I would add

something that Hannah Arendt once wrote about slaves in ancient Greece. Slaves could earn money, own property, even get rich (some did). What they could not do was work for anything *but themselves*; in other words, they could not fight, or vote, or hold office. They were only *allowed* to be what in our times most people *choose* to be—what economists call Economic Man, people who work only for their own personal gain.

Of course, in saying this about the young people I talked to, I am to some degree guessing (and therefore perhaps projecting). Of one thing I am certain. There was never, anywhere, a hopeful, positive, enthusiastic response to what I said. I cannot remember even one among all those students, the most favored young people of the (then, at least) most favored nation in the world, who said or later wrote to me, “Mr. Holt, here’s what I am interested in and care about, how can I find a way to work at it?”

Finding True Work

I was on a westbound U.S. submarine, a few days out of Pearl Harbor, when the news broke about the first atomic bomb. Since while in school I had heard about the splitting of the atom and the enormous amounts of energy that this released, I knew the bomb could not remain a secret, and that before long any country that wanted could find a way to make them. I decided for myself, and by myself (I don't remember how) that the only way to prevent the world-wide spread of nuclear weapons, and in the end, nuclear war, was to have some sort of world government. Having decided that, I did not quite know what to do about it. When we returned to the U.S. in October, to "mothball" our sub, I tried to find out what I could about any other people who might be talking or writing about, or working for, world government. By the middle of the following summer I decided that I had to find a way to do this work full time. I found there were three world government organizations, and went to them to ask for a job. Two had nothing. The third said they had nothing at the moment, but that in the fall the young man working in their mail room would be going back to college and that I could have his job for \$35 a week. I said I would take it. In the fall I began work, making up and sending out packages of literature, stamping the mail, keeping the membership card files, running the Addressograph machine, and doing whatever odd jobs turned up. One day they told me that a young lawyer named Conrad Shadlen had just asked for someone to give a talk on world government to the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Bayonne, N.J. On that day all our other speakers were busy. Would I do it? I gulped and said I would. It was the first of about 600 speeches that I was to give for the organization. After a while I left the mail room and began to work as a "field organizer," traveling about, giving speeches and trying to start local chapters of the organization.

I did this work for six years, then (for many reasons) left the organization, spent much of the year living and traveling (it was then cheap) in Europe, and came home, not sure what I wanted to do next, but thinking that I might try to go into farming, since I was even then very interested in what we now call Ecology. My sister, who had been trying without success to persuade me to be a teacher, did persuade me to visit a small, coed boarding school, the

Colorado Rocky Mountain School, that John and Anne Holden had just opened in Carbondale, Colo. My sister thought that since the school planned to do much of its own building and food raising, I might learn there, while working, many things I would need to know if I did go into farming. In a spirit of, "It can't hurt to take a look," I went to the school, two weeks after it had opened. I spent a day there, living the life of the school, going to some classes, talking to the students, helping some of them with their work, playing informal soccer with them.

I liked it. From my insides I got a message like the one I had received years before, when for the first time I went down into a submarine. It said, "Right now, this is the place for you." Next day, just before I left, I said to John Holden as we walked around the school, "You know, I like it here, and I'd like to stay and work here." He made what some people might have taken as a rather negative reply: "Well, we'd be glad to have you, but the trouble is, we haven't got any place to put you, and we haven't got any money to pay you, and we haven't got anything for you to do." To this I made what many years later we were to call *An Offer He Couldn't Refuse*. I said, "Well, if you get some sort of roof over my head, I don't much care where you put me, and if you're feeding me I can probably live without money, for a while at least, and I'm pretty sure I can find something to do." He laughed and said, "If you're willing to come out here on that basis, come ahead." Two weeks or so later I was back. For a month or two I lived in a little building, once a granary, that they were turning into an infirmary. I slept on a cot, not far from the table saw, stepped over piles of sawdust to get to it, lived out of my suitcases. I found plenty to do. I began cooking breakfast for the school every day, tutoring individual students in Economics, Trigonometry, Reading, coaching soccer. When another teacher left to get married, I took over her room and her salary (about \$1750/yr.). By the next year I was teaching regular classes in English and Math, and was the school business manager. A year later they hired a full-time business manager, but I then started teaching French. I taught at that school four years, worked very hard, had a good time, learned a great deal.

The point of these stories is that a great many of the people who are doing serious work in the world (as opposed to just making money) are very overworked and short of help. If a person, young or not so young, came to them and said, "I believe in the work you are doing and want to help you do

it in any and every way I can, will do any kind of work you ask me to do or that I can find to do, for very little pay or even none at all,” I suspect that many or most of them would say, “Sure, come right ahead.” Working with them, the newcomer would gradually learn more and more about what they were doing, would find or be given more interesting and important things to do, might before long become so valuable that they would find a way to pay her/him. In any case, s/he would learn far more from working with them and being around them than s/he could have learned in any school or college. (See Jud Jerome’s letter in *GWS #1*)

A Slow Start

I have a close friend whom I have known since he was in high school. His marks were good, his parents had money, so when he finished high school he went to a prestige college. Soon he had to choose a major. Since English had been his best and easiest school subject, and since he liked books, he chose English. A few years later he had his B.A. degree in English. It had cost him four years of his time and his parents about twenty thousand dollars of their money. With it, and fifteen or twenty cents, he could buy a cup of coffee almost anywhere. But not much else. What to do? Well, his marks were still good, he still had time, his parents still had money, so he went to a prestige graduate school to get a Ph.D. degree in (necessarily) English. Some years later—we had remained good friends all this time when he had completed all the course requirements for a Ph.D., and was finishing up his thesis, I asked him, “When you finish up all of this stuff, what are you going to do?” The question seemed to surprise him. After a pause, he said, “I don’t know, teach English in some college, I guess.” I said, “Is that what you really want to do?” This question seemed to surprise him even more. After another pause, he said, “Well, no, not particularly. But what else *can* I do?”

I said nothing, only thought (and still think) that this didn’t seem a very good way to spend seven or so years of one’s life and \$35,000 of one’s parents’ (or someone’s) money. Soon he began to teach English at a small state university, in the Western mountain country he loved. The only problem, he soon found, was that the students in his classes were at college only to get the ticket. They were not in the least interested in any of the things he had learned and wanted to teach. All they wanted to know was, what do we have to do to pass the course. That they were so polite about it made it even harder—it would have been more interesting if they had argued furiously that his course was a complete waste of time.

For a while he tried to tell himself that he would put in his time, collect his paycheck, and concentrate on the farming, hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, and skiing that he really loved. It didn’t work. He stuck it out for some years, every year hating his teaching, his department, and the university more and more. Finally he quit.

Now, after some difficult years, he is a carpenter and small builder and

contractor, doing careful and skilled work in a town where there is demand for it. He has found his work. But it still seems too bad that he had to spend seven or eight years getting ready to do, and eight years more doing, a job that meant nothing to him. The years and the money could have been better spent.

Even then, he was fortunate in having enough money in his family so that he could run the risk of leaving his job and looking for work worth doing. Most people can't do that. I think of a young woman (by no means unique), about to graduate from a School of Education, who, when I asked her what she had learned, said, "Well, I've learned two things, anyway—I've learned that I don't like children and I don't like teaching." When I asked why she went on with it, she said, "I have to, I've spent too much time and money learning to do this, I can't turn around and start learning to do something else."

To students who used to ask me whether they should go to, or stay in, or go back to college, I used to say, "Look, a college degree isn't a magic passkey that opens all the doors in town. It only opens a few, and before you spend a lot of time and money getting one of those keys, you'd be smart to find out what doors it opens, and what's on the other side of those doors, and whether you want to go through them." I also used to ask them, "What do you want to do? Suppose you had in your hand whatever college ticket you are thinking of getting, what would you like to do, *choose* to do, right now?" Most looked at me with blank faces. They had never considered the question. A few would say that they would like to be some sort of -ician or -ologist. I would reply, "OK, suppose you were one, then what would you like to do?" This stopped them. They did not know any -icians or -ologists, and had no idea what they did or whether they themselves might want to do it. They saw these "careers" only as slots that school might enable them to slip into.

Every year the major academic disciplines—History, English, Modern Languages, Economics, etc.—have big conferences. Hundreds of people with brand new Ph.D. degrees go to these conferences, hoping to land one of the by now scarce jobs. They hold their tickets up in the air and say, in effect, "Please hire me, someone, anyone, I'll do anything you tell me to." There is a well known name for these gatherings. It is "slave markets."

Remedial

In the July/Aug. 1971 issue of the magazine *Society* Norman and Margaret Silberberg wrote, “We have found seven longitudinal studies of remedial reading. Not one shows any long-term beneficial effect.” They also quote from a speech that President Nixon gave in early 1970, after almost \$1 billion had been spent yearly on reading programs under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. He said, “Before-and-after tests suggest that only 19 percent of the children in such programs improve their reading significantly; 15 percent appear to fall behind more than expected, and more than two-thirds of the children remain unaffected -that is, they continue to fall behind.”

Of course, in this matter President Nixon was not an impartial source of information. For political reasons of his own, he wanted to repeal the Education Act. But in this instance he was surely quoting material given him by education “experts” in H.E.W. Meanwhile, if there has been any later evidence that remedial reading programs have become more successful, it has been a well kept secret.

From Art Harris

Harper's Weekly, during its short life, published a letter from Art Harris in Arlington, Vt. He wrote, in part:

Seven years ago, my wife and I came to the conclusion that the public schools our two boys were attending were damaging, rather than enhancing, the learning process for them, and we decided to do something about it. Our older son, a voracious reader then in the sixth grade, was bored in the classroom because almost everything that was taught he had already discovered on his own. For him school was a long review and an authoritarian prison which sapped his strength.

Our attorney discovered a provision in the education laws of our state (Ed. note: Then NY, as I recall) that provided for in-home schooling. True, the statute was undoubtedly drafted for the infirm, and perhaps, for child actors as well, but if we could provide an "alternate" but "equivalent" educational experience, we could conceivably comply with the law.

The board of education decided not to fight us, perhaps to avoid the possibility of our pointing out publicly the deficiencies of the schools. We were assigned an advisor from the school system, who, after a nervous six months, left us alone.

We did not draw up a curriculum, a study plan, or an outline of courses. Such moves are the first step in *formalizing* the learning process, whereas we feel the best learning takes place informally. The narrow structuring of school courses has always appalled us. Who are these schools to decide that architecture, archaeology, anthropology, astrology, or astronomy (to take only the As) don't belong in the elementary grades? We believe that all subjects fuse and interlock and the mere definition of a subject is the first step in taking away some of its mystique. For the joy of learning (remember that?) is in discovering—even in discovering subjects—and in satisfying one's curiosity.

More for appearances than anything else, we borrowed some of those

dull textbooks and readers from our school-assigned advisor, stashed them away, and proceeded on our own—or rather, I should say, our two boys proceeded pretty much on their own, for all too often an adult gets between a learner and the material.

Perhaps I sound vague about this. There's a reason. We simply left our oldest boy alone. He read, sometimes eight to ten hours a day. He watched some TV, went to a fair number of movies. With no adults around to order him, to test him or spoonfeed him, he delved into metallurgy (his interest in cycling got him into this), nutrition (on his own he became a vegetarian), architecture. In fact, you name it, chances are he was into it geology, Zen, meteorology, etc.

Yes, we bought a few books, but mostly he used the library. Nobody taught him the Dewey Decimal System; he learned it because he needed to find books. Sometimes a radio or TV host would discuss a book with an author on tour. More often than not the host had not read the book, but (to the surprise of those who feel TV kills reading) our son often went to get it from the library, even if that meant paying 25 cents for a reservation.

Shortly after he turned 17, our oldest son took his high school equivalency test and scored well in all areas. He promptly got his high-school diploma. The very first college he applied to, Bard College in New York State (Ed. note: Barron's College guide rates it "very competitive."), accepted him, and gave him a full scholarship. I had always said an admissions director would be enchanted with the idea of accepting a self-educated child. He began college this fall.

Our other boy developed in a way that gratified us. It took almost a year of not doing very much at all for him to shed the school-instilled idea that he was dumb. (Ed. note: Sometimes it takes much longer.) I think our six-month trip to Mexico did much to dispel that notion, for of the four of us he learned the most Spanish. Nobody "taught" him a word of the language—he just picked it up along with a lot of confidence in himself.

We put absolutely no pressure on him to read. True, we bought a few books on dyslexia and by using their suggestions helped to introduce

him to simple printed words. And when others his age got interested in comic books, he really wanted to read. Only then did we make a big effort to help him. He still reads below what the schools call “grade level,” but that doesn’t bother us.

After being out of school for five years, he expressed a desire to go back to school last year—mostly because all his playmates were in school. So we let him. Almost immediately he became bored, occasionally sullen, and began once again to have feelings of inferiority. The school, locked into grades and classes and schedules, still has no provision for the special learning he requires.

I feel he’s more adrift back in school than he ever was out of school. I also see signs of school learning that are anything but salutary, for the school has its ninth-grade smokers, trashers, punchers, sexists, extortionists, and stealers, as well as a handful of authoritarian types (passing as teachers) who tell him that he may not wear his jacket in class, that he cannot talk while walking to an assembly hall, that he can’t do this or that.

I asked Art Harris what sort of peer group pressure may have led his younger son to go back to school. He replied, in part:

I don’t know how to analyze the peer group pressure which took C back to school. Certainly the kids didn’t *like* school—it was more that they played with him all summer and sort of knew the inevitability of their returning to school in the fall, and urged him to come along as part of their gang. They talked about the wood-working shop and also soccer. Apparently these were to be enjoyed and the rest to be endured.

C had been out of school so long (and left at primary grade) that he had forgotten how bad it was. The first week back in school he had a jacket on in class and was commanded to remove it. He said he was cold. That made no difference. He was to remove it—the light “baseball jacket” was for outside, not inside. I later told him he had a perfect right to wear the jacket in class—but by now he had already become subdued again. We noted immediately he was irritable afternoons—the return to school had affected his personality—

for the worse.

So there was no ostracism—he was, in school and out, always popular, gregarious. I think after a while—although he wasn’t teased—he felt slightly different with his at-home education, and while they didn’t tease him, they put pressure on him to join them for their own gang/amusement/pleasure. The sports was used as a lure.”

To which I would only add, as I said before, why shouldn’t a child, whose parents are paying taxes to support the local schools, be able to go to them *only* for woodworking and soccer, if that’s what s/he wants? I’d like to see a legal test of this.

In another letter, writing of his first talks with the schools about taking his boys out, Art writes:

The very best thing I did was put aside a weekend and write a long (9 or 10 page, single spaced) explanation of what we intended to do, where we got our crazy ideas (Holt, Illich, Leonard, Kozol, Dennison, et al.), how we felt about education, what our qualifications were, etc. Made a dozen copies or so for school people—anyone who’d take one—truant officer, superintendent, head of grade schools, school psychologist—even had copies for the school’s legal chap. I believe this was the turning point—to put it in writing—showed we were serious, gave people chance to appraise us calmly by what we said. Half the time people don’t listen—they resist and are thinking of how they’ll reply. But when you catch them quietly by giving them some reading material, it often reaches them. I feel that weekend was well spent—they realized too how serious we were, and the books we’d read. I quoted from some of these books, your own included, JH.

Agree this is good idea, for many reasons. Doesn’t *always* work, though, as some people have found out. But it is always worth doing.

No Comment

The magazine The Futurist, issue of June 1977, quoted these words (with accompanying drawing) from the book Future Facts: A Forecast Of The World As We Will Know It Before The End Of The Century, by Stephen Rosen (pub. by Simon and Schuster, New York):

Emergency alarm system developed originally for a racially troubled high school in California features a transmitter which people carry on their persons. When the clip is removed, a nearby receiver lights up, indicating that the emergency signal has been relayed to the master control panel. A map on the master control station pinpoints the location of the emergency, and help (Ed. note: Probably in the form of police or armed security guards.) can be on the way within 30 seconds.

Reading Problems

The reason the schools' efforts to deal with "reading problems" so seldom make them better and usually make them worse was put very clearly by George Dennison in *The Lives Of Children* so clearly, simply, and powerfully that I would have thought no one in the world could have failed to understand it.

He had been telling about his work, at the First Street School—a very small (23 students) private free school for mostly poor kids—with a twelve year old boy, Jose, who when he came to this country at age 7 could read Spanish, but after five years in public school could read neither Spanish nor English, nor do anything else that the schools had been trying to teach him to do.

With some pointed questions Dennison showed why Jose could only have seen the task of reading as uninteresting, unreal, humiliating, and terrifying. He then wrote:

Jose's reading problem is Jose. Or to put it another way, there is no such thing as a reading problem. Jose hates books, schools, and teachers, and among a hundred other insufficiencies—all of a piece—he cannot read. Is this a reading problem?

A reading problem, in short, is not a fact of life, but a fact of school administration. It does not describe Jose, but describes the action performed by the school i.e., the action of ignoring everything about Jose except his response to printed letters.

Simple enough. But schools have never been, and are not now, willing or able to understand it. So their "problems" get worse.

On Reading

Years ago I visited some friends; their youngest child, whom I had not seen since she was a tiny baby, was about five. After sizing me up for a while from a distance, and deciding that I seemed to be OK, she made friends, and soon asked me if I would “help her read.” Not quite knowing what she meant, I said I would. She got her book, Dr. Seuss’s *Hop On Pop*, led me to a sofa, and when I was seated, climbed up, snuggled against me, and began slowly to read out loud. What she then did, and what she wanted me to do, I describe in the chapter on Reading in *How Children Learn*. The point I make here is that the first thing she had to do, before the work could begin, was to get in cozy physical contact with me.

In *The Lives Of Children*, describing his work with twelve year old Jose, the tough street kid, Dennison makes the same point. He could only work with Jose at all when the two of them were alone in a locked room. The possibility that other children might see his ignorance and confusion would have been enough to stop Jose dead right at the start. Even alone with his good friend George, he could barely master his self-hatred and panic. Of these meetings Dennison writes:

And so our base of operations was our own relationship, and since Jose early came to trust me, I was able to do something which, simple as it may sound, was of the utmost importance: I made the real, the deeper base of our relationship a matter of physical contact. I could put my arm around his shoulders, or hold his arm, or sit close to him so that our bodies touched, or lean over the page so that our heads almost touched. The importance of this contact to a child experiencing problems with reading can hardly be overestimated.

I have to add here that the trusting had to come *before* the touching. To touch or hold a child who has not yet decided to trust you will only make “that child far more nervous.

In any case, whether you are a “gifted” five year old or a terrified illiterate twelve year old, trying to read something new is a dangerous adventure. You may make mistakes, or fail, and so, feel disappointment, or shame, or anger, or disgust. Just in order to get started on this adventure, most people need as

much comfort, reassurance, and security as they can find. Obviously, the typical classroom, with the other children ready to point out, correct, or even laugh at every mistake, and the teacher all too often (wittingly or unwittingly) helping and urging them to do this, is the worst possible place for this.

At the Ny Lille Skole (New Little School) in Bagsvaerd, near Copenhagen, which I describe in *Instead Of Education*, there is no formal reading program at all—no classes, no reading groups, no instruction, no testing, nothing. Children (like adults) read if, and when, and what, and with whom, and as much as they want to. But each child knows—it is not announced, just one of those things you find out by being in the school—that anytime s/he wants, s/he can go to Rasmus Hansen, a tall, deep-voiced, slow speaking teacher (for many years the head teacher of the school), and say, “Will you read with me?” and he will say Yes. The child picks something to read, goes with Rasmus to a little nook, not a locked room but a cozy and private place, sits down right beside him, and begins to read aloud. Rasmus does almost nothing. From time to time he says softly, “Ja, ja,” meaning “That’s right, keep going.” Unless he suspects the child may be getting in a panic, he almost never points out or corrects a mistake. If asked for a word, he simply says what it is. After a while, usually about twenty minutes or so, the child stops, closes the book, gets up, and goes off to do something else.

Hardly anything one could call teaching. As it happens, Rasmus was “trained” as a reading teacher. He told me that it had taken him many years to stop doing, first one thing and then another, all the many things he had been trained to do, and finally to learn that this tiny amount of moral support and help was all that children needed of him, and that anything more was no help at all.

Thirty Hours

I asked Rasmus how much of this “help” children seemed to need before they felt ready to explore reading on their own. He said that from his records of these reading sessions he had found that the most amount of time any children spent reading with him was about thirty hours, usually in sessions of twenty minutes to a half hour, spread out over a few months. But, he added, many children spent much less time than that with him, and many others never read with him at all. I should add that almost all of the children went from the Ny Lille Skole to the “gymnasium,” a high school far more difficult and demanding than all but a few secondary schools in the U.S. However and whenever the children may have learned it, they were all good readers.

Thirty hours. I had met that figure before. Ten years earlier, I had served for a few weeks as consultant to a program to teach reading to adult illiterates in Cleveland, Ohio. Most of the students were from thirty to fifty years old; most were poor; about half were black, half white; most had moved to Cleveland either from Appalachia or the deep South. There were three sessions, each lasting three weeks. In each session, students went to classes for two hours a night, five nights a week i.e. thirty hours. To teach them, the teachers used Caleb Gattegno’s *Words In Color*, a very ingenious (I now think, too ingenious) method. Used well, it can be very effective. But it makes great demands on teachers, that is, it can be used very badly. Few of the (volunteer) teachers in the program had previously used *Words In Color*; they themselves had been trained in an intensive course just before they began to teach the illiterates. I observed a good many, but by no means all of the teachers in one of the three sessions. Most of them used the method fairly well, one or two very well, a few very badly. The students and classes themselves varied; some classes were much more supportive, some students much more bold and vigorous than others. I don’t know what if any follow-up studies of the program were ever made, or what the students did with their new-found skill. My strong impression at the end of my three weeks was that most of the students in the classes I had observed had learned enough about reading in their thirty hours so that they could go on exploring reading, and become as skillful *as they wanted to be*, on their own.

Some years later I first heard of Paolo Freire, who until the Army ran him

out of the country had been teaching reading and writing to illiterate adult peasants in the poorest sections of northeastern Brazil. One might say that his method was a kind of politically radical, grown-up version of the method Sylvia Ashton Warner described in her books *Spinster and Teacher*. That is, he began by talking to these peasants about the conditions and problems of their lives (this is what the Army didn't like), and then showed them how to write and read the words that came up most in their talk. He too found that it took only about thirty hours of teaching before these wretchedly poor and previously demoralized peasants were able to go on exploring reading on their own.

Thirty hours. One school week. That is the true size of the task.

Multiplication, Etc.

This article continues the ideas in the articles on Counting in *GWS #1* and on Addition in *GWS #4* (which you might refer back to).

Just as they were given lists of unrelated “addition facts” and “subtraction facts” to memorize in first and second grades, so most children, when they reach third grade, will begin to meet “multiplication facts.” One such fact would be that $2 \times 3 = 6$, another that $3 \times 2 = 6$. If children ask about this coincidence, they may well be told, as they were about addition, that “multiplication is commutative,” which of course explains nothing, just tells them in fancier and more mysterious words what they already knew. They will almost certainly be given a list of “100 multiplication facts” to memorize (called “learning the times tables”) and will be tested on these often. Still later, probably in fifth grade, they will begin to meet fractions, and will be told that $\frac{1}{2} \times 6$ (sometimes “one-half of six”) = 3 and that $\frac{1}{3} \times 6 = 2$. Still later, they may be told that 2 and 3 are factors of 6.

So, somewhere between first or second and about seventh grades (depending on which standard arithmetic texts their teachers have been ordered to use) the children will have collected (complete with “explanations”, illustrations of baby chicks, pies, etc.) these more or less unrelated facts connected with the number 6:

$$2 \times 3 = 6$$

$$3 \times 2 = 6$$

$$6 \div 2 = 3$$

$$6 \div 3 = 2$$

$$\frac{1}{2} \times 6 = 3$$

$$\frac{1}{3} \times 6 = 2$$

$$6 \times ? = 3$$

$$6 \times \frac{1}{3} = 2$$

2 is one-third of 6

3 is one-half of 6

2 and 3 are factors of 6

But, as I said about “addition facts” in *GWS #4*, these are not separate “multiplication facts” or “division facts” or whatever. They are *one* fact, a fact not of arithmetic but of nature, a natural property of the number 6, which

children can find for themselves and verify as often as they need or want to. The fact is that when you have this many objects:

* * * * *

you can arrange them like this:

* * *

* * *

All those “facts” written out above are simply different ways of writing down and talking about this one fact. So anyone, having discovered this property or fact about 6, and having been told the different ways in which we write and talk about this fact, could look for and find similar facts about other numbers, and then use those same ways of writing them down.

People (young or old) who do this will find that there are some numbers (2, 3, 5, 7, etc.) which they cannot arrange in more than one row and have the rows come out even. They might be interested in knowing that we call such numbers “prime” and all other numbers “composite.” One of a number of properties of any and every whole number is that it is either prime or composite. Some people (young or old) might be interested in finding out for themselves what some of the prime numbers are, say, up to 200, or in learning that using modern computers people have been able to list all the primes up to some very large number (which I don’t know, but which you could probably find out by writing Martin Gardner at *Scientific American* magazine in New York City). Or that no one has yet found a formula which they can prove will generate all the prime numbers.

I am not saying that what have written above about properties of 6 and our ways of saying and writing them are things that every child should know, or that unschoolers must be sure to tell their children. I suspect that what I have long said about reading, that more children would learn it, and learn it better, if it were illegal, is just as true of elementary arithmetic. And there are many people who are right now leading interesting, useful, satisfying lives who do not know any arithmetic at all. On the other hand, what I have said about numbers here seems to me interesting, and useful, in many circumstances. Other things being anywhere equal, I would rather know it than not know it.

In any case, I do say that if we are going to show and/or tell children about multiplying, dividing, fractions, factors, and so on, we would do well to do it more or less as shown above, so that those different ideas of arithmetic are connected from the very beginning. And I think that at least some and

perhaps many children might find it quite interesting to find out for themselves which numbers can be arranged in two rows, which in three, which in four, five, etc. and which can only be put in one row.

Abstractions

This may be a good place to reprint something I wrote in *What Do I Do Monday?* (av. here) I had been writing about children using objects to find for themselves certain properties of numbers. I then added:

To this sort of talk I have often heard the reply that numbers are abstract and must be taught abstractly. I have heard this used as a criticism of the Cuisenaire rods. People who say this do not understand either numbers or abstractions and abstractness, or the rods. Of course numbers are abstract, but like any and all other abstractions, they are an abstraction of *something*. People invented them to help them memorize and record certain properties of reality: numbers of animals, boundaries of an annually flooded field, observations of stars, moon, tides, etc. These numbers did not get their properties from people's imaginations, but from the things they were designed to represent. A map of the United States is an abstraction, but it looks the way it does, not because the map maker wanted it that way, but because of the way the United States looks. Of course, map makers can and must make certain choices, just as did the inventors of numbers. They can decide that what they want to show on their maps are contours, or climate, or temperature, or rainfall, or roads, or air routes, or the historical growth of the country. Having decided that, they can decide to color, say, the Louisiana Purchase blue, or red, or yellow—whatever looks nice to them. But once they have decided what they want to map, and how they will represent it, by colors, or lines, or shading, or whatever, reality then dictates what the map will look like.

So with numbers. The time may come when it is useful to consider numbers and the science of working with them without any reference to what they stand for, just as it might be useful to study the general science of mapping without mapping anyone place in particular. But it is *illogical, confusing, and absurd* to start there with young children. The only way they can become familiar with the idea of maps, symbol systems, abstractions of reality, is to move from known realities to the maps or symbols of them. Indeed, we all work this way. I know how

contour maps are made—in that sense I understand them; but I cannot do what my brother-in-law, who among other things plans and lays out ski areas, can do. He can look at a contour map and instantly, in his mind's eye, feel the look and shape of the area. The reason he can do this while I can't is that he has walked over dozens of mountains and later looked at and studied and worked on the contour maps of areas where he was walking. No amount of explanations will enable any of us to turn an unfamiliar symbol system into the reality it stands for. We must go the other way first.

Teaching

In my latest book, *Never Too Late*, which is about my own experience as a late beginner in music (Delacorte, Oct. '78—av. here), I write at one point:

The trouble with most teachers of music or anything else is that they have in the back of their minds an idea more or less like this: “Learning is and can only be the result of teaching. Anything important my students learn, they learn because I teach it to them.’

All my own work as teacher and learner has led me to believe quite the opposite, that teaching is a very strong medicine, which like all strong medicines can quickly and easily turn into a poison. At the right time (i.e. when the student has asked for it) and in very small doses, it can indeed help learning. But at the wrong times, or in too large doses, it will slow down learning or prevent it altogether.

All the argument I have ever seen or heard about teaching seems to me to have missed this central point. People argue about whether teaching is good or bad, as if it was clear that when learning is not happening, the cause must be that people are teaching badly, or not enough. It never occurs to them that the problem may be that people are teaching too much, and that whether the teaching is good or bad may have very little to do with it.

Useful Resources

The *New Schools Exchange* (Pettigrew Ark. 72752) has published their latest (and very possibly, last) Directory. 120 pages long, it contains, among other things, a bibliography, a curriculum enrichment guide, a national directory of alternative and community schools, a list of full time adult education programs, a list of free universities, learning exchanges, etc. \$5 per copy, 40% off on orders of 10 or more.

The Lifelong Learner, by Ronald Gross (Simon & Schuster, NY \$8.95). Much information about independent learning. Some info seems to duplicate the NSE Directory i.e. the list of Free Universities, but in other respects they are different.

New Age Magazine, 32 Station St., Brookline Village MA 02146 (\$1.50 per copy) published in their Feb. '78 issue a list, compiled by Nancy DuVergne Smith, of Alternatives in Higher Education, which means, ways of getting real degrees, real college and/or graduate school tickets, without actually going to those places. Best list of these I have seen, not duplicated in either of the two sources above. GWS may make a cheap reprint of it some day, and/or print it in the magazine. For the time being, order from New Age.

Green Revolution, R.D. 7, Box 388A, York PA 17402 published in its Feb. '78 issue a Directory of Intentional Communities. Some readers of GWS have asked about these. I know of no better source of info on this subject. (\$2)

The National Alternative Schools Program has published a Directory of Public Alternative Schools, including, among other things, a list (with brief descriptions) of over 1300 schools. "Alternative" has become an OK word in public education, so how "alternative" some of these schools are, and in what ways, people will have to find out for themselves. But it is a place to start looking, and there is a chance that some of these, like the Multicultural High School in Milwaukee, WI (GWS #3), might act as the legal shelter for a home study program. Order Directory from NASP, School of Education, Univ. of Mass., Amherst MA 01003 (\$4.20, postage incl.) Make checks payable to Univ. of Mass.

Why School?

The Board of Public Education in Montana published in 1975 a pamphlet about educational goals. (I feel sure there are documents like this in many other states) At the top of the first page is a stylized picture of a child, a large plus sign, and a stylized picture of home, church, and school (with the school in front, home in the rear). Then this text:

In Montana, A Basic Quality Education Has Been Defined As “A Process Which Can Enable Students To Transform Their Potential Into Actuality” (Definition adopted by the Board of Public Education in its 1975 *Report on Basic Quality Education*)

The EXPERIENCE of schooling, as one part of the educational process, should actively involve students in:

communicating ideas, knowledge, thoughts, and feelings;

developing personal responsibility;

finding joy in learning;

reasoning critically and creatively;

being effective in a changing world;

assuming social responsibility;

learning who they are becoming; and

furthering their creative ability. (Eight dimensions of basic quality education as adopted by Montana’s Board of Public Education.)

(At the top of the second page, a big equals sign, then a stylized picture of child with arms and legs outflung, as if in joy, etc. Then this text:)

The OUTCOMES of the educational process should be students who have:

developed skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening (*communication*);

developed habits and skills necessary to maintain physical fitness and mental health (*fitness*);

learned the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (*citizenship*);

developed and applied skills which define and fulfill their learning needs throughout life (*lifelong learning*);

learned their career opportunities and capabilities (*careers*);

developed and applied standards for judging behavior (*character*);

acquired a positive attitude toward learning processes (*attitude*);

learned to live in harmony with others (*cooperation/relationships*);

learned to live in harmony with and improve the environment (*environment*);

developed an understanding of their individual role and the roles of others as members of a family (*family*);

ability to recognize, define and seek solutions to problems (*thinking*);

ability to cope with change (*change*);

acquired knowledge and skills to purchase goods and services appropriate to their needs and resources (*consumerism*);

acquired knowledge and skills for developing an appreciation of beauty (*beauty*);

acquired attitudes and knowledge needed for participation in both mental and physical recreational activities (*recreation/leisure*). (Montanans' Fifteen Goals for Education established through a survey as one part of the Montana Educational Assessment Program conducted by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.)

Good Reasons ...

One might argue a long time (and people do) about whether the above listed goals or purposes are good ones, or are things that schools can do better than anyone else, or do well, or even do at all, or whether what the schools do to carry out these purposes makes sense, or works. Such arguments are a waste of time. For none of the items listed above are the real, serious, primary purposes of school. They are secondary purposes—at best, things the schools wish they could do, not things they have to do.

What makes these purposes secondary? Is it that in stating them the Montana Board of Education is not sincere? Not at all. They are as sincere as the day is long, probably spent weeks of wearying committee sessions in drawing up these purposes, which most teachers would no doubt strongly endorse. No, what makes these purposes secondary is not that school people don't believe in them, *but that no one ever gets in trouble for not doing them.*

When and where was a superintendent, or principal, or teacher ever fired because students were not good at communicating thoughts and feelings? Or because they hated learning? Or could not reason well enough even to avoid being taken in by ads and TV commercials, or the grossest appeals by politicians or journalists to their greed, fear, and envy? Or because they drank, smoked, never exercised, never walked if they could drive? Or never voted? Or thought it was OK to do anything you could get away with? Or did not know what the Bill of Rights was, could not understand it, and when compelled to read it, dimly thought it was some kind of Communist document (all of these views widely held by Americans, in and out of school)? Or went over their heads in debt buying things they did not need and could not afford? Or threw their bottles, cans, and garbage all over the landscape? Or spent thirty hours a week watching TV? Or ... etc., etc.?

No one has been fired, or is going to be fired, because huge numbers of people coming out of our schools think and do these things. Everyone who works in schools knows this. Therefore these purposes, however sincerely held, are not serious, not primary.

And Real Ones

How then do we find the real, serious, primary purposes of school? We find them by asking, *what do people get in trouble for doing (or not doing)?* When we apply this acid test to schools, we find that their primary purposes are three.

The first is to get kids out of the adults' hair—out of the house, off the streets, and out of the labor market.

The second is to grade, rank, and label them, so that later they may be funneled into this or that slot in society, and what is more important, will accept without protest, *as being all they deserve*, the slots (mostly not very good) they have been funneled into.

The third is to teach them about Reality, to prepare them for Real Life. For most of them this means boring, alienated work, empty of skill or serious purpose, and an equally alienated and passive leisure. In short, for a life of mass production and mass consumption, the factory and the TV set. Schools (as they always have) make children fit for the factory, not because they teach anything that will be useful (in or out of the factory) *but because they are like the factory*.

The modern bureaucracy—whether factory, office, store, hospital, government agency, school, or whatever—is a machine with people for parts. The work of schools is to turn children into the kind of people who can and will work as parts of a machine, and will scarcely even be able to imagine any other way they could work.

But, some might ask, where and when do people decide that schools are going to do these things? Does the Board of Education (of Montana, or any other state or city), having drawn up that fine list of secondary purposes, then hold another and secret meeting, at which they say, never mind that list, here is what we are *really* going to do? Do educators say to themselves, I know I am *supposed* to help kids be informed, critical, creative, etc. but what I am *really* going to do is teach them to do what they're told, believe without question whatever Authority tells them, and accept boredom and powerlessness as a natural, proper, and inevitable part of all life. No; there are no secret meetings, and educators (except for a few, many of whom are now busy organizing "traditional" schools) do not say such things to each other or

to themselves. That is not what happens.

What happens is that schools and school people are taught to carry out their primary purposes in exactly the way that pigeons are taught to hit ping pong balls down an alley with their wings. They are operant conditioned. Operant conditioning (see *GWS #5*) is a way of getting another creature (person, pigeon, rat, or whatever) to do what you want, without ever showing or telling what you want, and without that other creature even knowing what you want, or suspecting that you want anything. I often imagine, if pigeons could talk, that two of them might have this little conversation: A. “Why do you keep hitting that little ball with your wing?” B. “That’s how I create food.”

If you want to make a creature move North, the trick is to reward every Northerly move and punish every Southerly move, however slight. Before long that creature will move North as often and as far as it can. If you teach in schools, it doesn’t take you long to find which way North is, i.e., to know that you will be in serious trouble if you don’t keep the kids still and quiet, if you don’t give a lot of tests and grades, or give mostly good grades, or if the children (up to and including college students) seem to like and trust you and to be having a lot of fun in your class. Before long there will be a reaction, from fellow teachers (often from them first of all), from superiors, from parents, perhaps even from students themselves (“She *made* us keep them notebooks!”). Under this steady pressure, only a few teachers persist. After a while, most of them get tired of being isolated, looked on as freaks, made fun of. They quit—or they get fired.

Same for Superintendents. Scores of them, within the past ten years or so, have been fired, for trying to make their schools more interesting, attractive, exciting, and meaningful to their students. Many innovative administrators have said to me over the years that they take it as a simple matter of course that they will not last in any job for more than three or four years, which is as long as it takes (it often takes less) for the angry opposition to form that will throw them out. The teachers, principals, and superintendents who hold their jobs *do not innovate*—or only as much as is useful for public relations purposes. Traditional subjects, strict discipline (at least on paper and in theory—see *The Way It Spozed To Be*), plenty of homework, plenty of tests, plenty of grades (mostly low); that’s what keeps your job or gets you a better one.

Sometimes the message comes directly. Some years ago a Professor of Education at a New Jersey college was asked to speak at a businessman's luncheon club in a nearby town. He talked about new kinds of teaching and learning in many primary schools in Great Britain and a few in this country. He was later told by the Superintendent of Schools in that town that within a few hours of the talk the head of one of the largest firms in town called up to say, "We don't want any of these newfangled ideas in our schools."

But usually the message does not need to be so quick or blunt. School people know which way North is, and where the food, and the electric shocks, come from.

School Story

From a Boston Globe story about the “reading crisis.”

Others suffer from even more serious reading problems. A transitional aide at the X Middle School recalls that when he showed the book, *The Ocean World Of Jacques Cousteau* to a student, the student asked what the title was.

“He got stuck on the word “ocean,”” the aide said. “He was an eighth-grader and he couldn’t even read.”

A good example of school incompetence. Nothing in what the schools call “phonics” would help a student who did not know the word “ocean” to figure it out. The only word I can think of in which the letters “-cean” make the same sound as in “ocean” is “crustacean,” hardly an everyday word. Two of the other main words in that title are French proper names. Maybe that student could read, maybe he couldn’t. But no intelligent, thoughtful, and serious teacher would make a judgment one way or the other on the basis of the student’s response to this book title.

Books Av. Here

Acting Out, by Roland Betts, intro. by J. Holt (\$8, cloth). From the introduction:

This is a very funny, sad, unsparing, compassionate, and frightening account of the lives of people, both students and adults, in the public schools of one of our great cities ... a very accurate description of urban mass education and mass schooling in the United States—a failure and a disaster.

Where (the courts) have not (allowed parents to teach their children at home), it has usually been on the grounds that, however skillful the parents might be at teaching school subjects, and however high the test scores of their children might be, the parents could not ... provide the necessary socializing, civilizing, democratizing experience of going to school with large numbers of other children. Having read Mr. Betts, I cannot but wonder, on what grounds could any reasonable judge compel children to attend the kind of schools here described. Indeed, I hope his book may be one piece of ammunition ... for parents to use who are trying to get their children out of schools.

An important new book.

The Lives Of Children, by George Dennison (\$1.70, paper). In my review of it for *The New York Review of Books*, I wrote:

It is by far the most perceptive, moving, and important book on education that I have ever read. ... It describes the lives of twenty-three poor children ... black, white, and Puerto Rican ... of the kind that our giant educational system conspicuously, totally, and hopelessly fails to reach or to help. (The First Street) school, spending no more money per pupil than the city's public schools, did not fail. The children got well, grew, learned.

Then, I thought that schools were (or at least might become) serious about helping children. Their failure to read or heed this book was one of the things that convinced me that they were not serious, and could not be made so. A great and essential book (see GWS #5).

The Way It Spozeed To Be and How To Survive In Your Native Land, by James Herndon (\$1.25 and \$2, paper). A serious and resourceful teacher, working in difficult situations, tries to learn, and does learn, how to do his job. Result—one school fires him, the next isolates and ignores him. Two perceptive, honest, revealing, and wonderfully comic books, worthy companions to Mark Twain. (see GWS #1 and #5)

The Self-Respecting Child, by Alison Stallibrass (\$7, cloth). (see GWS #1)

The Myth Of The Hyperactive Child, by Peter Schrag and Diane Divoky (\$2, paper). A mistake corrected and/or a racket exposed. (see GWS #1 and #5)

Of my own seven books (the eighth, *Never Too Late*, will appear in October), perhaps the most immediately useful to unschoolers may be *What Do I Do Monday?* It suggests many specific ways in which children can explore the world (in writing, math, science, etc.), and learn and feel its wholeness and interconnectedness. These were written as classroom projects, but almost all of them could be done by children, or one child, in a family. Even for those who might not want to try any of these projects, the book will show how any interest or activity of a child can be encouraged, and can and will then lead to many other interests and activities (\$2, cloth; \$1.50, paper).

Instead Of Education (\$3.50, cloth; \$3.10, paper) has a number of chapters about teaching, and about the proper relationship of teachers to learners, that might be very helpful to unschoolers.

Escape From Childhood (\$7, cloth; \$1.50 paper) is not about teaching or education, but about the great need of young people to be treated with seriousness, courtesy, and respect, to have contact with adults other than child specialists, and to feel they are a useful addition to the lives of the people around them.

Freedom And Beyond (\$7, cloth; \$1.50, paper) is about two things—should perhaps have been two separate books. The first half is about freedom—how people live, work, teach, learn together in non-coercive relationships, some of the problems they run into, some ways of dealing with these. The second half of the book is about poverty—more specifically, about why schools and things done in schools cannot cure poverty and usually only make it worse. Useful for dealing with the people who claim that compulsory schooling helps the poor, and indeed is their only hope.

How Children Fail (\$1, paper). If your children are in school, and having trouble, this will probably tell you (and them) a lot about why. If they are at home, this may help you avoid some of the school's mistakes. It will also help you learn the signs in your children's behavior that will tell you that you are still making some of those mistakes, putting them under too much pressure of one kind or another.

How Children Learn (\$1, paper). How little kids figure things out, before too much adult "teaching," in and out of school, makes them fearful, dependent, and stupid.

The Underachieving School (\$1, paper). Useful chapters on reading, on why testing is useless and harmful, on important flaws in Piaget's experiments, and other myths of school.

The Lives And Times Of Archy And Mehitabel (\$6, cloth). Nothing to do with education. A cockroach and a tough alley cat take a satirical look at life in the U.S.A. Written in the 20s and even truer and funnier today. A classic of comic verse.

A sample, just to tempt. In one poem, Archy tells of meeting Warty Bliggens, a toad who thinks that the entire universe was created just for him. When Archy asks how come, Warty Bliggens asks in return what the universe has done to deserve him. To this Archy comments (since he works the keys of a typewriter by diving on them, head first, he can't make capital letters):

if i were a human being

i would not laugh

too complacently

at poor warty bliggens

for similar absurdities

have only too often

lodged in the crinkles

of the human

cerebrum

Editor—John Holt

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Growing Without Schooling 7

January 1979

Many things have happened since you received GWS #6. Two unschooling families have won important rulings from state courts—more on this later. *Time* magazine, after talking at length with a number of unschooling families, ran a fine story about this in their Dec. 4 '78 issue. Soon after, I was invited to appear, with Linda and Bob Sessions and their children, on the Phil Donahue show in Chicago. In the four weeks since the first airing of the show (it goes out in different cities on different days), we received 2700 letters! Some of these sound only curious, but at least half sound really interested in our work. Needless to say, for the two of us to read and answer that much mail has been quite a task. And we expect another 1000 or so before we're through. If most of those who sound interested decide to subscribe, it should be a great boost to us.

The group subscription record has moved West again, this time to Lincoln, Neb., where readers have taken out a 22X subscription—and for 18 issues!

At the same time, the publishers of my newest book (*Never Too Late—Delacorte*) said that they were very interested in a possible book about unschooling. Much of the material for this would come from GWS, but I have already written 10-15,000 words of new material and have more still to write. All this action has delayed this issue of GWS. But barring other avalanches of mail, we should have #8 out fairly soon.

Good News

Since we wrote the story “Help Wanted” in this issue, a Massachusetts Superior Court has handed down a ruling favorable to the Perchemlides family. It did not (as I did not think it would) say point blank to the School District, “Approve this family’s program.” What it said was, in effect, “Take another look at this program, and *this time*, be reasonable.” The family will probably have to (and will be wise to) make a few small concessions to the schools, probably in the area of curriculum, though I have strongly urged that they not yield an inch in the crucial matter of testing and evaluation. But the effect of the ruling will almost certainly be that they will be able to teach their children at home.

The Judge’s decision is long and intricate, and a very good lesson in how judges think. Since we are so late with this issue, I won’t try to quote it or discuss it much here. (For \$2, we will send you a copy of the complete ruling.) But he made one novel and (to us) extremely important and useful point, that the Constitution guarantees to citizens many *implied rights*, rights which it does not specifically name, and that the right of parents to control the education of their children is one such implied right. He did not put this right under the First Amendment, but under the *Ninth*, saying that the right to educate one’s children can be seen as a logical part of a general right to privacy, the right to control one’s private affairs.

But he also said that the right of the states to oversee the education of the young was *itself* a constitutionally protected right, falling under the general heading of police powers. From this it follows that in this matter of education the rights of parents and the rights of states are competing rights, which must be balanced against each other. The schools, therefore, may not arbitrarily reject, as they did in this case, a proposed home teaching plan, without giving any reasons. They must give reasons, which must be compelling, and may not include such trivia as “the children will miss the social life,” or “it will set a bad precedent.”

This is the narrow line that we must try to (and I think can) persuade the courts to walk. Yes, the States may oversee the education of the young, and Yes, to that end they may establish schools and even make them compulsory, but at the same time, No, they may not establish a monopoly of schools or

even of methods of schooling (this is the meaning of Pierce and other cases), and No, they may not say that for people to educate their own children is in and of itself a crime, or arbitrarily and without due process deny them the right to do so.

Help Needed

Mr. and Mrs. Perchemlides (*GWS #4*), when they told the local school board that they wanted to take their child out of school, were told by them to submit a home teaching program. They did twenty pages long, detailed and thorough. The school board (as often happens) called it “inadequate,” without giving any reasons, or saying how they would have to change it to make it adequate.

In states where the law makes home instruction a legal alternative, such action by school boards can, I believe, be attacked in court on two grounds: 1) It denies due process 2) It sets aside the stated will of the legislature. As I have said, I do not think we should try to get courts to rule that compulsory schooling, or things done in and by schools, are un-Constitutional. All such arguments lead to the Supreme Court, which if they hear such cases at all are for some time to come likely to rule against us.

Beyond that, I think we would be unwise to make it part of our legal strategy to ask local or state courts to overrule school boards by specifically approving home teaching programs which the boards have turned down . In the first place, the legislatures have specifically given that task to the school boards. In the second place, the courts may very well say that they are not competent to make such decisions. In the third place, they may fear (with good reason) that if in a few cases they do rule in favor of parents and against the local school board, they will soon be swamped with such cases. Finally, there is no reason to expect that in matters of education most judges will be any more tolerant or enlightened than most school boards.

But I do think we may be able to get many courts to say that if state law makes home instruction a legal option (and gives school boards the right to approve or disapprove such programs), these boards are legally obliged 1) to make public some explicit and reasonable standards which such programs must meet in order to be approved 2) to approve all programs which, meet such standards, and 3) where they claim that a given program does not meet them, to state explicitly in what respects it does not and how it would have to be changed in order to do so .

This, legally, is where the Perchemlides family is at the moment. They are trying to convince the court that, in disapproving their program of home

instruction, the local school board acted arbitrarily and unreasonably. To do that, they must persuade the court, not necessarily to overrule the school board by approving their program, but only to say that the program has enough intrinsic merit so that the board could not turn it down out of hand, without reasons. To help them, I have asked some Professors of Education I know to look at their program, and if they think it is good, or at least equivalent to what is done in most schools, to say so in writing. So far, four have agreed to do so, and I believe others will join them.

Which brings me at last to the point of this particular article. It would be very helpful if we had, from all parts of the country, a list of professors of Education, and also, school administrators—Superintendents, Curriculum Supervisors, School Board Presidents or other officers and members—who would be willing from time to time to look over proposed home instruction programs of unschoolers, and if they think they are adequate and/or equivalent to what local schools provide, to put this in writing. Will you, readers of *GWS*, please help us make such a list, either by asking any Professors of Education, etc. you know if they would agree to be on such a list, or, if you are a Professor of Education, etc., by giving us your name. We would not publish these names in *GWS* (unless some people asked to have their names published). But we would send the list to unschoolers who asked for it, and they could get in touch with such Professors, etc. directly.

A Reminder

The label or address on your *GWS* (or envelope) will have on it a symbol like 1 07, 2 08, 3 12, etc. The first of these two numerals tells us how many copies of each issue to send you. The second numeral tells us, and you, the *last* issue of your present subscription.

If your subscription ends with *this* issue of *GWS*, and if you wish to continue to subscribe (we hope you do), please renew your subscription right away. Otherwise we will have to send you a renewal notice, which will take time and money we would much rather use to make a better magazine, help unschoolers, and find new readers. If for any reason you have decided that you do not wish to receive *GWS* any more, it will be a great help to us if you will drop us a card telling us that. Thanks very much.

Ruling From Iowa

In the case of The State of Iowa, plaintiff, vs. Robert Sessions and Linda Sessions, defendants, the following excerpts from the recent ruling of the District Court of Iowa in and for Winneshiek County may be of great interest to many GWS readers:

The above cases, involving the filing of criminal charges and convictions thereon against Robert Sessions and Linda Sessions in Magistrate Court, now come before the Court upon appeals to District Court. The matters as criminal matters, as contemplated by statute, were heard de novo by the Court on appeal.

The Court, after reviewing the file, considering the evidence, statements of counsel, and the briefs and arguments submitted, now enters the following:

Findings Of Fact

1. Robert Sessions and Linda Sessions were each charged under Section 299.1 in that each did unlawfully fail to have his or her 7-year-old son, Erik Sessions, attend a public school and/or obtain equivalent instruction elsewhere.
2. They were tried under that charge in Magistrate's Court. They were each found guilty and were each sentenced to pay a fine of \$50 and costs were assessed against them. Appeal was thereafter filed.
6. The defendants requested the board of directors of the Decorah Community School District to approve their home teaching program. The board refused, and the matter was appealed to the State Department of Public Instruction, and a decision was rendered by the board . . . sustaining the position of the Decorah board and stating in substance, (a) that the Sessions met the first test, that is, of an equivalent instruction program . . . (b) The Sessions did not meet the second test, that is, the requirement of "providing instruction by a certified teacher."
7. Thereafter, the Sessions filed a petition for declaratory ruling with

the state board in which clarification and guidance or interpretation was asked in the following form: “Precisely what must we do to comply with the “instruction by a certified teacher” clause of 299.1 of the 1977 Code of Iowa?”

On May 10, 1978, the board answered the query in letter form (stating in substance) ... (c) ... “the appropriate standard to be used to determine the amount of instruction required by a certified teacher is that portion of a normal day during which instruction occurs in the public school district of residence. ... strongly imply the necessity of teacher presence or close proximity throughout the instructional process.’ ... This letter and information reached the defendants some time after their conviction.

8. Defendants assert the unconstitutionality of the charge in that: (a) the law is vague on standards of public instruction. (b) It violates the 1st and 14th Amendments. (c) Denial of due process by the action of the Decorah Community School District Board.

The Court enters the following:

Conclusions Of Law

3. Defendants further assert unconstitutionality by virtue of alleged violations of the 1st and 14th Amendments to the United States Constitution. Defendants in effect assert that their right to freedom of religion has been denied by denying the defendants their right to educate their child as they desire. The defendants cite the compelling case of *State of Wisconsin vs. Yoder*, 406 US 205, 32 Lawyers Ed. 2d 15, 92 Supreme Court 1526, and other citations in substantiation of their position. ... The Court feels that under the very concept of the *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* case cited by the defendants, that adequate showing has not been made to put the defendants’ opposition on a religious plane. In the cited case the Court said in substance: ‘... a way of life, however virtuous and admirable, may not be interposed as a barrier to reasonable state regulation of education if it is based on purely secular considerations; to have the protection of the religious clauses of the 1st Amendment, the claims must be *rooted in religious belief*....’ (Ed. italics)

This is not to say an individual or individuals must be a part of an organized religion to come under the concept of the cited case. But rather under the record in this case the defendants have not presented to the Court sufficient evidence to sustain their argument under the 1st Amendment.

6. Defendants urge the position that truancy violation, being a criminal charge, that the burden is on the plaintiff (sic) to prove all of the elements of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt. This proposition is surely an accurate statement of the law. Applying this to the case before the Court, the burden would be on the State to show each of the following elements: (1) That the defendants failed to have their child attend school in a public school district; and (2) Failing to have the child attend public school, they did not cause said child to attend upon equivalent instruction by a *certified teacher elsewhere*.

The first element was proved. As to the second element, the State held that the parents did procure a program indicating an equivalent education. The query remaining then: Was the *equivalent instruction provided by a certified teacher elsewhere*?

The Court's ruling in this case is not to be construed as the Court's passing upon the quality of education in the Decorah school system.... The Court's function is essentially to determine whether or not the defendants have committed the crime alleged and are guilty thereof.

7. Finally the Court legally concludes that the burden is above set forth under the second element, "failing to have child attend public school, did they cause said child to attend upon equivalent instruction by a certified teacher elsewhere?' In this connection the Court must conclude that based upon the entire record, the State has failed to prove the alternate or second element, that is, that the schooling for Erik is not the equivalent by a certified teacher elsewhere (sic). The Court concludes that there is a reasonable doubt as to the question of the certified teacher, and that as a consequence the defendants should be acquitted of the criminal charge.

In so ruling the Court has *considered of great significance the element of equivalency* (Ed. italics), the sincere effort on the part of the

defendants to comply, the difficulties and long delay in their getting a response to their query on a certified teacher (in fact no response was received until after their conviction), *the inherent nature of the statutes contemplating a private tutorial situation as an alternate (sic) to public school attendance* (Ed. italics), and finally the conclusion that the legislature created a public school requirement with alternatives. *These alternatives may not be arbitrarily denied* (Ed. italics), but if the statute is to have a viable Constitutional aspect of validity, it must be a determinable, workable statute with the opportunity for a legitimate exception.

The Court can understand the concern over the propriety of “opening the door” for many attempted exceptions. (Ed. note: The State made much of this point in all its dealings with the Sessions.) However, the Court feels that this is not a real threat under the statute and reasonably within the spirit of the statute. Exception as contemplated by the statute adds strength, not weakness, to the law.

8. Finally the Court merely concludes that the second and alternate element of the crime has not been proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Now, Therefore, It Is The Judgment And Decree Of The Court:

1. The judgment and sentence of the Magistrate is reversed.
2. The defendants are hereby acquitted of the charges filed against them.
3. Costs are assessed to the plaintiff.

Frank D. Elwood, Judge First Judicial District, Iowa.

A Landmark Case

This seems to me an extremely important decision, in some ways the most important decision on compulsory schooling that has yet appeared. To be sure, the court made its ruling on very narrow grounds. But that is why the ruling is so important. There is very little in it that most judges, *whatever might be their views on compulsory schooling*, would be likely to disagree with. It is, in short, a decision which we can expect many courts, at least in states where the law provides specifically for alternatives to schooling, to accept as a reasonable precedent.

What it boils down to is this. In all such cases 1) the burden of proof is on the schools 2) to show beyond reasonable doubt 3) that what the parents propose to do at home will be worse than what the schools are actually doing (not just talking about doing). There are very few school systems which will in fact be able to show this, either to a judge or a jury.

This gives us very good reason to believe that in most jurisdictions, in states whose laws provide for an alternative to schooling (unlike, say, NH, which does not), any parents who prepare and present their case thoroughly and wisely can probably win a favorable ruling from a court.

It is worth noting, too, that Judge Elwood in Iowa held it very much against the State (i.e., the schools) that they did not cooperate with the Sessions in their efforts to find out precisely what the schools would accept as “equivalent.” This means that when we ask schools what we must do to make our program equivalent, *they have to answer*. If we then do what they tell us we have to do, they are not likely to be able to show beyond a reasonable doubt that our program is *not* equivalent.

Not only will these arguments probably seem weighty to other courts, or juries, but they may well convince a good many school boards and their attorneys that bringing unschoolers to court will be far more trouble than it is worth. As a general rule, lawyers do not advise their clients to go to court unless they think they have an excellent chance to win.

Bob Sessions, writing about the decision in the *North Country Anvil* (a good publication, \$7.50 for 6 issues, Box 37, Millville MN 55957), says,

Judge Elwood ... ruled in our favor on two counts: 1) he does not think the state proved our guilt beyond a reasonable doubt because

they offered no good arguments that “certified instruction’ requires the identical number of hours of contact found in local schools, and 2) he believes that our providing an equivalent education to that to be got in schools satisfies the *intent of Iowa law* (Ed. italics). His decision does not specify how much certified instruction is adequate (Ed. note: Thank goodness that question is left *open*.) nor does he say that anyone with a program like ours should be exempted. (Ed. note: But thanks to his ruling, most will be.) The Iowa Department of Public Instruction still has review power regarding the adequacy of anyone’s program, and all such programs must have “significant” involvement of a certified instructor.”

Later he says,

The county attorney has filed a motion for a re-hearing with the district judge, and he has said publicly that he is strongly predisposed to appeal to the Iowa Supreme Court. We have good reason to believe his motion for are-hearing will be rejected, and we’re also convinced that he will appeal.

To date we have spent about \$3,000 on this case, \$700 of which came in the form of mostly small donations from people like yourselves. Our reserves have been exhausted, and although working through the Supreme Court takes much time (a year to a year and a half), consequently allowing us to again save some money, it is also much more costly. The only way we will be able to continue is through support from you.”

I hope any GWS readers in a position to do so will give some of this support. (Rob’t Sessions, Rt. 2, Decorah, IA 52101)

Legal Strategies

A few general observations. Judges, in making their rulings, take into account a number of things—legal principle, legal precedent, the will of the legislature, and *the possible or probable social effect of their ruling*. Thus, parents who have sued the schools for damages because their children did not learn anything there have so far been turned down by the courts, on the grounds that this would lead to a rash of lawsuits that would bankrupt the schools. We may take it as certain that the courts will *not* in any foreseeable future make rulings which they think may lead to the speedy destruction of the public schools or the overturn of compulsory schooling. If we ask for such broad rulings, we will be turned down. But beyond that, either in asking for narrow rulings, or speaking of any we may be able to win, we must be careful not to make large public boasts and outcries to the effect that “this means the end of compulsory schooling.” Judge Elwood’s ruling may or may not be upheld by the Iowa Supreme Court. Almost certainly, it would not be if it had said that anyone with a program like the Sessions should be exempted from compulsory schooling, or that the Iowa Department of Public Instruction should not have the power to review such programs. The fact that the Sessions are willing to go to such trouble and expense to teach their child at home will be seen by the courts as part of the proof *they must have* that the Sessions will be serious and conscientious teachers. The courts may be ready to give the same permission to any others who can show that they too are willing to go to this amount of trouble. But they are probably not yet ready to give blanket permission to anyone just because they can put the right words down on a piece of paper.

In *GWS #6*, in a short piece entitled “Equivalent,” we told about an injured boy, unable to go to school, to whom the schools sent a tutor—*for an hour and a half a week!* This was all he needed to keep up with his studies.

We didn’t print that just to make one more joke against the schools. The Iowa case shows that this matter of equivalency is crucial. Any parents who are considering a court battle against the schools need to find out exactly what the schools are doing, including what they are doing about sick and/or injured children. How much home instruction by a certified instructor do the schools themselves provide? Are all tutors used by the schools in fact

certified? Ask the schools, and the State Department of Public Instruction. But also, check up on their answers. People who work in large organizations may not know what is actually going on, and even when they do, may not always tell the truth about it.

In GWS #4, in the article “Testing The Schools,” we suggested a number of questions that parents might ask schools. (We will add more questions soon). We don’t suggest these questions as a kind of school-baiting. They are serious, and have to do with the matter of equivalency.

Furthermore, when you ask these questions, or any others you may think of, put them in writing. Send copies to all members of the school board, to the school’s attorneys, to all top administrators, curriculum planners, etc. If the school board has recently won, or is facing, a close election, send copies of these questions to their opponents.

The idea is not to spring these questions on the schools in the midst of a court battle. Ask the questions well in advance, and to as many people as possible. Give them plenty of time to answer. *For they have no answers!* In almost all schools, good or bad, the children who are behind grade level, in reading, math, or whatever, never catch up, but fall further behind. And the number of those who have fallen behind rises every year. At the high-powered boarding school I went to, C students did not become B and A students; they became D students. It’s the same story everywhere.

Fractions

Theo Giesy tells us a nice story:

When Danille was 6 or 7, she was lying in my bed thinking about money and wondered how \$1 would divide among 3 children. She thought about it awhile and said, “You could break it into dimes and give each one 3, that leaves 1 dime, you break that into pennies and give each one 3, and I get the extra penny.” That was all her own, I made no comments or suggestions.

When I first taught fifth grade, before I had “taught” the children anything about fractions, or even mentioned the word, I used to ask them questions like this: “If you had three candy bars, and wanted to divide them evenly among five people, how would you do it?” Most of them could think of one or more ways to do this. But after they had “had” fractions, and had learned to think of this as a problem that you had to use fractions to solve, most of them couldn’t do it. Instead of reality, and their own common sense and ingenuity, they now had “rules,” which they could never keep straight or remember how to apply.

The Social Life

Many people write that they would like to take their children out of school, but worry that this may hurt their social life, or social development. About this, a reader writes:

My mother tells me that after the first day in kindergarten I told her that I didn't need to go to school any more because I knew everything already. Great arrogance? Not really. I knew how to be quiet, how to listen to children's stories, and how to sing. I wanted to learn about the adult world but was restricted to a world which adults believed children wanted. My great preschool enthusiasm died an early death.

Shame was one of the first lessons that I learned. In the first grade I was told to color a picture of a mother and daughter working in a kitchen. It struck me that if I were to color the entire picture yellow, then it would be different from all the other pictures. When I handed it in to the teacher I expected her to be pleased, if not genuinely excited. She, instead, glared at me for what seemed to be a long time and caused me to feel the deepest shame and self-contempt. I was six years old.

Since spontaneity was dangerous—it conflicted with the teacher's view of how children should act—lying was a valuable survival technique. In first grade, the class was sent to the kindergarten room to do some work without supervision. I used this opportunity to take a plastic doll and stick the head into a plastic toilet in one of the furnished doll houses in the room. No one was sure who did it, but everyone thought it was amusing—except the teacher. She was red with anger (she was a nun, and working-class Catholic schools in the early 1960s were not the most humane institutions) and I feared a severe beating. Suspicion was eventually focused on me and I lied with complete success, at least for me; another boy was blamed for the incident. I wish that I had said, "Yes, I did it, so what." But I was afraid.

Other incidents occurred to other people and were much more serious. I saw a boy of thirteen, seventh grade, try to explain why he did not have an assignment. His crime was that he spoke with indignation. Before he said three words the teacher stopped him and with a who-the-hell-do-you-think-you-are tone of voice called him to the desk and slapped him across the face with a rubber strap which was about 6 to 8 inches long and 1/4 inch thick. He

cried; they always did when it was in the face. He never did get the chance to explain why he did not have the assignment. I'm not so sure that he didn't have it. It may have been that he could not find it quickly enough. This teacher, the principal, was a textbook authoritarian. Every violation of her largely unwritten rules would lead her to deliver the same angry statement: "Don't challenge me." She saw challenges in virtually everything even though we would never have challenged her. I'll just give two of her biggest challenges.

Challenge number one involved misbehavior which the teacher present did not see, but the principal looking into the room did. The fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades (it was a small school) were in this room to practice singing. She was furious, talked about challenges, and scolded the student vehemently. Then she proceeded to slap him halfway across the room. She gave him about eight or ten real haymaker slaps. I was standing only a few feet away at the time. One fact about this event showed how much in awe of authority we were: the victim of this violence did not raise his hands to protect his face. When it was over, all I could hear was the boy crying and my own heart beating.

Challenge number two involved the same boy. This time he urinated, or defecated, or both, in his pants. Perhaps he was ill or maybe he had a mental problem. (Ed. note: Or perhaps he had merely been denied permission to go to the bathroom, which happens quite often in school.) He didn't do this regularly. He was about twelve years old. Naturally this called for punishment. He was forced to stand in front of each class in the school while the teacher explained to the class his crime. When he came to our classroom the principal named him the school's stinker and told us why. But what I remember most clearly is the pained *smile* (Ed. italics—this is scary) on his face.

There were many incidents of fear and humiliation. Even though there were not many savage beatings, the point is that we lived in an environment where this could happen anytime. And we knew that. I had no clear idea that there was anything wrong with the school; I only had a vague feeling that things didn't have to be the way they were. I wasn't a noble child resisting tyrannical teachers. No, I loved the game of fear and humiliation and played like the masters.

"We can hardly wait to make someone pay for our humiliation, yield to us

as we were once made to yield.” (*Freedom And Beyond*, p. 114)

I’m not sure when it started, but in the eighth grade a number of us would terrorize some of the timid boys in the school. We would push the victim around, ridicule him, pull his shirt out, spin him around, dust the chalk erasers on his clothes, mess up his hair, and chase him on the playground. It was easy to be friends with these boys when I was alone with them. But when there was a group of us the teasing would begin. *Since we were always in groups* (Ed. italics), the teasing of these boys, two in particular, was nearly unending. On the playground they had to avoid being seen. One of the boys would go home for lunch and not return until the last minute of recess. We did it without thought and it seemed to be only boyish pranks. It was sadism and I found it to be almost irresistible.

We then started to turn on the group members and practice our arts on the selected victim. I remember coming home with sore sides from laughing so hard at another’s humiliation, but I felt empty and actually unhappy. The next day I would do it again. This only stopped when I became the victim. It was pure hell. Everyone you knew devoted all his time to your being humiliated. Any one act was insignificant: slapping an unaware student in the back of the head was popular. But it happened all day long in a multitude of ways. Christmas vacation came and one of my prime torturers transferred to another school. Things cooled off for me, but not for the timid boys or the younger children in the school. We almost had serious violence with the male students several years younger than us.

I don’t remember the beginning or the end of this sadistic behavior. I know that I didn’t act this way before my last two years in grade school or since then.

I believe that I was lucky in not turning out to be an ignorant brutal person who delights in being such a person. My last two years in grade school show that I could have been. Fortunately, I had asthma and was able to stay home a great deal. While at home I would spend all day reading an encyclopaedia for children. This gave me a love of learning which I never would have acquired at school. In my last two years in grade school I missed about sixty days of school, thirty each year. This allowed me to preserve what little sanity I had. In high school I started to read Erich Fromm, and in my second year I read *Summerhill*. By then it was clear to me what had been the source of my suffering. And my cruelty.

When I was at home and not in school because of illness (often I wasn't really sick), I was able to explore the world through reading. This could be done solely out of personal interest and at my desired pace. What a wonderful feeling to have an interest which one can freely nurture. *To act out of personal conviction was a feeling totally different from my feelings in school.* (Ed. italics)."

Thanks for a most moving letter, and confession. It reminds me of a part of my own schooling. At one point I was in a public elementary school, in a class in which almost all the boys were bigger and older than I was, most of them from working class Italian or Polish families. One by one, the toughest ones first, then the others, more or less in order of toughness, they beat me up at recess. Which is to say, they punched me until they knocked me down and/or made me cry. Once a given boy had beaten me up, he didn't bother to do it again. There didn't seem to me to be much malice in it; it was as if this had to be done in order to find my proper place in the class. Finally everyone had beat me except a boy named Henry. One day the bigger boys hemmed us in and announced that Henry and I had to have a fight to find who was the biggest sissy in the sixth grade. Henry and I didn't want to fight, but they told us that if we didn't, they would beat up on both of us. So for a while Henry and I circled around, swinging wildly at each other, the bigger boys laughing and urging us on. Nothing happened for some time, until one of my wild swings hit Henry's nose. It began to bleed, Henry began to cry, and so did I. But the bigger boys were satisfied; they declared that Henry was now the official biggest sissy in the class, and on the whole, they didn't pick on me much anymore if they could find Henry. How he survived all this, I don't know.

I am also reminded of something a good deal more sinister, that I read in the program notes of the recording of Benjamin Britten's opera *Billy Budd*. At the time in which the opera is set, large ships used to go to sea with a number of cabin boys, perhaps twelve, thirteen years old. Now and then the crew—all this with the approval of the ship's officers—would use the cabin boys for some free entertainment. They would tie the left hands of each of the cabin boys to a mast, so that they were arranged round the mast like the spokes of a wheel. In the right hand of each cabin boy they would put a

marlinspike, in effect a short wooden club. Then they would explain the rules of the “game.” For every blow that a cabin boy was struck from behind, he could strike one blow -only one -at the boy ahead of him. If he was not struck, he could not strike. Then, to start things going, a crew member would strike one of the cabin boys. He would in turn strike the boy ahead of him, who would strike the boy ahead of him, and so on, blow after blow, round and round the mast, until they all, or all but one, lay senseless on the deck. The joy of the game, for the crew, lay not just in the sadism of it, but even more in knowing that any boy could stop the circle of blows, end the game, and save himself and his companions, just by refusing to strike the boy ahead, refusing to do what was done to him. But apparently, this never happened, and the experienced and hardened older members of the crew knew that it was not going to happen.

The writer of the letter says, “to act out of personal conviction was a feeling totally different from my feelings in school.” It is a very important part of the real and serious purposes of schools to kill that feeling. The vast majority of the general public, and of the parents and teachers of most children in schools, feels that to act out of personal conviction is a luxury and an indulgence that they, and most other people, cannot afford. As one of the New York hardhats who violently assaulted a peaceful and legal anti-war demonstration later said to an interviewer, “I’ve got plenty of things I’d like to protest about, but I keep my mouth shut.” And I have long since lost track of the number of schoolteachers and/or administrators who, defending coercion in schools, have said to me, “If I wasn’t made to do things, I wouldn’t do anything.”

No Comment

The Boston Globe of Sept. 1, 1978 carried an AP story, saying in part:

Back-To-School Boosts Retailers

New York—Many of the nation's leading retail chains reported record sales in August yesterday, sales they said were sparked by end-of-summer and back-to-school promotions.

Good News From Mo.

Albert Hobart, P.O. Box 112, Willow Springs, MO 65793, writes:

For the past four years we have been teaching our nine year old son at home rather than sending him to school. It's been a pleasant and memorable experience for all of us. Our son is learning quickly and easily, and he seems to be a happy, good-natured, well-adjusted boy. The only thing we regret is that we haven't had more contact with other families whose children are learning at home.

Thus recently we decided to see what we could do to bring together a group of parents who are committed to helping their children learn without schooling. As we picture it, several "unschooling" families would live in the same vicinity and get together from time to time for mutual support, good times, and the sharing of ideas. One of our most important goals would be to insure that our children have an ongoing opportunity to play and grow together and develop lasting friendships.

We've been interested in this idea for several years, but our home near Boston, Mass. never seemed like the appropriate setting. Our suburban neighbors were usually too involved with the school way of raising their children to even consider the kind of informal learning arrangement we had in mind. We soon discovered, moreover, that many parents who were teaching their own children shared our desire to live in a more rural environment where they could garden, raise farm animals, and, in general, live a more self-sufficient life.

As a result we decided to move to the Missouri Ozarks. I grew up in St. Louis, so I was already familiar with the area, but the main reason we chose to settle in the Show Me State was that it's legal in Missouri to teach your own children. We've met a number of families in this vicinity whose children are learning at home, and none of them have had any problems with the school authorities.

We particularly like the Ozarks because the people who live here have an admiration for self-reliance and a distrust of government interference in their private lives. Thus they seem more sympathetic towards home education than people we've met elsewhere.

(As a word of warning, however, I think I should repeat an excellent point

made in GWS #2; regardless of what the law says, school authorities anywhere can make trouble for you if they want to. We think there are ways to avoid this difficulty, and we hope we've found an area where this sort of problem is least likely to occur. But should worse come to worst, we are prepared to work together with other parents to organize some kind of minimal private school. My wife is a certified teacher, and I've had some teaching experience.)

Another reason we like the Ozarks is that the cost of land is relatively low compared to other regions. Prices range from \$300 to \$400 an acre for a 40 acre plot, although the cost goes up for smaller parcels, high quality farmland, or places with creeks or springs. There's plenty of land available, so it should be easy for families to buy property within driving distance of each other.

The opportunities for employment in the Ozarks are probably similar to what they would be in most rural areas. There are certainly jobs available, but at comparatively lower salaries. On the other hand, it doesn't cost much to live here either. For instance, the property taxes on a 40 acre farm are usually less than \$100 a year and sometimes less than \$50.

If the ideas I've described sound appealing to you and you think your family might enjoy living in the Ozarks, please write. We'd be happy to give you more information.

From a later letter:

Last week we held a pot-luck picnic at the campground where we've been staying. We think it was quite a success. 47 people attended, 21 adults and 26 children ... many more than we expected. The parents discussed their various experiences and exchanged information, and everybody seemed to have a good time, especially the children. We're going to meet again in a few weeks, and we plan to invite more people. We don't know if it will turn into a regular get-together or not. We hope so. But we're certain that the parents who came feel more positive about what they're doing, and that some who were uncertain about home education are now committed to the idea.

Our son Robert continues to thrive. He's met boys from three "unschooling" families who live nearby. He really enjoys playing with these new friends, especially because he has so much in common with them. In fact, our son seems to enjoy everything about his life here in the Ozarks. He's

so happy, so full of life and curiosity, that it's always a joy for us to be with him."

School Story

A recent UPI release from Providence, RI, says, in part:

A 14-year-old boy who skipped high school and has been pulling straight A's at Rhode Island Junior College Thursday was allowed to stay in school while authorities test him to see if he is smart enough for college. (Ed. note: This is how the story is worded; I assume they mean that the decision to allow him to stay was made on Thursday.)

Jonathan Dellinger graduated from Cranston (RI) Junior High in June. The state said an education law prohibits the boy from leaving high school until he is 16.

But the boy enrolled in the college's continuing education program this fall and was getting A's in Spanish, introductory Chemistry, Algebra, and fundamentals of writing when the college forced him to withdraw Oct. 8.

Jonathan and his mother sued the college, contending his constitutional rights were violated when he was expelled because of his age.

Under the agreement announced in Superior Court Thursday by the State Education Department and the boy's lawyer, Jonathan will be allowed to take courses at the college for one semester.

In the meantime, he will undergo tests at the University of Rhode Island and lawyers for both sides will file written arguments within two weeks on whether the case (Ed. note: I assume this means his mother's suit.) should Be dismissed.

"I can't wait to get back to classes," the youth said after the court settlement. "All my friends are there. It's the first school I've gone to where I felt I really belonged."

Jonathan's mother, Barbara McKinney, said the boy has an IQ of 155, 15 points above the theoretical "genius" margin of 140.

Mrs. McKinney said the Cranston public school system “virtually ignored my son’s intelligence. He was always bored with his age group.’ But she says she’s “content for the time being’ with the state college.

Jonathan said he plans to apply to Brown University next year.

After the agreement was reached, the boy’s lawyer, Stephen J. Fortunato, Jr. moved to dismiss the case.

“We got what we wanted,’ he said. “Jonathan goes back to RIJC tomorrow and he’ll be tested to see if he belongs in high school or college.’

But J. Peter Dougherty, a state lawyer representing the college, asked the court to continue hearing the case.

“The president of the college is getting calls from parents all over Rhode Island who say they have gifted high-school age children,” he said.

School people are unbelievable. They have some test which they say is a “good predictor of college success.” That means, most of the people who have scored well on the test have later on got good grades in college, which suggests that any other kid who scores well on it will also get good grades in college. So now, with perfectly straight faces, they are going to give this test to this boy, *who is already getting straight A’s in college*, to find out whether he is smart enough to go to college!

It’s like something out of *Alice In Wonderland*.

What is that junior college president so afraid of? Suppose there *are* many other young people in Rhode Island like Jonathan, perfectly capable of doing outstanding college work though only of high school age. Wouldn’t that be a good thing? One would suppose that a sensible man, a man really interested in learning, would be delighted, would say, “By all means send them here, no use having them waste their time in high school.”

Unless, of course, the real purpose of high school is to waste their time, *and to have them get used to having their time wasted*. Unless, in short, the

purpose of school is not to speed them into useful life in adult society, *but to hold them out of it.*

The story suggests another way in which children who are good at school (know how to play the school game) might get out of one or more years of high school. Indeed, one reader of GWS has told me that during her high school years she was able to get out of going to high school by taking extension courses at the state university. It seems to me very likely that most courts would agree that a child who was taking college courses and getting good marks was getting an education “equivalent” to that provided by the local high school, and therefore need not attend that high school.

On the whole, I don’t think it would be wise to make a constitutional issue out of this. Nothing in the U.S. Constitution says that people may not have various rights and privileges withheld because of age. Many such laws exist in every state laws about drinking, driving, voting, etc.. Not for a very long time to come are the Federal Courts going to overturn all such laws by declaring all age discrimination unconstitutional. But most state courts, as I said before, can probably be persuaded to rule, on one ground or another, that a child forbidden by the schools to do work that he has proved himself capable of doing is being denied some kind of educational opportunity guaranteed him by the laws of the state.

Sensible Phonics

Elsewhere in GWS I have said (and will probably say many times again) that most children, if there was interesting stuff around to read, would figure out for themselves how to read it even if we did not “teach” them anything, and only told them what words said if and when they asked us. To those who may disagree with this, and insist that some teaching is necessary or at least helpful, I would only say that if we are going to try to “teach” children something about reading, we ought at least (unlike almost all schools and teachers) to do it in ways that will make their learning easier and not harder. That is, we should try to avoid telling them things that are inconsistent, self-contradictory, or just plain false.

Two small examples. In many first, second, etc. grade classrooms I used to see signs on the walls—and people tell me they are still up there—saying, “When two vowels go out walking, the first one does the talking.”(Typical of the cutesy-wootsy way in which schools talk to young children) What this means, of course, is that there are many vowel pairs -bAIt, bEAt, bOAt, etc.—in which the first of the two vowels makes the sound. OK to point that out to children, though the best way to do this would simply be to give examples. But the trouble with the cute little sentence that the schools have cooked up to tell children this is that it contains two vowel pairs, *both of which violate the rule*. This might not bother some children, either because they already understand what the rule is telling them or (more likely) because they don’t think about anything they hear in school. But some children do think about what they see and hear, and it is just such thoughtful and intelligent children who might very well be thrown for a loop by this dumb sentence on the wall.

Other example. Among the sounds which vowels make is one which is the same as the *name* of the vowel, as in bAke, bEEt rOse, etc. The schools have traditionally called these sounds the “long” vowel sounds. By contrast, they give the name “short” to the vowel sounds in bAck, bEt, bIt, etc. Now the fact is that there is nothing *longer* about the sound of A in bAke than its sound in bAck. We can say either word quickly or slowly, make either vowel sound as long or short as we wish. Again, calling one of these vowel sounds “long” and the other one “short,” though it makes no sense -one might as well call one blue and the other green -might not bother the kind of children who

(as I was) are ready to parrot back to the teacher whatever they hear, never mind what it means or whether it means anything. But it might be extremely confusing and even frightening to other kinds of children, including many of the most truly intelligent.

It might not even do any harm to call the sounds of bAck, bIt, pOt, etc. “short” vowels, as long as we made it clear that there was nothing really any shorter about those sounds, and that we just used this word because we had to use some word, and people had been using this one for quite a while, so we decided we’d stick to it. After all, that’s why we call dogs “dogs”; there is no particular sense to it, it’s just that we’ve been doing it that way for a long time. But to say to children things which make no sense, *as if they did make sense*, is stupid and will surely cause some of them great and needless confusion.

I have to insist that these two small and perhaps not very damaging pieces of nonsense, and other and much larger and more damaging ones I will talk about in a second, were not invented and never would have been invented by parents teaching their own children. They were invented by people trying to turn a casual, natural, everyday act into a “science” and a mystery.

Let’s now take a broader look at the teaching of reading, more specifically, what most people call “phonics.”

In “Reading, Chicago Style”(GWS #2), I pointed out that, according to a newspaper report, a Board of Education “reading expert” had made a list of 500 reading skills (later cut to 273, to be “taught” in grades 1 through 8) that children needed to learn in elementary school. What those lists could be made up of I cannot imagine and do not want to know. In a word, they are nonsense.

The fact is that there are only two general ideas that one needs to grasp in order to be able to read a phonic language like English (or French, German, Italian, etc.—as opposed to, say, Chinese). 1) Written letters stand for spoken sounds. 2) The order of the letters on the page, from our left to our right, corresponds to the order in time of the spoken sounds.

It is not necessary for children to be able to *say* these rules in order to understand and be able to use them. Nor is it a good idea to try to teach them these rules by saying and then explaining them. The way to teach them—that is, if you insist on teaching them—is to demonstrate it through very simple and clear examples.

Aside from that, what children have to learn are the connections between the 45 or so sounds that make up spoken English and the 380 or so letters or combinations of letters that represent these sounds in written English. This is not a large or hard task. But, as in everything else, the schools do a great deal to make it larger and harder.

The first mistake they make is to teach or try to teach the children the sounds of each individual letter. In the case of consonants, this amounts to telling the children what is not true. Of the consonants, there are only six or seven which can be *said* all by themselves—S (or the-c-in niCe), Z (or the S in riSe), M, N, V, F, J (or the G in George)—plus the pair SH. There are the borderline cases of L, R, W, and Y, but it seems wiser to let children meet these sounds in syllables and words. As for the rest, we cannot say the sounds that B, or D, or K, or P, or T, etc. make, all by themselves. B does not say “buh,” nor D “duh,” etc. BIG does not say “buh-ig,” nor RUB “ruh-buh.” These letters don’t make any sound, except perhaps the faintest puff of air, except when they are combined with a vowel in a word or syllable. Therefore, it is misleading and absurd, as well as false, to try to teach them in isolation.

It is equally foolish and mistaken to try to teach the vowel sounds in isolation, in this case because each vowel makes a number of different sounds, depending on what consonants it is combined with. Since we can’t tell what the letter A says except as we see it joined with consonants, then it makes sense to introduce the sounds of A (or any other vowel) only in the context of words or syllables.

All we have to do then is to expose children to the two basic ideas of phonics, that written letters stand for and “make” spoken sounds, and that the order of the written letters matches the order of the spoken sounds. The first we can do very easily by any kind of reading aloud, whether of words in books, or signs, or whatever. The second we can do by writing down, and saying as we write them, words which use the six or seven consonants that we can sound alone, and so can stretch out in time. Thus we could write SAM, saying the S as we write the S, the A as we write it, the M as we write it. Same with MAN, PAN, VAN, or MIS, or US, or IF. It is neither necessary nor a good idea to be too thorough about this. It is not a lesson to be completely learned and digested the first or second time. That is not how children learn things. They have to live with an idea or insight for a while,

turn it around in some part of their minds, before they can, in a very real sense, discover it, say, “I see,” take possession of the idea, make it their own -and unless they do this, the idea will never be more than surface, parrot learning, they will never really be able to make use of it.

Then, as children slowly take possession of these ideas about reading, we can introduce them to more words, and so more sounds, and the connections between the words and the sounds. In *GWS #3* I mentioned a book, *Let's Read*, which lists all the one-syllable words that can be made from different combinations of consonants and vowels. But it wouldn't take any parents very long to make such lists for themselves—BAT, FAT, CAT, RAT, BIN, DIN, FIN, GIN, TIN, etc. There is no need for such lists to be complete, just long enough to expose the child to the idea that words that look mostly alike will probably sound mostly alike.

In any case, hardly any children will want to spend much time with what are so obviously teaching materials. They will want to get busy reading (and writing) *real* words, words in a context of and meaning. No need to talk here about ways to do that—any people who read this are sure to have many ideas of their own. If we read and write, the children will want to; if we don't, they won't.

Let me say once again that I don't think even the very limited amount of teaching I have described here is really necessary or in most cases even helpful. All I say is, if you feel you must do some teaching, or if your child somehow expects and demands this of you (most won't), then try to avoid, in ways I have suggested here, the crippling mistakes of the schools.

A P.S. to the above. Another very common school mistake is to ask children to learn and memorize which letters are vowels and which are consonants. Schools usually do this by trying to teach the children some definitions of “vowel” and “consonant.” These definitions are almost always inconsistent and self-contradictory, such as “A vowel is a sound that you can say all by itself.” As I have said, this is equally true of some of the consonants. I have thought about this from time to time, and have never been able to think of a definition of vowels and consonants which was clear, distinct, and allowed no exceptions.

In any case, this is a bad way to teach children anything. They think best (as I suspect we all do) when they can move from the particular to the general. Beyond that, there is no good reason why children learning to read

should learn the words “vowel” and “consonant.” Knowing or not knowing those words has nothing whatever to do with reading.

I have written elsewhere about playing a game with children in which they ask me to write a word, and I write it. Next time I do this, I may use one color pen to write consonants, and another to write vowels. Though I can imagine that some children, suspecting that I was trying to sneak in some teaching, might tell me not to do even that. If anyone tries this out, please let me know what happens.

A better variation of that game might go like this. We could write each letter on a separate card or piece of paper, vowels in one color, consonants in another. Then we could say to the child, “Put together any two, or three, or four (or more) of these cards, and I will tell you what they say.” If a child gave us BSRX, we would do our best to make those sounds. The child would begin to notice after a while that the only combinations of letters that made sounds that sounded like the words he heard around him were the ones that had both colors in them, and that these were very often in the form of consonant-color + vowel-color + consonant-color. If he ever asked, “What do you call this kind of letter, and what do you call this kind?” (I can’t guess whether a child would be likely to do this), I would say, “We call these kinds of letters ‘vowels’ and these ‘consonants.’” (If he asked why, I would tell him I didn’t know.)

Mind you, I am not saying that any of these tricks or games are necessary, or even that they will help a child learn to read faster or better. But for people who for whatever reasons feel they want to do *something*, I suggest these as things that it might be fun (for both adult and child) to do, and, *as long as they are fun*, possibly useful. and probably not harmful.

Teaching

The other day a memory popped up that I had completely forgotten. Some years ago I was reading aloud to a small child, as yet a non-reader, perhaps three or four years old. As I read aloud I had the bright idea that by moving a finger along under the words as I read them I might make more clear the connections between the written and the spoken words. A chance to get in a little subtle teaching. Without saying anything about it and as casually as possible. I began to do this.

It didn't take the child very long to figure out that what had begun as a nice, friendly, cozy sharing of a story had turned into something else, that her/his project had by some magic turned into *my* project. After a while, and without saying a word, s/he reached up a hand, took hold of my hand, and very gently moved it off the page and down by my side—where it belonged. I gave up “teaching” and went back to doing what I had been asked to do, which was to read the story.

More On “No”

The author of “Her Own Money” (GWS #6) writes. in part:

You’ve made an excellent point about the difference between “No’ the angry signal and “No’ the meaningful word. I think of some people who recently visited us—constantly slapping (lightly) their kids—No, No, bad boy, say “please,” don’t do that, etc. About drove me crazy. And as you say meaningless to the kids. I watched them totally tune out *everything* their parents did and said. Rightly so, too, for the kids weren’t doing anything that I could see needed warning or reprimanding.

there is a third kind of “No.’ perhaps the most common of all, neither an angry explosion nor a meaningful word—the no, no, no that goes on all day with some parents. This constant hassling is simply a running, ineffective banter. The parents don’t even *mean* it; there’s no anger or even much reprimand in their voices. Our cultural expectation is that kids are bad, always getting into trouble, and parents must be dictators controlling their kids (in the name of “protection”).

How to cope with these 3 kinds of “No’ is much more difficult, though, than you make it sound.

You’re saying, if we can become aware of how we use “No’ we can change our use of it. And I agree with you in two cases. First, as parents, we can simply SHUT UP! If we can sit back and listen to ourselves, we can hear how much negative harassment we throw at our kids. If a parent would seriously and objectively listen to what he says (through his child’s ears), he would be appalled and could probably with some effort change that kind of “No.”

I think here of L (recently 3) who was pouring herself a glass of milk yesterday. She had gotten it from the fridge, opened it, poured from a fat 2-qt. carton a very small juice-glass of milk, had drunk it, then had gotten a paper towel and was wiping up the milk spilt on the table. There was more milk spilt than the towel could absorb so as she wiped now, the milk was being pushed off the table onto the floor.

I walked in at this point and started with the running “No No” commentary in a whiny voice: “Ooooh no, L, you should have asked someone to pour you a glass of milk—no, don’t wipe it up, it’s going on the

floor, now stop, don't do it, I'll do it, it's bad enough on the table look, now you've got it on the floor—you're making more work for me."

Happily at this point I was struck by a rare beam of sanity and it said to me. "Oh, quit being such a bitch. L has just poured her first glass of milk all by herself and you're ruining the whole thing for her."

And suddenly I looked and saw a very little girl trying very hard to grow up—trying to wipe up herself the mess she had made getting herself a drink of milk. And I said, "L. I think Sparkle (dog) would like this extra milk."

L stopped and looked at me, I had finally said something of meaning. All the negative harassment up till then she had been trying to ignore.

I said. "If you get Sparkle's dish we can put the milk in it."

She got it and we did.

And immediately she began an animated chatter about how Sparkle would like this milk and how she had poured them both a drink of milk, etc. Until then she had barely said one word. In fact if I had pushed her far enough "OK, L, get out of the kitchen while I clean up your mess"—she would have probably ended up crying (over spilt milk!).

But the happy ending here did not require too much effort on my part because I wasn't very emotionally involved. My mind could still be objective about the situation to the extent of being able to control and change it.

I think this is also why your suggestion would *work*, for *teachers*. On the whole, they are not emotionally involved with their students and could therefore make a successful intellectual effort to change their way of saying "No" to children. Parents are so emotionally interlocked (as well as emotionally open) with their kids that they are both trapped into destructive ways of relating to each other. The smallest trigger can set off the largest explosion ... Children become scapegoats on whom their parents vent the worst of feelings (usually unconsciously). Of course, this also happens in school, or anyplace else. An adult in a bad mood will dump his frustrations on those under him in the pecking order, esp. on kids who are felt to be so much weaker. And then on it goes, kids pick on weaker kids, etc. It is within the nuclear family that this pecking order is—at its worst. And that's why I disagree strongly with your theory that we can *easily* change the use of the word No from an explosive signal to a gentle word. You say, "There is no reason why, except in rare times of great stress or danger ..."

Aha! There's the problem. Yes, "rare times of *danger*." But certainly not

“rare times of great stress”—not when you’re speaking of parents with their own children esp. when they are in their own home.

A very good point, in a very good letter. Actually, I said much the same thing in *Escape From Childhood*, that children, even if a great burden in every other way, are still useful to adults in that they give them someone below them in the pecking order, on whom they *can* take out all their frustrations:

As for teachers, they may not be emotionally linked with children in quite the way parents are, but many of them are linked with them in another very powerful way i.e., they are afraid of them, *afraid* of losing their control over them, afraid the children will do things that will get them in trouble or even cost them their jobs. Such teachers treat students with (as Silberman said) “appalling incivility,” harshly and rudely, as a matter of principle, the only way to keep their control over them. Many of them (see *The Way It Spozed To Be*) advise young teachers to do the same. “Get the upper hand right at the start, etc.” As long as schools are jails i.e., compulsory, and work primarily on the basis of bribes and threats i.e., grades, get-into-college, etc., this is not very likely to change.

In writing my earlier piece on “No” I guess I was really thinking about, and aiming at, those people who believe, as a matter of principle, that unless children hear the word “No” with a lot of anger in it, they won’t pay any attention to it.

Starting A School

To a parent who wrote about joining a few other parents in forming their own school, I said:

Thanks for news of your school. One piece of heartfelt advice. People sending their kids to your school *must* be made to understand that if there is something they think those children *must* be taught or must learn, basics or whatever, it must be *their* responsibility to do that teaching, and to do it in their own home—or at any rate, away from the school. The school must be a place where people come together to do the things that interest and excite them most. Otherwise, you will be torn to pieces with arguments about whether the school should teach reading or arithmetic, or teach it one or four hours a week, or whatever. Believe me, I speak from the bitter experience of many people.

And this would be my very strong advice to any group of unschoolers who want to start a school as a way of escaping compulsory attendance laws, or giving their children a place to meet and be with other children, or for whatever reasons. OK to have rules which say, more or less, no fair hurting or bothering other people. Every human society has these, and children expect them and understand them. But the school must not try to *compel* learning, if for no other reason than this, that people will argue forever, and with increasing bitterness and anger about what kinds of learning must be compelled.

Parents' Rights

The Manchester, N.H. Union Leader, on Oct. 31, 1978, reported a decision of the NH State Supreme Court that may have great importance to unschoolers, not least of all because 1) NH is a politically "conservative" state 2) NH law does not mention home schooling as a legal alternative.

The story, reads, in part (I use quotes only as they appear in the story):

SUPREME COURT VACATES PARENTAL RIGHTS ORDER

Noting that in an "ideal world, children would not be brought up in inadequate homes," the state Supreme Court yesterday declared that this "is not an ideal world, and to merely hold that inadequate parenting, *absent specific harm to the children*, (Ed. note: Italics mine.) is sufficient to terminate parental rights in the best interest of the child is too vague a concept and places undue emphasis on the parental conduct rather than any harm to the child."

The high court thus vacated a 1977 order of the Merrimack County Probate Court which had terminated the parental rights of a 32-year-old father, identified only as "Robert H.," over his three minor children on the grounds of failure to correct the conditions leading to a finding of neglect.

"We outline the standard to be applied in such cases and remand," noted the Supreme Court. It said RSA chapter 170-C was enacted to provide for the involuntary termination of the parent child relationship by a judicial process which will safeguard the rights and interests of all parties, and that a termination order must be based upon "clear and convincing evidence."

The high court determined that the government must "prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt before the permanent termination of liberty and natural rights of parents guaranteed under the N.H. Constitution, Part I, Article 2, can occur."

"We hold that absent a showing of *specific harm to the children* (Ed. Italics), growing up in a so-called disadvantaged home is not a

sufficient basis for coercive intervention. Robert H. may not be a model parent, but he is as entitled to help from the division (of welfare) as anyone else, and maybe more so,” said the Supreme Court.

“ . . . any termination petition under chapter 170-C must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt to meet the requirements of the N.H. Constitution,” ordered the Supreme Court.

The high court noted that the father can neither read nor write, suffers serious heart problems, and because of limited job skills, is rarely steadily employed. The children are six, seven, and nine and “they are very much a family unit with strong sibling ties.”

The legal point is obvious. If (as is the case) the courts will not allow welfare etc., agencies to take children from such a parent, or even (as is also often the case) from parents who abuse their children up to the point of causing serious injury, they are not likely (if all the above is pointed out to them in a legal brief) to allow agencies to take children away from otherwise competent and loving parents simply because these parents refuse to send their children to school. As in the case cited above, the burden of proof will be on the state to show beyond reasonable doubt that in such cases the children are being specifically harmed by not being sent to school. This will be exceedingly difficult to prove, particularly if parents (having read *GWS*) go into court well prepared, and well armed with hard questions for the schools.

It might also be a good idea for unschoolers in all states to read their respective *state* constitutions, to see what these may have to say about the rights of parents with respect to their children and their children’s education. Some of them, at least, like the constitution of N.H. (which I have not read), may be much more explicit about this than the U.S. Constitution. I have said before and will say again that I think we would be very unwise to go into the Federal Courts with a broad Constitutional attack on compulsory schooling as such. This does not mean that we should not make the fullest possible use of anything we can find in state constitutions about parents’ rights to influence or control the education of their children.

The World At Two (Cont.)

The mother of J (see GWS #6, “The World At Two”), writes:

J is great. No naps now which means he is super go-power all day with a huge collapse about 7:30. He has his room all to himself now and he really likes to hang out in there alone for an hour and a half most days, driving trucks around mostly. I’ve never seen a kid more into organizing things. He plays with dominoes and calls them either adobes, for building houses, or bales of hay, and has them stacked, lined up, or otherwise arranged in some perfect order; same with the trucks; he’ll scream and yell, as per your theory of two year old behavior, if you snatch him up from a group of trucks and carry him off to lunch. But if you give him a couple of minutes to park them all in a straight line then he’ll come willingly. Your theory (treat them like big people) works out over and over again; brush past him, leave him behind in the snow when you’re hustling up to feed the goats and you get a black and blue screaming pass out tantrum, Treat them “Big” and things roll along. Only hangup is the occasional times you have to take advantage of your superior size and age and pull a powerplay. The trick is to learn to avoid the situations that once in a while make that a necessity, like not getting in a rush, and not letting them get so tired they break down completely—like letting dinner be late.”

As J gets nearer to, although still fairly far from, school age, I worry more about trying to go it on our own; not at all about trying to teach him the basics but about what this little town is going to think because in a way it becomes a put down to them: we’re not going to send *our* child to that crummy school; while they’re more or less stuck with it. Already people say, “When J goes to school, etc.” I Just smile and shut up. Also J gets so desperate for kids I’m pretty sure he’s going to want to go to that big building that always has a passel of children running around in front. Sometimes, just driving by houses where he suspects there might be kids, he says, “I wanna see some kids, mommy.” Actually, we’re working harder on it and he’s getting to be around more but there are still long gaps.

I wrote back, suggesting, more or less, that when people talk about J going

to school she say, “He’s already going to school,” and that when people ask where, she say, “Right at home.” This in turn made me think of something so obvious that I can’t imagine why I didn’t think of it long ago. In *GWS #1*, I said that if unschoolers are asked by neighbors or other people where their children are going to school, they should reply that the children “are in a special program.” I now think this is a mistake. Unschoolers should *never* say, or admit, that their children are not “going to school.” They should insist that they *are* going to school. If people say: “Where?” they should say, “Right here in our own home.”

My strong hunch is that this will satisfy a large number of otherwise critical or even hostile people. In these days, most people believe in word magic. Not for them the wise advice of Justice Holmes: “Think things, not words.” For them, the word *is* the thing, the label on the package *is* the contents. If the label says “New! Fresh! Pure!” it must *be* new, etc.

Many of these folks have in their minds, among other slogans and rules, the rule that children should “go to school.” If we say that our children *are* “going to school,” most of them will not get into complicated arguments about what is or is not “a school,” or whether our home is *really* a school, but will be satisfied that the rule is being obeyed. Some, of course, will not be satisfied, will say, “Why aren’t they going to the same school as the other children?” But nothing we said or might say could satisfy these people. For them, school is the Army for kids, a bad experience that they do not want any child to escape.

In saying that our children, who are learning at home, are “in school,” we are not just tricking people—though we may be doing that. We are also putting into their minds the important and very true idea that children (like everyone else) are *always* learning, no matter where they are or what they are doing, that the whole world is a learning place for them, that “school” does not have to mean only that big brick building with the cyclone fence and (usually) padlocked gates, but could mean any place at all. It will be much easier for such people, unless they are real Blue Meanies, to understand and accept later that some of the time—perhaps very little or none—our children may be in the red brick building, but that most of the time they will be “in school” somewhere else.

What I meant by “treat them like big people” was, of course, to treat them in the courteous and respectful way that we big people like to be treated. To

snatch any child away from what s/he is doing, in order to do what we want done, is to say to that child, “Your interests and purposes are not serious and do not count.” In the many years I have been watching children and adults together, in homes and in public places, I have seen many two-year-old “tantrums.” Of those I have seen from the beginning (but who knows where anything “begins”?), except for a few that were brought on by exhaustion, almost all seemed to me to have been caused by a needless affront, often unintentional, to the child’s dignity, that is, by someone treating the child as if what s/he was doing, or what s/he thought or wanted, did not count. I have felt and still feel very strongly that most of these tantrums could have been avoided by taking a few extra seconds to show the child the kind of courtesy we would routinely show to another adult.

This mother’s words show once again what nonsense it is to talk about children’s “short attention span.” In *How Children Learn* I wrote about an eighteen month-old child trying to put together a ballpoint pen that she had taken apart. Though the task was much too hard for her small and unpracticed fingers, she worked steadily and patiently at it for at least forty-five minutes. When some of the schools in Great Britain began the unheard of experiment of letting school children direct and control their own learning, they found that five and six-year-olds would often work on a single task for an entire morning or afternoon and often for several days at a stretch. Most young children (at least when they are not dreaming, which is also important to them) pay a lot closer *attention* to the world around them than most adults. Their problem—at least it looks to us like a problem is that almost everything in the world around them is interesting to them. Also, they see that world as all of a piece; it never occurs to them, as to us, that if they pay attention to *this* it means that they have *stopped* paying attention to *that*. They don’t think in terms of paying attention to only one thing at a time.

What we really mean when we say that children have short attention spans is that they will not pay attention for very long to the things that we want them to pay attention to. A sensitive and concerned mother has just written me—I get many such letters -to say that she is worried because when she tries to teach her young child letters (or whatever) the child only pays attention for a couple of minutes. She fears there may be something wrong with the child. From the little she has told me, I doubt that there is anything wrong at all. The problem (if we have to think of it as a problem) is that most

healthy and curious children *don't like to be taught*. The reason is not that they don't like to learn -they like nothing better. The reason is that they understand very well the unspoken (sometimes unconscious) assumption behind all *uninvited* teaching: "You are too stupid to understand why this is important, and/or too stupid to see it or find it or figure it out for yourself." Children refuse this kind of teaching as long as they can. If the time comes (as in school) when they can no longer find ways to refuse or escape it, they may soon decide that they are no longer capable of figuring things out, and can only learn when they are made to learn, told what to learn, and shown how. In short, they may soon become as stupid as the parents or teachers or schools believed they were all along. But they don't start out that way.

Scientists

Hanna Kirchner, writing in Poland about the work of Janusz Korczak, said, in part:

He always stressed that by means of learning the everyday expressions from the obscure language of adults, the child tries to fathom the mystery of life. The child's fragmentary and incomplete knowledge of the world, welded together by imagination, creates a specific "magic consciousness" which, as has been discovered in the twentieth century, exists among children and primitive people and may be associated with the origins of poetry.

She then gives this wonderful quote from Korczak's book *How To Love A Child*:

(one child says), "They say there is one moon and yet one can see it everywhere.'

"Listen, I'll stand behind the fence and you stay in the garden." They lock the gate.

"Well, is there a moon in the garden?'

"Yes.'

"Here too.'

They change places and check once again. Now they are sure there must be two moons.

And yet they figure out, sooner or later, and *by themselves*, that there is only one moon. Forgive me for saying what must be obvious to so many GWS readers. Yet I know from experience that there will be many adults, including some who may one day, somewhere, read this piece, who will insist that children only learn there is one moon because adults tell them, and that if we didn't tell them they would never be able to figure it out.

A Self-Teacher

A mother writes from British Columbia:

“My daughter, T, for instance, who is eight, has been very interested in rocks, fossils and Indian artifacts for several years now. I don’t know a great deal about these subjects, but we found some good books at second hand stores, borrowed some from the library and were even given a pile of lapidary magazines about to be discarded. She has an enormous collection of specimens now (all collected herself), by no means all identified. We packed a box of fossils and pseudo-fossils (Ed. note: Have no idea what a pseudo-fossil is.) and took them to the Provincial Museum where some very friendly (and slightly bemused) curators did their best to identify them. She has found one artifact which we are pretty sure is the handle of a stone tool of some sort and we will take it to an expert for an opinion. We are also working on a plan for a water-wheel-powered rock tumbler that she can polish stones in. The result has been a lot of learning and I doubt we’ve spent \$10.00.

The children follow their interests where they lead and never refer to it as learning or school, and I don’t either. T was interested in Indians and what foods they ate in the old days. Now she horrifies parents when she goes to town and feeds her friends roots from the liquorice fern or peeled salmonberry shoots. But she knows much better than the parents, I suspect, what plants and berries shouldn’t be eaten and why.

As far as reading goes, you say that it isn’t difficult to learn to read and compared to some other things we learn I imagine you are right. Still I found it very confusing to explain to my daughter why the letter sounds changed like quicksilver from one word to the next. (Ed. note: But there’s no *need* to “explain” it, and indeed, no *way* to explain it.) That’s why I was relieved to find the Open Court 1st grade reading program. I learned a lot of phonetics from it! You need two workbooks, reader 1: 1: 1 and 1: 1: 2, each \$2.35, and either the Teacher’s Guide for \$12.66 or a phono-record of Millie’s story for \$6.64. The story introduces and ties together the phonetic sounds. The teacher’s guide has other useful information besides the story but it’s not absolutely necessary. With the books and record a child could learn by himself.

We don’t use any regular course material now. The books for elementary

grades seem terribly superficial—a little bit about lots of things and not very much about anything. I find even young children like to learn about things in detail. T is up to grade level in most aspects of the three R's—definitely not spelling (taking after her mother, no doubt). (Ed. note: There were *no* spelling mistakes in this mother's letter.) I would say that we haven't invested more than one hour a week in the last three years to maintain this level.

T spent a long time choosing a *Cricket* magazine to send you and I've got a feeling she wasn't looking for the best one. That's what makes the magazine worth \$15, to us anyway. The stories are good and the binding is good, and the children save them carefully and read them again and again. Anyway she was glad to send it as long as it wasn't a favorite. I read her pieces out of your books sometimes and she's always interested. She and M, 5, thought the 62 item kindergarten check list (Ed. note: From *Instead Of Education*.) was very amusing. M said he didn't use bathroom habits—he likes the tub and the bath toys."

What I mean about explaining sounds is this—there's no more way of *explaining* why the letter *a* sounds one way in "cat," another way in "car," and still another in "call," than there is of explaining why we call a dog a "dog" and not a "blif" or "mub." We just do, that's all. Pressed, we might say to a child that our grandparents and their grandparents and their grandparents all said it this way for a long, long time back. Pressed still harder, we might show children how to look up word derivations in a big dictionary. Pressed harder yet, we might say that some people make it their work to try to figure out how people talked a long time ago, but that they have to do a lot of guessing, since of course the people aren't around any more to ask, and didn't leave any records like tapes or recordings.

I just read from cover to cover the issue of *Cricket* that T sent, and think it's wonderful! Stories, poems, articles, illustrations, puzzles—all seem to me just right. *Cricket* is a monthly (\$15/yr., \$27.50/2 yrs., \$36/3 yrs., from Open Court Publishing Co., 1058 8th St., La Salle, IL 61301), and a good bargain—there is more material in one issue than in many children's books.

As for phonics, you don't need all those materials. (See "Sensible Phonics" in this issue of *GWS*).

N.Y. Law

One of our readers from New York State sent us a letter, which she received from the office of the counsel of the State Education Department in Albany, and which may be of interest to other readers, both in NY and other states. It says, in full:

Senator Javits has referred your letter of June 26, 1978 to this Department for response.

Pursuant to subdivision 1 of section 3204 of the Education Law, a student may satisfy the compulsory education law by attending upon instruction in "a public school or elsewhere." In cases such as *People v. Turner*, 277 App. Div. 317 and *In Re Meyer*, 203 Misc. 549 (to learn the meaning of those numbers, see "More From D" in GWS #3, or ask any lawyer, law student, law librarian, or perhaps the librarian in the reference part of the Public Library), the courts have upheld a parent's right to instruct his children at home. It is necessary, however, that the local school officials review the proposed course of study to determine whether it is substantially equivalent to that offered in the public schools. I would, therefore, suggest that you contact your chief school officer and arrange to discuss your plan to instruct your child at home.

Enclosed is a Law Pamphlet 9 which describes the process by which the Board of Regents charters an educational corporation. If you wish to operate a school on a profit-making basis, you would follow the provisions of the Business Corporation Law. A further alternative is not to establish a corporation.

Sincerely,

(name)

Associate Attorney

cc: Senator Javits

This letter suggests, first, that if you can get your U.S. Senator (or perhaps Representative) to write a letter about home schooling to the state educational authorities, they will respond fairly promptly (in this case, 2 1/2 months, which is probably quite good for state government), and secondly, that they will give you quite complete information. It might be worth finding out, sometime and somewhere, whether the kind of letter a state department of education sends out in response to a letter from a citizen is exactly the same as the letter they send in response to a letter from a U.S. Senator—and if there is a difference, what it is. If some readers make this political mini-experiment, do let us know what you find out.

What may be more important, the letter also suggests that, in New York State at least, the Board of Regents, the chief educational authorities of the state, have nothing to do with chartering profit-making schools. It would be interesting to find out how hard or easy it is, in NY or any other state, to set up a “profit-making” school. We might find out that this was a much easier way for parents to call their own home a school. Readers in NY and elsewhere may want to look into this—if so, again, let us know what you find out.

Politics Of Knowledge

Here are some interesting words about education from one of its earliest and strongest supporters. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (of Sherlock Holmes fame), in the foreword of a book Construction And Reconstruction Of The Human Body, by Eugen Sandow, published in London in 1907, wrote, in part:

The strength of a nation is measured by the sum total of the strength of all the units that form it. It is a truism that anything which raises any portion of a man, his body, his character, his intelligence, increases to that extent the strength of the country to which he belongs. Therefore, since the State is so interested in these matters, it has every reason to examine into them and to regulate them. The truth is an obvious one, but it is only within our own lifetimes that it has been practically applied. “Parents may do what they like with their children, a man may do what he likes with himself.” So ran the old heresy, which ignored the fact that the State must look after the health of its own component parts. Then came the Education Act of 1870. It was a great new departure. What it said was, “*No, your mind is not your own.* (Ed. italics) You may wish to keep it ignorant. But ignorant minds are a danger to the State. Therefore we must *force* you to keep yourself in better order.” That is as far as we have got yet in State ownership of the individual.

Most of those who first pushed through compulsory education thought this way. There were very few Jeffersons among them. But I want to look more closely at another part of Conan Doyle’s thought. “You may wish to keep it ignorant.” What did he mean by “ignorant”?

What he meant was almost certainly that this “you” might not want to learn the kinds of things that rich people knew in those days i.e., Greek, Latin, Ancient History (which they saw as a kind of morality play), Classical Literature, perhaps a little Mathematics. One of the many fringe benefits of being rich and powerful, in any society, is that you are able to say that some kinds of knowledge, i.e., the kind of things *you* know, are much more important than others, and therefore, that the people who have this knowledge i.e., you and your friends, are much more important and deserving than people who know other things. It is not hard to see why in any society

powerful people, whether the rich or simply high government officials, should want to say that the kind of knowledge that most people pick up from everyday life and work is worth less than the kind that can only be picked up in special places.

An “Ignorant” Man

Let’s take a look at one of those “ignorant” men that Conan Doyle was worried about. In his book *Travels Through America*, first published in *Esquire* magazine, Feb. 76, Harrison Salisbury described his efforts to trace the Westward path of some of his ancestors. He describes one of them thus:

He (Hiram Salisbury) was a man of his time (1815) ... I scan the journal for clues and reconstruct the post-Revolutionary American. I list his skills, one sheet of scratch paper after another. He knew every farm chore. He milked cows and attended the calves in birth. He physicked his horse. He ploughed, he planted, he cultivated, hayed, picked apples, grafted fruit trees, cut wheat with a scythe, cradled oats, threshed grain with a flail on a clay floor. He chopped the corn and put down his vegetables for winter. He made cider and built cider mills. He made cheese and fashioned cheese tongs. He butchered the hogs and sheared the sheep. He churned butter and salted it. He made soap and candles, thatched barns and built smokehouses. He butchered oxen and constructed ox sledges. He fought forest fires and marked out the land. He repaired the crane at Smith’s mill and forged a crane for his own fireplace to hang the kettle on. He collected iron in the countryside and smelted it. He tapped (mended) his children’s shoes and his own. He built trundle beds, oxcarts, sleighs, wagons, wagon wheels and wheel spokes. He turned logs into boards and cut locust wood for picket fences. He made house frames, beams, mortised and pegged. With six men’s help he raised the frames and built the houses. He made a neat cherry stand with a drawer for a cousin, fixed clocks and went fishing. He carved his own board measures (yardsticks) and sold them for a dollar apiece. He fitted window cases, mended locks, and fixed compasses. He hewed timber, surveyed the forest, wrote deeds and shaved shingles. He inspected the town records and audited the books of the Friendship Lodge, the oldest freshwater Masonic lodge in the country (still running). He chipped ploughs, constructed carding machines, carved gunstocks and built looms. He set gravestones and fashioned wagon hubs. He ran a bookstore and could make a fine coffin in half a day. He was a member of the state’s General Assembly, overseer of the poor, appraiser of property and

fellow of the town council. He made hoops by the thousand and also pewter faucets. For many years he collected the town taxes.

I have not listed all of Hiram's skills but enough. I do not think he was an unusual man. Put me in Hiram's world and I would not last long. Put Hiram down in our world. He might have a little trouble with a computer, but he'd get the hang of it faster than I could cradle a bushel of oats.

I tend to agree with Harrison Salisbury that Hiram, though perhaps not an unusual man in his time, would be a most unusual one in ours, far more knowing, skillful, intelligent, resourceful, adaptive, inventive, and competent than most people we could find today, in either city or country, and no matter how schooled.

But the real question I want to raise, and answer, is how Hiram learned all those skills. To be sure, he did not learn them in school. Nor did he learn them in workshops or any other school-like activity. Almost certainly, he learned how to do all those kinds of work, many of them highly skilled, by being around when other people were doing them. Nor were these other people doing the work in order to teach Hiram something. Nobody raised a barn just so that Hiram could see how barns were raised. They raised it because they needed the barn. Nor did they say to him, "Hiram, as long as I have to raise this barn, you may as well come around and learn how it is done." They said, "Hiram, I'm raising a barn and *I need your help.*" He was there to help, not to learn—but as he helped, he learned.

Almost a century later John Dewey was to talk about "learning by doing." The way for students to learn (for example) how pottery is made is not read about it in a book but to make pots. Well, OK, no doubt about it's being better. But making pots just to learn how it is done still doesn't seem to me anywhere near as good as making pots (and learning from it) because *someone needs the pots*. The incentive to learn how to do good work, and to do it, is surely much greater when you know that the work has to be done, that it is going to be of real use to someone.

Finding Out

Since to so many people “learning” means what happens in school, or what is supposed to happen, I would rather use other words to describe what we humans do as a natural part of our living. “Finding out” seems to fit pretty well. Here, a reader talks about it:

I am almost a caricature of the congenital unteachable. It may have been something I picked up from imitating my father, for I notice he shares the trait to this day. He is very quick to learn, but utterly resists being taught.

I began to see how much this unteachability pervaded my life when I began about a year ago to see how much of my childhood I could remember distinctly. Probably the extreme example was learning to play the piano. I am told that I started banging away on the family upright at about age four. One day my dad got tired of the noise and said something to the effect of “If you’re going to play, why don’t you play *something*?” Well, I quit until my parents left the house, and when they came back that afternoon I was already picking out tunes. In a year I played “Silent Night” at church Christmas ceremonies.

When we moved to a larger town, my parents resolved that I should go to a piano teacher. But I didn’t want to practice scales, for I was already playing songs and the teacher would not explain *why* I should practice. In three months she told my parents that I was the worst student she’d ever had and that I would never learn to play. This did leave me with a somewhat irrational (Ed. note: And very common.) fear of the musical notation system (at least until I began to discover its logic myself) but to make a long story short I went on to become a good piano player and composer and have off and on supported myself in this way, playing all kinds of music. I still can’t read notes (a common phenomenon among good musicians in their younger years, by the way) but now I *want* to learn so as to build a logical structure which could point the way to further improvement in my playing. A major goal in my life is to achieve the ability to spend large amounts of time working on this -in the meantime I’m working on fingerwork, doing things I only dreamed about a couple of years back. All absolutely self taught.

So much has been like this. I started drawing at about four, also holding the pencil the wrong way. People said that I would never be able to draw that

way. After selling dozens of paintings and drawings, I still hold it that way—I don't like the other way, as it produces a more unsteady hand for me. When, at about twelve, I wanted to write books, my dad gave me an old Royal and left me alone. I learned to type at good speed with one right hand finger. When I get going I can type faster this way than some secretaries with their ten fingers. More recently, when I was typing the manuscript for my first “real” book, I taught myself to use the index finger on my left hand, as a way to beat the boredom.

Then there was swimming lessons, which almost permanently made me hate swimming. A couple of years afterward, when I *wanted* to swim with my friends, I jumped in and swam as if I had always done so.

And there was writing. My father broke his usual hands-off stance to urge me to learn to write, when I was seventeen. I would not do so while being urged. In senior composition class I turned in pieces designed to meet the assignment, and no more -tortured pieces. When I had the chance to say something in a graduation address, the speech teacher (also the composition teacher) panned the address as “terrible”, but it went over well. In that same last semester in high school, I poured my energies into writing (with a friend) an underground newspaper attacking compulsory education and poking fun at the pretenses of the school world. No one panned the writing here—they took it very seriously. And somehow the same year I won a statewide writing contest award.

I taught myself auto mechanics on my first car, after being told for years that I was low in mechanical ability. I became a good carpenter's apprentice in two months, building one and a half houses with just one carpenter working at the same time. I surprised them all (except my parents -who had been listening) when I switched from an undergraduate education in pre-law to master's work in engineering, putting to rest the old thing about how artsy-booksey types cannot cope with numbers.

How did I get through schools? Only one way -by taking the offensive. Way back around fifth grade, my parents supplied us kids with the Golden Book Encyclopedia. I lapped up each book as it came home from the supermarket. Not long after that I was tested for reading at school and was found to be reading five years ahead of my grade. What is more, the Golden Book Encyclopedia gave me two invaluable things which freed me from much of the meaningless work the schools had cut out for me. One, I

acquired from the encyclopedia a working familiarity with many aspects of science, history, geography, and art -such that I still “leaned on” this knowledge during exams as late as, say, tenth grade. Moreover, it taught me an understanding of how the world works, so that I could figure out what I did not actually know.

I recall what I did in fifth grade to free up more time to study airplanes, which I was then immersed in as a subject. The teacher wanted us to come up with five new words a week which we were supposed to define as a vocabulary lesson. (Ed note—as if anyone ever learned words this way) Trouble was, words did not come to me at this steady pace. So, one day, I reached into the dictionary for two hundred-odd words and did a year’s assignments in one bored stroke. Then I went back to gobbling up new and historical words as part of the new book I was writing on airplanes.

It was like this throughout college as well. In undergraduate school I took political science and philosophy because I wanted to understand the mystery of government. The political science department wanted to talk about voting behavior studies and the philosophy department wanted to talk about mathematics, so I played the incorrigible in my second year and obtained an understanding which allowed me to graduate with a program in ethical philosophy and constitutional theory. The understanding was quite explicit: I offered a couple of professors the opportunity to “supervise” the development of publishable work if they would only stay off my back with their extraneous demands. I wanted to get economics from this same school but found it so unintelligible that I was driven into home study, which has resulted in a good knowledge of (a different school of) economic theory.

When I went back to grad school I again entered on the explicit understanding that I would take some required courses and do some required research for the chance to be allowed hunks of free time to pursue an area that no one at the school even understood. It worked. So well, in fact, that I literally walked into a job working with the guy who my previous research had shown to be tops in the field.

And now I find some strange truths. With the top-notch people that make up our company, *what counts is the ability to teach oneself*—(Ed. Italics). As my employer puts it, “Though we may seem to know a lot around here, we succeed because we start out by admitting our ignorance, and then setting out to overcome it.’

This points up one important idea noted in *GWS #4*: the “need to know.” People often say of me that I “know” a great deal about this or that; but often I have only average knowledge or less. In any given context, however, I can identify what I need to know next, and self reliance has taught me to immediately acquire the knowledge in ways which do not essentially differ from one case to the next. Thus it occurs to me that if people recognized knowledge as being important *only in relation to actual goals*—narrow or broad in scope—rather than being some kind of unquestionable goal in itself, they might better know how to go about acquiring it.

I know more than a few individuals who share my experience. Their existence assures me that a market exists for free schools offering not “teachers” but the *resources necessary for self-teaching* (Ed. italics).

Credentials

The Washington Monthly recently reported:

The *Washington Post* expressed outrage at the fact that lots of people were getting into law school with false credentials, passing the courses, and going into law practice. Gabrielle Ann Scott Elliott was one example. With only a tenth-grade education, she used false credentials to get into the University of South Carolina Law School, from which she graduated with above average grades and then passed the South Carolina bar examination. Instead of being outraged by Ms. Elliott, shouldn't we be outraged by the phony system of credentials that deprives people of ability of the right to use their talent?

On Learning

The writer of the letter quoted in “Finding Out” later wrote again, saying in part:

I find that GWS has done for me exactly what I wanted it to do. I wanted it to open up some crevices in my thinking into which the stream of experience could deposit memories, insights, sayings, and other little gems.

(Ed. note: I have to interrupt just long enough to say that I have never heard anyone say better what one person’s words (written or spoken) can, at best, do for another. We cannot give each other our experiences, but we can help each other to find new meanings from our own experiences. This is the true work of all serious writers and writing.)

Until I read GWS it had not really dawned on me how *possible* it was for children to grow up by themselves without a great deal of aid/supervision. No matter that I had done this myself. Yes, I had already concluded that the ideal thing would be for children just to *live*—either alongside their parents or not, as they wished—and that this would be the best possible education. But as I now, through GWS, see many other people thinking the same thing and I visualize a world of such children, it dawns on me how very artificial it is to think in terms of schools at all, and how very accustomed we might become to having our institutions—all of them—open and accessible to children, instead of schools. I always thought the best school was a library, or perhaps a marketplace. I now think the single idea which symbolizes best this new education is the idea of a large number of adults all committed to being accessible to questions from children about their field of endeavor. It occurs to me that I have learned a great deal from merchants in this way, and in any auto-parts store they’re prepared to educate in this fashion. (Ed. note: Also hardware store, lumberyard, greenhouse, music store, etc.)

I think introspection is one of the great self-educational tools. One can be a scientist with one’s own subconscious, testing and probing by means of imaginatively placing oneself in a certain position and then asking, “How do I like (or dislike) that?” All you get of course, is a reading of your feelings, but this leads to asking why one feels as one does, which in turn leads to identification of hidden experiences and implicit principles, which can then be questioned. I was fortunate *that for the larger part of my childhood both*

parents worked and I was left large chunks of time to introspect. (Ed. italics)
I loved doing it and still do.

Almost all the activities I have undertaken in life began with imitation. There was a time in adolescence when I even worried whether I had anything original to say or paint or play. But worrying did no good and I went ahead producing for my own gratification. Then later on I got a better perspective on the world and became aware that I was already pushing the limits in some things. How and when does imitation lead to originality? Why does some imitation always remain that? An interesting question.

I went through the first four or five grades being pretty much as cowed as everyone else when I could not understand phonics or the new math or any of the rest of it. For the longest time I could not remember multiplication or division and successfully hid it like virtually everyone else. But what overcame my fear was exasperation (and that names the feeling as well as the concept!); *I could not stand being bored* and this communal silence was certainly boring. I also began to get skeptical about schools after fifth grade and began to conceive of my ignorant questions as a way to find out if these were *real* teachers in front of me or not. I developed a kind of come-on in which I would raise my hand, openly apologize for my ignorance (Ed. note: A good move.), and then ask questions no one else asked. As I got sharper I would start to probe the limits of the teacher; this was to relieve the boredom. It had the added advantage that it kept teachers unsure about my intent (which was unfortunately the best I could want from my high school teachers) until *I* knew it. On the one hand I would-ask a “dumb” question and on the other I’d turn around with a tough one. If the teacher were relatively open-minded and good-hearted, the dumb question would be seen and welcomed as a sign of classroom comprehension, and the tough question would be seen and welcomed as an intellectual challenge. If the teacher were mean spirited, the dumb question would be an opening to intimidate and the tough question would be dismissed casually. I entertained myself like this all through high school and learned a great deal. I won’t say the “method” was worked out in quite this Machiavellian way but this was its logic.

When children are exhorted to show initiative they learn guilt about procrastination. Yet often people just want to think things out. Many people I know, who have a prodigal ability to do things, are creative procrastinators. That is, faced with large numbers of things to do, they delay doing things

until they've had plenty of time to damn well feel like doing them. They delay until they've had time to plumb their subconscious on the subject, to look at all the alternatives, to question their assumptions, to fantasize about the subject, to sleep on it. Executives do this; why not children?"

One reason why not is that most children are not going to be executives, but people doing—boring work. It is one of the chief tasks of schools (see *GWS #6*) to prepare them to do such work, and what's more, to do it as soon as someone else tells them to do it.

On imitation, the British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams once said or wrote that when he was very young, studying composition with Maurice Ravel, he said to Ravel one day that he was worried because everything he wrote sounded like imitation Ravel. Ravel said, in effect, "Don't worry about it, go right on imitating me, if you have anything original to say it will come out." Which it did—Vaughan William's later music sounds about as unlike Ravel's as one could imagine.

Useful Book

Mathematics—A Human Endeavor, by Harold R. Jacobs (pub. By W. H. Freeman & Co., San Francisco CA), is about the best book on mathematics, for beginners, that I have seen. What Jacobs tries to do, and does very well, is give the beginner, or even the math-hater, an idea of what mathematical *thinking* is about, why human beings have found it so interesting, and how (to some extent) it has grown over the centuries. It is a delightful book, for people of almost any age. People who (like me) have done school math (and even gotten good grades) without ever having the slightest idea of what math is really all about, may find it interesting and exciting. People who have always feared and hated math may find there is no reason to fear and hate it. And I can't think of any book on math that would be more fun to read to and work on with even quite young children. I believe that it was written for high-school or even college students, but I would guess that quite young children would like it if they could work on it with an adult, perhaps to help them with some of the long words.

The book is laid out somewhat like a conventional text, in chapters, with questions and problems. But, unlike most texts, it begins by looking at the path of billiard balls on a table, and the ways in which we might think about that. From there it goes on to many other fascinating and unfamiliar topics. The mathematical illustrations are clear and well chosen, and the book is sprinkled with pertinent and very funny cartoons from "Peanuts," "B.C.," and other sources. I can't recommend it too highly. My copy (cloth) says that there is also a paperback edition, but doesn't mention the price of either—but W. H. Freeman would tell you.

Textbooks

Jud Jerome (GWS #1, 2) writes:

I was teaching Topher algebra that day from a college text. I've got to tell you about this text. It is one of these programmed learning things, with a column of "answers" you are supposed to cover up so that you are reading along and testing your comprehension all the while. Completely boring. Now the reason I am using it is that Topher has had all he can take without boring himself to death of fractions, decimals, all the "arithmetic" processes. He is NOT an exceptional student, NOT especially interested in mathematics, but just a normal 11-year old who hasn't had his brain dulled by school, and it doesn't take more than a few hours of attention over 11 years to learn how to add, subtract, multiply, divide, to get the basic ideas of fractions, and to learn that you can substitute letters or other symbols for numbers you don't know and go through the same processes. So far as I can figure out that's all there is to arithmetic and algebra (Ed. note: At least, school algebra.) beyond practice, learning a few symbols, etc. at least up to quadratics and complicated exponents and roots.

Anyhow, this text. I wanted something to work on algebra with him, so asked Marty to pick up a college text. We are finding that, in general, though they are in themselves pretty terrible, *college texts are about at the level that "elementary" students find the material interesting.* (Ed. italics) There is enough in the content to engage them so that they can concentrate on the processes. This is true even of literature: Sandy read and discussed a Hawthorne story recently with two 7-year olds and an 11year old and found they had the important ideas even though they didn't know all the vocabulary. I could give many examples of how this works at various ages with various subjects, but, anyway, I wanted some college algebra book that didn't look too forbidding, and Marty came back with this two-volume programmed text on Algebra. Topher started and got bored working alone, and by working with him I could easily see why, as the text is endlessly repetitious, going over the same thing again and again with slightly different wording, apparently in the effort to drum it into heads of young people being cattle-prodded through junior colleges. It wasn't appropriate for Topher, *who still takes adults and learning seriously* (Ed. Italics) So by working with him

I showed him how to skip ahead ten or twenty pages at a time, read a question, see if it was still obvious, and if it wasn't, go back a few questions to see where the necessary information was included. *In a couple of hours we were able to cover a hundred pages this way.* (Ed. italics)

But I got stumped when they started throwing around terms such as Commutative Law, Associative Law, Distributive Law. Now I remembered being embarrassed by those terms somewhere back in college math and I was ashamed that I had never learned what they meant. So I went through that part of the book with Topher with some care. And I still couldn't see why it mattered, or why such a fancy name had to be given to the obvious fact that it didn't matter what order you added things up in or multiplied things. I figured I must be missing some subtlety that was crucial to further study of mathematics. Then, in GWS, you disposed of the problem for me by pointing out that we are not, after all, studying mathematics, but Nature, truth -and the labels, which someone some time or other thought might be helpful, often obscured simple truths. You didn't say it exactly that way, but that's what I got out of it. The result was I felt liberated suddenly, and realized that I could help liberate Topher.

Except that there is the further problem that as I go at text after text with him telling him the book is foolish he begins to wonder whether the books are, indeed, foolish, or whether his father is arrogant and self justifying. He doesn't say that he wonders, but I sense it. Eventually he is bound to wonder. For as I said, he takes adults, books, learning seriously, and it is probably very hard for him to believe that "grown-ups" are deliberately deceiving and misleading and absurd to the degree that I imply they are.

Of course, part of the answer is that I was foolish to think that there is a college text suitable for him, and that if I spent the time I could think up better "problems" and teach the subject better without texts, or if I were clever enough I could find examples in life which were more engaging and relevant than the problems in texts. But I am either not that clever or I won't take that much time. I would like something like workbooks, textbooks, to do some of this counselling and inventing for me. Eventually there may be such books. Some of our people may be writing them. Meanwhile, thanks for taking Commutative law, etc. off my back!"

Some interesting and important questions here. I'm not sure that we need to say that any particular textbook is misleading or foolish. If we are able, over and over again, to make clear to children (or others) what this or that textbook has made unclear, the children will soon draw their own conclusions about the worth of textbooks. If a child said to me, "This textbook isn't much good, is it?" I might agree that no, it wasn't. If s/he went on to say, "Well, why did you get it for me then?" I might say that none of the ones I looked at seemed to me any better. From this the child might conclude that textbooks were generally not much good, or perhaps, that there might be some better textbooks somewhere but that s/he was probably going to have to find them. Or, maybe, write them.

Many things in the world around me seem to me ugly, wasteful, foolish, cruel, destructive, and wicked. How much of this should I talk to children about? I tend to feel, not much. I prefer to let, or help, children explore as much of the world as they can, and then make up their own minds about it. If they ask me what I think about something, I will tell them. But if I have to criticize the world in their hearing, I prefer to do it in specifics, rather than give the idea that I think the world, *in general*, is a bad place. I don't think it is, and for all the bad that is in it, I would much rather be in it than out of it. I am in no hurry to leave. Even if I thought the world, and the people in it, was more bad than good, I don't think I would tell children so. Time enough for them to learn all that is bad. I would not have wanted to know, when I was young, all that I now know about what is wrong with the world. I'm not sure that I could have stood to know it. Time, and experience, and many friends and pleasures, have given me many assets to balance against that knowledge, things to put in the other side of the scales. Children don't have many of these. They need time to learn about some of the good things while they are learning (as they are bound to) about the bad.

Tree Planters

The Nov. 8, 1978, issue of Manas (see GWS #3 and others) says in part:

Five or six years ago a fifteen-year-old boy ... learned that the trees in Southern California are dying (Ed.—because of smog) at the rate of about 50,000 a year. He couldn't stand the idea of the forest fading away. What a picture—the mountains turned to wasteland, a moonscape without trees! This youth—the Sierra Club has published a book about him, *Tree Boy*, by Shirley Nagel—went to work to replant the forests with smog-resistant seedlings. He organized help wherever he could find it—children, old men and women, handicapped people—and they all worked together to replant trees. He made friends with county, state, and national forest people—which requires a lot of doing for a lad in his teens—so that they took him seriously, valuing the help of his crews of earnest youngsters.

Today the Tree People go on planting trees, and telling about planting trees to school children, running education classes and workshops at their environmental center (some old fire department buildings with ten acres for growing things, and being re-inhabited and rehabilitated by the Tree People). Now and then the “older” Tree People—hardly one of them yet twenty-five—go out on speaking dates. And they plant five to ten thousand trees a year, some in the cities, some in parks where a lot of people see them and see them being planted. Other people ask how do they do what they do. How do they fan this spark of theirs to a flame so that several thousand youngsters want to help plant trees every year?

A Record

The *Boston Globe* also reported that on opening day this fall (1978) attendance in the Boston public schools was at a record high. They didn't say whether it was a record for opening day or for any day. Nor did they say whether it was a record for the past five years, or ten, or twenty, or what. But it was a record, and they were mighty proud of it. And what was this record? How many of the students signed up for school and supposed to be there on this opening day were actually there? You'll never guess.

74.5%.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Growing Without Schooling 8

March 1979

In *GWS #7* I said that we had received 2700 letters as a result of the TV show with Phil Donahue, and might get 1000 more. The total is now about 7500, and though the flood has slowed down a good deal, it has not stopped.

Of these letters, about half expressed some kind of sympathy and support, from mild to ecstatic. Perhaps 1000 or so said they definitely wanted to subscribe to *GWS*. (Had I guessed how much mail there would be, I would have tried to give the price on the air!) Another 1000 seemed strongly interested. As far as we can, I plan to follow up these people until they either subscribe or say, "Leave me alone!"

Only eight letters were critical and/or hostile, and none of them were what you could call hate mail. Of the eight, four or five did not so much defend the schools as criticize me for not trying to make them better.

Hundreds of the supporting letters (and about four of the critical) were from teachers or ex-teachers. Some of the latter had retired, many had quit in despair and disgust, or been fired. Many of those who are still teaching said things like, "I work in the schools, and I know what they're like, and I don't want that for my child."

Only one letter strongly defended the schools.

While doing the show, I said to Linda Sessions during a station/commercial break, and after we had heard some fairly hostile comment from the audience, that we were not there so much to convince the audience as to send out a signal. Later I read that about four and a half million families (mostly mothers, since it is a daytime show) regularly watch it. That's a lot of people. But there are a great many more still to be reached. We have much more signal sending left to do.

CBS “60 Minutes” wanted to do a show on the same subject, but was told by higher-ups that the number of unschoolers was not big enough to justify it. But another CBS TV show, called “Magazine,” definitely plans to do a program on unschooling. At least one other big national show is looking into it.

The monthly magazine *Mother Jones* has a very good article on home schooling coming out. I have had long conversations about it from *The Ladies Home Journal*. Omni, a new magazine of science and fiction has said they want to interview me. An interview with me, which I have not yet seen, has been published in the *Libertarian Review*. And all over the country the newspapers have been full of stories about unschoolers.

New Records

The group subscription record has moved to a Southeastern state (for the time being, I can't say which one), where readers have taken out—hold onto your hats—a 74X subscription, for 12 issues! (Each reader will get *GWS* for about \$1.32 per year, or 23¢ per issue.)

The next largest group subscription is in Great Britain, where a group of people connected with the British unschooling movement called Education Otherwise have taken out a 40X subscription for 18 issues.

A Good Invention

From the Amherst Record (MA)

University of Massachusetts School of Education Dean Mario Fantini provided the idea of the, “portfolio approach” to evaluate the education of Richard and Keith Perchemlides, sons of Peter and Susan Perchemlides.

The portfolio approach is acceptable to Schools Supt. Donald Frizzle and to the family.

According to Fantini, video and cassette tapes, actual art works and photographs can be used to evaluate the children’s learning instead of the weekly paper and pencil test. The portfolio becomes “an archive of each child” he said.

In a telephone interview Thursday, Fantini said the Perchemlides asked his advice in developing an education program for their children. He said he spent “countless hours” with the couple discussing their philosophy of education and their goals in educating their children at home.

Fantini, who specializes in different approaches to learning and teaching, approves the option of parents educating their children at home. But he said it is important to assess the benefits of this education to the child.

Fantini said “it makes sense to have an outside evaluation by an individual or panel in a home education situation.” He said this third party review would be impartial and acceptable to school administrators.

From Ky.

Mil Duncan (106 Lorraine Ct. Berea KY 40403) writes:

Bill and I have two sons, Graham 4 and Ian 3 as of 10/78, who are full of curiosity and eagerness about the world. Since they were infants they have had books to hold and study and listen to- and lately their attention span for story or poem listening seems almost without limits. They love “how things work” books and books that describe Indians’ lifestyle and history. When we read books with more words than pictures (like *Wind In The Willows* or *Charlotte’s Web* or *A. A. Milne*) they are still and attentive, and interrupt to comment on the story or to ask about words or expressions. They have the patience now to hear non-plot-like prose—to listen about the wind rustling in trees and pouring over the characters’ skin or fur—and to enjoy those descriptions as well.

In his *Autobiography* John Stuart Mill describes his unique education that his father provided him: (p.21)

“There was one cardinal point, of which I have already given some indication, and which, more than anything else, was the cause of whatever good it effected. Most boys or youths who have had much knowledge drilled into them, have their mental capacities not strengthened, but overlaid by it. They are crammed with mere facts, and with the opinions or phrases of other people, and these are accepted as a substitute for the power to form opinions of their own. Mine, however, was not an education of cram. My father never permitted anything which I learnt to degenerate into a mere exercise of memory. He strove to make the understanding not only go along with every step of the teaching, but, if possible, precede it. Anything which could be found out by thinking I never was told, until I had exhausted my efforts to find it out for myself.”

Out of the blue last month Graham began to multiply. He said, “Mil, I know what 2 three’s are,” and so forth ... arranging with fingers or objects so that he can pose problems and solve them. Discovery fills every hour, doesn’t it!

Unschoolers

From the Daily Review (Hayward CA, May 1976):

Going To College At 16 Is No Problem For Him

San Leandro—Though he is only 16, Mark Edwards has had no difficulty in adjusting to campus life in California State University, Hayward, where he is a full-time student this quarter.

(He) was able to enroll at Cal State at the age of 16 because of the California High School Proficiency Examination for 16 and 17-year-olds given for the first time last Dec. 20.

The exam is designed for 16 and 17-year-olds who want to terminate their high school education before they become 18. Those who take the examination and pass it are awarded a Certificate of Proficiency which is the legal equivalent of a high school diploma and allows them to drop out of high school with parental permission.

Mark was accepted at Cal State on the basis of his scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the American College Testing exam.

It was because of the proficiency examination that Mark was able to enroll in the California State College system.

Without it, Mark's only alternatives would have been private colleges.

Mark is the son of Dr. and Mrs. Scott Edwards of San Leandro. His father is a professor of political science at Cal State and his mother is a junior high school teacher.

Mid-way through the eighth grade Mark decided to drop out of school, preferring to be tutored at home by his parents ... being more advanced academically than his fellow students, he was often referred to as an "egg head."

He enrolled in Moreau High School in the ninth grade in 1974, but dropped out early in 1975 and completed his high school education at

home.

At Cal State, Hayward, Mark is taking 17 units. He has already challenged one class, English 1001, written the test and received the credits.

Mr. and Mrs. Edwards sent me that clipping, and along with it one from the San Francisco Examiner, Jan. 10, 1979.

This Family Learned Its Lesson—Kids Study At Home

Five years ago the Edwardses decided to yank their children from the formal classroom atmosphere and have them attend class at home in San Leandro.

The Edwards children, aged 13 to 18, speak in glowing terms of their home-based schooling and claim it's given them poise and an insatiable appetite for learning that they wouldn't otherwise have had at their age.

The results are remarkable. Mark, the eldest at 18, is a junior at the University of California at Berkeley. Cliff is a sophomore at Chabot College, and 14-year-old Matthew is a freshman at Holy Name College in Oakland. The parents currently teach daughters Jennifer, 14, and Diane, 13.

The ongoing education, however, isn't as regimented as the usual day's schedule at a school. The father begins each day with a brisk morning jog, leading the children. Following that the daughters are given the day's assignment from their mother. One subject at a time—such as geography—is tackled for a few months. But if a daughter simply doesn't want to study one day, preferring instead to tend other chores, the studies are generally continued the next day. And the parents insist that relatively little time and money are “spent for such an education.”

With the clippings Mrs. Edwards sent this information:

Mark and Cliff, 19 & 17, work almost a full week as well as attend classes. Mark works in a credit office and Cliff is a salesman for a radio store. They had no problems getting part time work. Matt, 14, is a paid organist and pianist helping to defray his school expenses.”

A Needed Law

The State of California has done something that I suggested in Instead Of Education. (I don't mean to imply that they necessarily got the idea from me—though they may have.) In it I wrote:

To further reduce the power of the schools and their tickets, we might also extend the idea of the high-school equivalency exam. In all states and territories, people who have never finished high school can, by passing an examination, get the equivalent of a high school diploma. Today, people may not take this exam until they reach a given age, varying from state to state between seventeen and twenty-one. Clearly, the law does not mean to let any young person get out of school merely by showing that he has already learned what the school is supposed to teach him. But we might before long be able in many states to pass laws that one could take the equivalency exam at any age—or even laws that anyone who passed the exam no longer had to go to high school, and if below the school leaving age, must be admitted without cost to his choice of the state colleges.

This could be a great help to many poor or nonwhite children who would like to be doctors or lawyers or work in other professions. What keeps them out now, as much as any other thing, is the extraordinary amount of time it takes to get the needed school credentials.

A year or two ago someone introduced into the Massachusetts legislature a bill to lower the age at which students could take the high school equivalency exam. Public educators turned out in force to oppose it—as it turned out, successfully. But the political climate is changing, and today it might be possible in many states to persuade the legislatures to pass a law like the one in California.

Sherlock's Triumph

Merritt Clifton, editor/publisher of Samisdat (Box 231, Richford VT 05476), author of novels 24X12 and A Baseball Fantasy, writes:

consider Sir Conan Doyle's remarks quoted in GWS #7 in context with his own greatest literary accomplishment, the creation of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle advocates formal education; Holmes is self-educated. Doyle suggests learning is best accomplished in school, during childhood; Holmes experiments, toys, & questions like an intelligent child on into adulthood, & conspicuously avoids any institutional connections. Doyle would lock children up; Holmes lets curious boys and girls play with his most precious equipment. Holmes' arch-enemy is the institutionally—educated Professor Moriarty, who stands for everything Conan Doyle does—and Holmes triumphs, while Doyle died considering himself an abysmal failure. Doyle hated Holmes, as is well-known, and tried to kill him off in mid-career. Yet Holmes survived, as voice for the real, repressed man inside Conan Doyle. The outer Conan Doyle was afraid of his own true inner convictions. Fortunately, inner convictions overcame outer image. Sherlock Holmes, for instance, has taught more children to enjoy reading than all the institutional texts ever written.

Makes me want to read Holmes again, haven't since I was a kid, when I read all of him, and how I loved it.

Electricity

Theo Giesy writes:

During the holidays while we had the tree up, Susie was wondering why all the bulbs go out on the series strings and only the burned out one goes off on parallel strings. (I still cling to and insist on using four series strings from my childhood) Darrin gave her a very nice explanation of the difference between series and parallel wiring. I have no idea where he picked it up. I asked him where he learned that. He said, where he learned everything. I asked what he meant by that. He said, from me. I know he only learned it from me in that I gave him time to learn what he was interested in.

On “Infinity”

A mother wrote me a wonderful letter, which has disappeared in my filing system (I was sure I knew where it was), talking partly about the problems she had with the letters Band D when she was little, and partly about her six-year-old's thinking and questions about numbers. One of his questions was, what was the number next to infinity. To this I wrote, in part:

There is no number before “infinity.” Kids talk about “infinity” as if it were a number, but it isn't. The word “infinite” means “endless” or “boundless.” You can't get to the end, or the edge, because there isn't one; no matter how far you go, you can keep on going. Not an easy idea, maybe, for a six-year-old, or even most adults, to grasp.

The family, or as mathematicians would say the “class” of whole numbers, i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 ... has no biggest number. No matter how big a number we think of, we can always add some other number to it, or multiply it by another number. Mathematicians call this kind of class of numbers not, infinite” but “trans finite.”

There's a good chapter about transfinite numbers in a fascinating book which you may be able to get from a library, or perhaps from a university, called *Mathematics And The Imagination*, by Kastner and Newman. We learn that one transfinite class, such as the class of even numbers, is the same size as another transfinite class, the class of *all* whole numbers. It seems crazy at first, how can there be as many even numbers as there are numbers, since half the numbers are odd. Well, we can say that one class of things is the same size as another class of things if for every item in the first class we can match one and just one item in the second class. If for each right shoe we have one and only one left shoe, then we have just as many right shoes as left shoes, even if lye don't know exactly how many we have. For every number in the class of whole numbers, 1, 2, 3 ... we can make one and only one even number, by multiplying the first number times 2. 1 matches with 2, 2 matches with 4, 3 matches with 6, 4 with 8, 5 with 10, and so on no matter how far we go. So we can say those two classes are the same size.

There is a wonderful proof, what mathematicians call “elegant” (and it is, too), that the class of fractions is the same size as the class of whole numbers. That really is hard to believe, since between any two whole numbers you can

put as many fractions as you want. But there is a way to do that matching game again, so it must be true. There is another elegant proof that the class of decimals is larger than the class of whole numbers. But I won't say more about this now. Let me know if you can't find the book; I still have a copy and could make a copy of those pages.

The mathematician who did a lot of the early work on this was Georg Cantor. He showed that some transfinite numbers are bigger than others. Indeed, I think he found four or five different transfinite numbers, each bigger than the one before. The class of whole numbers was the smallest, the class of decimals the next smallest. Then a still larger one which represented (among other things) the class of all functions.

These are big ideas for a six-year-old (or anyone) to grapple with. Try them out, see what happens, don't be surprised or disappointed if he suddenly turns away from numbers and starts to look at something else. Meanwhile, see if you can encourage him to talk about "infinite" instead of "infinity." There is no such thing, or mathematical idea, as "infinity." There is just the adjective "infinite," meaning, as I said before, without an end or an edge.

From Newark

Dean Schneider, 77 Custer Ave., Newark NJ 07112, writes:

At a workshop the other day the speaker was talking about her experiences with unschooling in Newark. She, a member of a city poverty agency and former teacher, had a friend who actually never registered her child for school. When her child was six or seven and had not yet been to school, she started being hassled and threatened by the school authorities (I don't know how they became aware of the "offense" in the first place). Despite her repeated defense that she was effectively teaching her child at home, the powers that be turned their screws. But rather than submit, the mother took her child and moved out of state. This was around 1974 or 1975.

After the meeting, I enquired as to other cases she knew about of parents, in Newark, taking their children out of schools altogether and teaching them at home. She said she had five or six friends who are thinking seriously about it. They are single parents (the number of mother-centered households in Newark runs about 50%) who had, themselves, gone through the Newark public schools and wanted nothing of the sort for their children. They were far-sighted enough to plan their work lives and finances so they could take three or more years off, or at least juggle their time, to be at home to teach their children. Whether or not they too will encounter official resistance or pressure is unknown. In 1967, home study became legal in *New Jersey under State v. Massa*, 95 NJ Super, 382, 231 A 2nd 252 (1967). But this ruling, in itself, does not prevent legal or political manoeuvring as has been seen in other states where home study is supposedly legal.

I have recently heard of other instances of parents unschooling their children in Newark and New York City. My next door neighbor seriously contemplated keeping her daughter at home last year, but then decided to enter her at the alternative school right up the street.

It appears that far from inhibiting attempts at unschooling, big city life is getting so rotten as to encourage it. When in one week one hears of half a dozen cases of actual or contemplated unschooling in a city with the dismal reputation of Newark, it becomes clearer that there is a willingness to pull out of public schools should conditions become desperate enough—even if this means arranging work lives to make it feasible, relying on friends or

relatives, or training children for early independence and self-reliance (as you mention in GWS #4) . This also appears to counter the claim that only middle class whites can afford to get their kids out of public schools.

Even when children are in schools that parents find suspect, you hear of brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins and parents chipping in at night or on weekends trying to teach at home to reverse or minimize the damage wrought by the public schools. A student at my school last year, when asked, “How are you ever going to learn this stuff if you don’t listen?” replied, “My uncle teaches me at home.” Another former student in our third grade had very irregular attendance and this was considered a problem. Yet I tutored her during the summer and she picked things up very quickly, and is in fact ahead in her studies compared to other third graders (who have been more regular in attending school). From what she told me, it was evident that her mother made home instruction a regular part of daily life (after school). Another student told me today that she has a tutor come to her house from time to time.

In Newark, some parents have started their own schools while others have selected schools which are at least better, which can mean “stronger academically,” more relaxed or more disciplined, happier or stricter. But in any case, creating or selecting their own school is an act by parents to acquire some say in their own lives and the lives of their children. And one way these alternative schools could support parents in unschooling is to offer to supervise or help develop home study programs for a small fee. This could be to provide just paper legitimacy or to actually work with parents to devise a plan of action. I know you mention this for parents using an alternative school outside their own state (*Instead Of Education*, and *New Schools Exchange Newsletter* #131). This is a prospect I’m keeping my eye on in Newark.

Even a dismal city like Newark has a real world outside the school doors, and much to be learned from people in or out of schools. There’s a good library system, a good museum with a number of workshops and programs, parks, zoos, airports, shipping ports, etc.—all things to learn from. Also, there is easy access to all New York City has to offer. Should unschooling happen more in Newark, there’s a city out there to be used profitably. And if it can happen here, it can happen anywhere.”

At the moment, I know of only five schools in the country that are willing, so to speak, to provide cover for unschooling families. One is, of course, the Santa Fe Community School, which has already helped a number of families in this way. The others I will write about in *GWS* as soon as I have their permission to do so. Meanwhile, we need to know of more such schools. If any readers are part of a school which would be willing to do this—act as legal cover for unschooling families and/or help them with a home study program—please let me know. Thanks.

A Shelter School

No sooner had I written the above than I had a letter from Ed Nagel (P.O. Box 2823, Santa Fe, NM 87501—Tel. (505) 471—6928) on just this subject:

Re: home-study students enrolled at Santa Fe Community School, since 1974–75 we have enrolled about 100 students, from different states, of whom only 3 that I know of were ever challenged. One was Erik Sessions (still enrolled). Another was the child of a lady from PA, on whose behalf Wm. Ball wrote a letter, obtaining a substantial delay of any action against her. Later she returned her child to prison. (Actually the child was never formally enrolled at SFCS during this period.) The third parent was fairly mobile; when her child's "attendance" was challenged in PA, SFCS wrote a letter verifying her employment with the school as a supervisor of off campus travel—study. This satisfied the local superintendent and ended any further queries.

There are others, occasionally, who attempt to obtain a legal "guarantee" from the local public school officials—asking the "boss" in effect if they can undermine his operation—and who, failing in this, become intimidated and soon retreat from their position. Or, they may move, literally, to another state where they may then proceed less conspicuously to provide an educational alternative, in some cases, at least, thru SFCS.

As I write, it occurs to me that there may have been another challenge, but NONE of the parents whose children enrolled at SFCS have ever had to go to jail, or paid a fine (the unenrolled child's parent from Pa. paid a fine, as I recall, prior to Ball's intervention, or lost a challenge throughout this five year period.

Currently, there are between 40 and 50 students enrolled in home- study programs through SFCS, several within our own state. Of these, I would estimate about 1/3 have been enrolled for more than 2 years now. Of the many alternative schools doing this in other states which have been made known to me—roughly 30—only 3 have given me permission to put searching parents in touch with them, and then only under certain conditions; everyone is paranoid. No one wants to go to court; not the parents, not the schools; not the public officials who can manage to keep the news/noise down about the few "unusual" arrangements they allow/tolerate within their

district.”

Good news about SFCS. If I were planning to take children out of school, one of the first things I would do would be to enroll them at SFCS, or make such an arrangement with another school if I knew of one that would do it. I would do other things as well, but I would certainly do this.

As for school officials, several people have told me that they have had their children out of school, and that the schools, even though they had not formally approved this, were willing to let it go on, *as long as nobody complained*. But as soon as some nosy neighbor reported to the schools that such-and- such children were not in school, the schools had to make a big show of disapproval, start talking about law, courts, etc. What the officials are afraid of is that someone will say publicly, “How come you let those people get away with not sending their kids to school?”

What we need (among other things) is an answer for the *schools* to give to the nosy neighbors. Maybe if the schools can say, “That child is enrolled in a private school and we have nothing to say about him,” it would solve their problem, and so, our problem.

On “Religious Belief”

A Canadian parent, writing about the Sessions case (GWS #7), discussed the part of the ruling that said that parents’ claims to constitutional protection on religious grounds of their right to teach at home must be “rooted in religious belief.” The court did not say what it would or would not consider “religious belief.” About this, the parent went on to say:

“I see “religion” as a concept that can be manipulated for unschoolers’ benefit just as can the concepts of “school,” “teach,” “educate,” etc. As you pointed out, unschoolers should say, “Yes, our child goes to school,” and “Yes, I am teaching my kids,” even if the method of teaching is simply allowing them to learn.

For “religious belief,” what just about anybody could feel comfortable with is the feeling that one’s children are divine beings to be protected and nurtured to the best of the parent’s ability. I’d say something like this: “I believe that my children are Divine Beings and that it is my Divine Responsibility to educate my children according to “God’s Plan.” The trick is that “God” and “religion” can mean whatever one wants them to. “God” doesn’t have to be Judaeo-Christian; it can be Universal Energy, or Nature, or simply Love.

I replied that this isn’t what I meant at all. Such a statement might work in Canada (though I doubt it), but not in the U.S. What the framers of the Constitution wished to prevent, and what the Constitution itself forbade, has happened anyway. Judaeo-Christianity has to all intents and purposes become the official, state religion of the U. S. When the Constitution was amended to put the words “under God” into the Pledge of Allegiance, it was not just any God, or anyone’s personal definition of God, that people had in mind. It was *the* God of Christians and Jews.

Any people who are asking on religious grounds for the right to teach their own children will have a much better chance if they use the word “Christian.” To defend home schooling on the grounds that children are some kind of Divine Beings would almost certainly be a disastrous mistake. In many parts of the U.S., people would consider that statement itself to be irreligious or blasphemous.

I would instead suggest that people say that what happens in schools

offends their Christian beliefs about the way to teach and bring up children, as indeed I would think it would offend, and deeply, anyone who understood the word “Christian” to mean “based on the teachings of Christ.” That is to say, on the New Testament as opposed to the Old, where those with a mind to have always been able to find excuses for greed, racism, hatred, violence, and cruelty.

It is of course possible that the courts might one day uphold the right of Moslem or Buddhist or Hindu parents to teach their children at home, on the grounds that both the daily life and the subject matter and values (both taught and untaught) of the average school classroom seriously violated their religious beliefs. I hope someone will make such a test case, and will follow it closely if they do. But as for such parents winning—I’ll believe it only when I see it.

Meanwhile, if we can in good conscience apply the word “Christian” to our beliefs, it seems to me to make good sense to do so.”

From Quebec

Helen Fox, 137 Chemin du Ruisseau, St. Clet, Quebec, writes:

We are solving the school problem for our daughters (12, 8, & 3) in a combination of ways—home teaching before they are 6 so they read well and love math before they see a classroom. Then French school, which in our little village here in Quebec is friendly, relaxed, even joyful (Ed. note: Certainly not true of many or most schools in France.), and for some reason much emphasis is put on sports (they tan in winter from skiing and skating every day) and “public” speaking. All we hope for them to learn at school that we cannot teach them better at home is French and a total immersion in a culture and life-style different from ours. They seem unaffected by geography books from 1947 (we read maps, go places & talk, after school) and the other idiocies that are so debilitating in the suburbs, and elsewhere.

They love school, & do well. I think they love the chance to live a completely different life than the one we live here, at home even a new personality is born in another language. I marvel at them, as I stumble along talking to their friends.

Interesting to note, though, that the older two much prefer reading in English (in which they’ve had no school training) than in French. They (esp. the older one) say it’s because “there’s nothing good to read in French ... no action & adventure” but I imagine there’s less action and adventure in the *act* of reading that was taught methodically.

These schools, by the way, are not great for French children. A *large* number repeat a grade, and many get disgusted in high school & quit to work on the farm (illegally). Class, in elementary school, is often a madhouse—but it’s endured, even enjoyed, I suspect, by the teachers who, like most French Canadians I have met, really like kids & want to be with them.

In a later letter:

French school is working so well that my 8-yr.-old is reading a paperback called “Preparez Votre Enfant a l’Ecole” (Ed. note: “Get Your Child Ready For School.”) in order to get ideas for her own school that she conducts for 3—6 yr. olds, in French. She also cooks dinner for 5 and writes short stories in English.

It is now the law in Quebec that children from English speaking families must go to French schools. (Quite a few were going even before that law was passed) These children are taught to read, in French. Except perhaps in a few families, no one teaches them to read in English. But I have seen more than one report saying that where such tests have been made, these children have been found to read much better in English than in French.

Learning A Language

Young children who come into contact with people who speak more than one language will learn to speak all of those languages, and usually without much trouble. Older people, who have a lot of trouble, are amazed at this, and cook up a lot of fancy theories about the child having a special aptitude, or the child's brain being somehow different from the adult's, to explain why the child learns so much easier and faster.

The real explanation is simpler than this. The child, who speaks language A in his home, but who meets outside the home other people, especially other children, who speak language B, does not in any way set himself the task of "learning language B." In fact, he does not think of himself as speaking language A, or indeed any language. He just speaks, learns to understand what other people say, and to make them understand what he wants to say.

Now, all of a sudden, he meets some people whom he can't understand at all, and who can't understand him. What he wants, and what he tries to do, is to understand those people, *right now*, and to make them understand him, *right now*. That is what he works at, and since he is smart, tireless, and ingenious, and not easily discouraged by difficulties, and since he gets instant feedback to tell him whether or not he is understanding or being understood, he very quickly gets good at it.

His parents think how wonderful it is that he is learning language B so quickly. But he is not trying to do that, would not understand what it meant "to learn a language," would not know how to do such a task even if people could explain to him what the task was. He is just trying to communicate with people.

I saw a most vivid example of this difference when, after my father had retired from business, he and my mother began to spend the winter half of each year in Mexico. My father, who had graduated from a "good" college (not a good student, but good enough to graduate), told himself sternly, and kept telling himself for six years and more, that he ought to "learn Spanish." My mother, who had not gone to college, and had been a very poor student—she had always been terribly near-sighted, but beyond that, probably bored to death—could not have cared less about "learning Spanish." What she wanted like the little child, was to be able to talk to these people around her, who

were very different from any people she had known, and who interested her very much. So, like a very young child—she always had a small child's keenness of observation and sharpness of mind—she began to try to talk to the people around her, to ask the names of things, to ask *how* to ask the names of people she talked to, enchanted as people always are by someone who makes a real effort to speak their language—I discovered this on my travels in Italy—talked back, showed her things and told her their names (as they did to me when I visited), gently corrected her mistakes in pronunciation or usage, not so that she would speak “correctly” but only so that she would be better understood, and helped her in every way they could. The result was that very soon she was able to talk easily and fluently with people on a variety of subjects.

At the same time, my father, who thought of himself as trying to “learn” Spanish, which meant to learn to speak it correctly, so that then he could talk to the people around him, never learned more than twenty or so words in all the years he lived there. Now and then my mother tried to get him to say a few words to the people he met. He couldn't do it, was paralyzed by his school-learned fear of doing it wrong, making a mistake, looking foolish or stupid. He backed away from all these human contacts, all the while telling himself that he really ought to learn Spanish but just couldn't, was too old, did not have the aptitude, and so on.

Since then I have learned something from Ivan Illich, which seemed surprising until I thought about it, when it stopped being surprising at all. He had been traveling a lot in the polyglot i.e. multi-language cultures of Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. What he found was that the people who grew up in these cultures before schools were widespread, and therefore, before people began to think that important things, including “foreign languages,” had to be learned in school, did in fact learn to speak many languages, just from the experience of daily life. This was true of even very poor, humble, ordinary people. Such people, if they came regularly into contact with people who spoke other languages, and if they had good reason business, or whatever—to talk with them, learned to talk with them. But among the younger people, who grew up going to school, and so learned—even if they learned nothing else—that important things can only be learned in school, and then only when they are taught, very few learn more than one language. In short, schools not only make knowledge scarce and expensive,

but they make it difficult, by making it abstract, and cutting it off from the powerful motives, incentives, and rewards of daily life. They make the vast majority of people, not more informed or learned, but more ignorant, less eager and less able to learn new things than they would otherwise have been.

On Understanding

The friend I mentioned, in “Life In School” in GWS #6, once wrote to say that many children in her science class had not understood a talk she had given about asteroids, and asked what she might do about it. I wrote back, saying in part:

I decided that when we don’t understand something, one (or more) of three things are happening. 1) We have heard a word/words or seen a sign, for which we don’t know the *referent*—which just means, the object, thing, experience that the word or sign refers to. Thus the referent of the word “dog” is a four-legged furry animal, usually with tail, etc. If you had never seen a dog, and someone mentioned the name in conversation, you’d be a little puzzled. Or if you were an Eskimo, and someone mentioned a giraffe (I can’t imagine why), again, you’d be puzzled. If you had only lived in the far North, it would be very hard to “explain” to you what a tree was. Or a mountain, if you lived on flat tundra. People who have never seen snow, even though they have heard of it and even seen photos of it, are usually bowled over when they see the real thing.

If you had seen *some* animals, say a horse or a cat, I could explain a dog pretty easily, could say it was smaller than a horse but about the same size or bigger than a cat, with four legs, head, and tail in the same position. If you had never seen a four-legged animal at all, it might be a little bit hard to explain how a four-legged animal is put together. You could perhaps draw a picture. But people who have had no experience of pictures, primitive tribes, cannot connect in their minds pictures of things with the real things, cannot even recognize a picture of themselves or their own house.

Part of your problem in explaining asteroids may have been that many of your classmates didn’t have the *feel* for the distances and emptiness of space. They can perhaps imagine what something is like a mile away, but tens or hundreds or thousands of miles don’t mean much to them, in which case words won’t help.

The second thing that can cause us not to understand is when we hear one thing, and then another, and the two seem to contradict each other. If you had been told that ducks fly in the air, and that snapping turtles live in the water, and later heard someone say that a duck had been caught by a snapping turtle

(which happens), you would be confused. How could that be possible? Someone would then have to say that ducks also live some of the time in the water, at which point you would understand.

And the third thing that causes us not to understand is when someone tells us one thing, which seems to make sense, and then some other thing, which also seems to make sense, but we can't see how they are connected, what they have to do with each other. Or someone may tell us something, that we think we understand, but it doesn't seem to connect with anything, we think, "Why are you telling me that?"

Knowing this about understanding can be useful for people trying to learn things. If you find, reading, or hearing someone talk, that you don't understand something, don't panic. Take a few minutes to ask yourself which of those three cases you are in. If you are reading, and are not sure what the referent of a word or phrase is, what thing is being described, you can ask someone, or look it up in a dictionary, or if the book is a textbook, look it up in the index at the back of the book, see on what page the word first appears, and then see what it says about the word on that page. In a math or science textbook, you can usually find the word earlier in the chapter you're reading.

If your problem is that two things seem to contradict each other, it will help to say as accurately as you can what the contradiction is, thus, "It says that ducks fly in the air, and that snapping turtles live in the water, so how could a snapping turtle catch a duck?" That is an easy question for someone else to answer. When a student says to a teacher, "I don't get it," there isn't much the teacher can do about it. The more precisely we can say what it is that confuses us, the easier it will be for us, or someone, to clear up the confusion.

Seatwork

A mother—not an unschooler, she was interviewing me for a newspaper—told me the other day about some of the “reading problems” her child is having at school. His problem is that he loves to read and regularly reads books several years ahead of his so-called “grade-level.” His teacher complained to his mother that the boy was “falling behind in his reading seatwork.” This work consists of copying out vocabulary and spelling lists, reading sample paragraphs and answering questions about them, filling out various workbooks, and doing similar exercises—the kind that people invent who think that the ability to read well consists of hundreds of separate and measurable “skills.”

When the children were supposed to be doing this “seatwork,” this boy held books in his lap and read them instead. The teacher said that if he did not catch up with his seatwork she was going to give him a C in reading. The mother said, “How can you do that? You know he is a good reader? You know he reads books, for his own pleasure, that are way ahead of his grade level. How can you give such a boy a C in reading?” The teacher admitted that she knew the boy was a good reader, probably the best in the class. But she still insisted that he had to do his seatwork. The mother then said, “But the reason for the seatwork is to get the children to the point where they *can* read and understand the kind of books my son is already reading. Why should he have to get ready to do what he already knows how to do?” The teacher would not budge. The children were supposed to be doing seatwork, he had to do seatwork.

Government Property

From MANAS (see GWS #3) of 12/20/78, this quote:

a month or so ago, a public school official in Los Angeles declared on TV that the child, until he graduates from high school, “belongs to the state.”

The Schools Confess

A recent issue of Case and Comment, for which I have no address, reprinted an article on Teacher Malpractice which originally appeared in the American Educator, journal of the American Federation of Teachers. The article said, in part:

“In 1972, parents of a graduate of the public school system in San Francisco brought a \$500,000 suit against the school district charging that after a total of 13 years of regular attendance, their son was not able to read.

During his years in school, according to information compiled on the case, he was in the middle of his classes, maintained average grades and was never involved in anything which resulted in major disciplinary action. His parents claimed that during their son’s years in the public school they were rebuffed in their attempts to get information on the progress of their son, but were assured by school officials and teachers he was moving along at grade level.

Shortly after the youth’s graduation, he was given a reading test by specialists who concluded the youth was only reading on a fifth grade level.

The California State Court of Appeals rejected the parents’ claim of the school system’s failure to educate their son. The court declared it was impossible for any person, most of all the courts, to set guidelines for “proper” academic procedures which must be followed by all schools and all teachers.

“Unlike the activity of the highway, or the marketplace, classroom methodology affords no readily acceptable standards of care, or cause, or injury. The science of pedagogy itself is fraught with different and conflicting theories of how or what a child should be taught, and any layman might, and commonly does, have his own emphatic views on the subject,” read the court’s opinion.”

The court was, of course, quite right in saying this. But what then becomes

of the claim, which the schools make all the time, that they alone know how to teach children? It might not be a bad idea for parents, fighting in court for the right to teach their own children, to quote those words from the California decision.

Smoking

Every now and then, in the subway or some public place, I see young people, perhaps twelve or thirteen years old, sometimes even as young as ten, smoking cigarettes. It is a comic and pitiful sight. They have obviously practiced (as I once did) all the mechanics of holding the cigarette, taking a puff, inhaling the smoke (if they can), blowing it out casually, flicking the ashes off the end, etc. They want to look as if they had been smoking for years, yet they give themselves away every second. They dart nervous glances in every direction, half to be seen (and admired) by everyone, half fearing that they may be seen by someone who will get them in trouble. Above all, they can't let the cigarette alone for a second. They take puff after puff, one right after another. The smoke they are breathing must be as hot as a burning building.

It is an ordeal. The smoke tastes awful. Children have sensitive taste buds, and that smoke must taste even worse to them than to most non-smoking adults, which is saying a lot. They have to struggle not to choke, not to cough, maybe even not to get sick. Why do they do it? Because "all the other kids" are doing it, or soon will be, and they have to stay ahead of them, or at least not fall behind. In short, wanting to smoke, or feeling one has to smoke whether one wants to or not, is one of the many fringe benefits of that great "social life" at school that people talk about.

Some people, when they learn I don't smoke, say, "I wish I had your will power." I tell them they have it backwards. I tried to smoke, but I didn't have—enough will power to keep at it. The taste of the smoke itself I could just barely stand, but the taste it left in my mouth—for days—was too much for me. I gave it up.

I was able to give it up only because I was so far on the outside edge of the peer group that being a little farther out made no difference. I had nothing to lose. I longed to be an insider, but smoking, even if I could make myself learn to stand it, was not going to make me one. So why put myself through it. I had already learned, a little bit, and only because I had to, to say, "The heck with them." So said it. For a few years I smoked only when I got drunk, which meant I had a double penalty to pay next day. Years later, thinking it might help me fight off drowsiness on a long driving trip, I inhaled a big puff

of a cigarette. It almost knocked me down—I thought the top of my head had lifted clean off. Wow, what a drug! Since then, no more.

I feel sorry for all the children who think they have to smoke, and even sorrier for any non-smoking parents who may desperately wish they could persuade them not to. If the children have lived in the peer group long enough to become enslaved to it, addicted to it—we might call them “peer group junkies”—then they are going to smoke, and do anything and everything else the peer group does. If Mom and Pop make a fuss, then they will lie about it and do it behind their backs. The evidence on this is clear. In some age groups, fewer people are smoking. But more children are smoking every year, especially girls, and they start earlier.

One remedy, of course, is for children to feel themselves full members of a human group or groups whose example and good opinion they value enough so that they don’t worry about what the peer group is doing. I don’t know any other.

Growing With Trees

A mother writes:

I read *How Children Learn* when A was 2 and felt helped by it to see ways of playing and communicating that I'd been missing. I heard part of a lecture you gave on public radio about kids having the right to work and be part of the "real" world. But I didn't know until GWS #1 came out that you'd gone all the way to *no school*. At that time A was 8 and had never gone to school. It was so exciting to hear that there even *were* any others. GWS has filled-a-real need, helping us feel less alone and more faith in what we are doing.

T, A, and I earn almost all of our money by seasonal orchard work—picking apples 2 months in the fall and pruning apple trees 2 months in the late winter. We leave home and work in various parts of (apple country).

I've been doing this since I was 4 months pregnant with A. She is almost 10. The other 8 months we are home, in a neighborhood with 6 or so other couples who also live in the woods, are building their own houses. Most garden, most are self-employed doing crafts or odd jobs. A's best friend—M (8)—is also her cousin and also has never been to school. She's enrolled in the Santa Fe Community School. We are keeping a low profile. Neither of our families have been bothered by the law. A and M play with other kids in the area who do go to school. We don't hide what we're doing but we don't advertise it either. I don't really know how much the local school board knows and whether or not they're purposely looking the other way. (Ed.—this is often the case) Since we three leave home Sept. 1st and March 1st teach time for 2 months, it is possible they just assume she goes to school somewhere else.

A started picking of her own accord one day when she was 5. She put her raincoat on backwards, using the hood as a bucket to hold the fruit until she emptied into the boxes. She was very proud of herself. She worked all day and picked 3 bushels. The next rainy day we made a quarter size bucket out of a plastic waste basket and a pant leg. The cloth bottom opened up for emptying like our buckets. T made her a 10 foot ladder (he makes and sells apple picking ladders). She picked from the bottoms of our trees and we paid

her what we earned per bushel before deductions for food and rent.

Now, 5 years later, she has a custom-made 1/2 size bucket and a 14 foot ladder. She works 2 hours or more most days, picking to the same quality standards we use. She keeps her own tally. She pays about 1/2 of her own living expenses from her earnings when we're on the crew. She handles the ladder well, picks as much of the tops as she can.

How much to pay her and how much to expect her to work have been areas of confusion. It didn't seem right to continue to pay her, in effect, more per bushel than anyone else by not deducting any expenses. But if we deducted her full expenses, she wouldn't earn anything (yet). So we compromised. Earning money is not her main motivation but she likes to get paid and it seems good for her to have money to spend. If she continues to increase her production she'll soon be able to pay her full expenses on the crew and have a good amount left over.

In many poor cultures the kids' earnings help support the whole family. We have to earn enough to live on the rest of the year. So it seems possible that as she gets older she might pay her expenses the rest of the year too, or contribute toward things we'll all use. We are not part of a tradition where the kids work a lot or contribute much to the family's survival. And we are not so close to the line that our survival depends upon her contributions. So when we're in doubt we take the more regular (like our own upbringing) course. I believe she's working a good amount of her own accord when we're on crews. She says she wants to get so she's paying all of her expenses on the crews.

I don't believe in compelling kids to study some subject they don't want to, but I do believe in insisting they do some work, in relation to their abilities and the needs of the family. Since they start with a compelling desire to do what the older family members do, this is no problem. Now sometimes she objects to some chores (it's boring, so-and-so doesn't have to). We insist. If you want to be warm, too, you have to carry firewood, too. She seems to see the justice of it and gives in pretty easily.

She helps with pruning, too. Has her own saw and with direction will sometimes prune a whole tree. But it is a harder skill to learn.

I think living on a work crew has been really good for our family. It helped me set limits and encouraged us to accept time away from each other, but still allowed us to be together when we needed it. Very young, A

accepted that I had to work and learned to amuse herself very well. I think that kind of solitude is very important for everyone. She became less clinging and demanding and I learned I could choose which demands I would meet. Before crew life I felt I should give her everything she was asking for. As a result of working with her near I learned that she could accept it and *benefitted* when I sometimes let her work it out herself. This led to both of us feeling our own individuality and made our close times closer. And brought my way of being with her into accord with T's way.

Spending a good part of every day outside is another important benefit. There are so many more things to do outside, such good things to choose from. She did not amuse herself outside in the cold part of the pruning season when she was 3 and younger. When it was too cold for her to keep herself warm in deep hard-to-move-in snow, we took turns not working to stay with her. But I remember days when it was snowy but fairly warm and she dug, went sliding, climbed trees, bounced on springy limbs *and found a deer antler*.

Her attitude toward work (and mine) have benefitted from the work situation. Most of the crew, most of the time, are working with a willing attitude and there's a lot of enthusiasm that is catching. She works harder and longer with T who enjoys pushing himself than with me. She and I talk a lot and concentrate less. Everyone is paid by how much they do and there are a lot of other kinds of companionship fit in around the work. Some people return year after year and some don't, but one season is enough to get very close in a situation like that. Working with someone makes it easy.

Even though there's a gap of 1/2 years, A and E enjoy each other a lot and play together really well. A is an accomplished baby-sitter, patient, full of good ideas when something goes wrong, a playmate. We make sure they visit during the 8 months we're not on crews because they miss each other. A started babysitting on the pruning crew when E was 7 months old. One hour a day in exchange for lessons and a trip to the library one morning a week with E's mother. That concept of the time with an adult being a privilege put lessons in a wholly different light. They made booklets about aspects of apple trees, like insects that live on them, and pruning. This last picking season it was recorder playing for 1/2 hour or so when she wanted it in exchange for one evening a week baby-sitting.

Another thing that's become a regular tradition is that M and A each

spend a week with each family during each work season. She spends a week at home with them and M spends a week on the crew with the 3 of us. M is 2 years younger and the swap was a little hard for her at first but it gets better each time she does it.

How much time we've had for lessons has varied. It's less on crews than the rest of the year but they tend to be more regular since our life is more the same every day. We've done math and word games with me picking and her sitting on the grass under the tree. A favorite pre-reading game went with a book of all the mammals. I would name one. She'd guess what letter it started with and look it up alphabetically, verifying the word with the picture, and then write it down. She also wrote lists of things around her. Another favorite was writing a word like *clover* or *dandelion* and then finding the other words inside the big one. I strongly believe in answering a question if I know the answer rather than saying, "You can figure that out," "Sound it out," etc. We were amazed to see that with no "drill" to speak of she got better from lesson to lesson. The lessons were *showing* us that she was learning, rather than *doing* the teaching. I have noticed more and learned a lot about the English language by being involved with her learning to read and write. It's been exciting and interesting, the hardest part learning to shut up, not to push. All along we've read aloud, gone for nature walks and discussed numbers.

Since I have been the book-keeper on the last few crews her interest in math has grown sharply. She helps with the payroll and counts out everyone's final net pay. She seems to have a good solid concept of reading and math. She doesn't gobble them up in quantity but when she's interested in something she follows it through.

Here some of my insecurity about her comes cropping up. How does she compare with other kids her age? I can remember doing more at her age with school stuff (naturally) and being more interested in reading and music and kids' games. But I lived in a city neighborhood, went to school and had 2 sisters, and my parents were more intellectual.

All in all the hardest thing about not sending A to school is the unknown. Since school was such a big part of my life, I can't imagine what it would have been like without it (especially ages 13-18). It's hard to imagine what her life will be without it. Looking back—so far, so good, but looking ahead is one big question mark. Will she be equipped with what she needs to be independent of us? Will she have friends enough during adolescence? She

doesn't ask to go to school, will she try it later?

I think we need to do more to help her have access to other parts of the world and help her follow through with more of her interests. Pottery, sewing, cooking, and French are some. These aren't my strong interests or skills and so it will be with friends that she pursues them. We'll continue sending her over to our potter friend's house. We've just found a French woman living not too far away. Maybe she'll tutor A in French.

I'd like for her to tryout more extra-curricular but school-type things. She was in a swimming class last summer. 4-H?

I sometimes feel unsure in how much to encourage or make things happen for her and how much to wait and let her initiate.

I wonder if we'll get hassled by the law sometime in the future.

A, M, and I went on bike trips last summer. I want to do that more and perhaps include more of the kids in the neighborhood.

We have recently found 2 families, 15 miles away in two different directions, who recently got school board approval for home instruction for their kids. We are meeting one day a week, bringing the kids together and getting to know each other.

Reply

You wonder how A compares with other kids her age? My guess would be that she compares very well, probably smarter, more self-reliant, more serious, more considerate, more self-motivated, more independent, more honest, etc. I think of the exclusive and expensive school where I first taught fifth grade. My students were the children of many of the leading business, professional, and academic families in this area. I would guess that the average family income must have been at least \$40,000 a year, and the average IQ of the children over 120. I worked with three fifth grade classes there, sixty children, grew fond of them, came to know them well. But I felt very strongly that of that group of children not one in four, if even that many, had the kind of health of mind and spirit that I would have wanted for a child of my own. And I suspect they were better than their counterparts at that same school today, for these are harder and more anxious times for children to grow up in.

You say that as a kid her age you were more interested in reading. I was too. But in the school I just mentioned, I can't remember more than a handful of those super-bright children who ever read for fun. At 10 and 11, I read a great deal, on my own. By the time I was 13, away at boarding school, this had stopped. I had plenty of time at school, since I found the work easy, but I can't remember ever, not even once, reading a book that had not been assigned. Many of those that were assigned, I loved—*Joseph Conrad*, for instance. But I never read any of his other books, just for my own pleasure. Neither did anyone else. We would have been astonished if anyone had suggested it. (No one did.) Reading had become one of those (many) things that you did when, and because, and only because, *they* told you to.

With any luck at all, A should escape that way of looking at reading—and at life.

I suspect A is in any important sense a great deal smarter than most kids, and far more likely to adapt, and adapt well, to any new and difficult environment she might meet. See Jud Jerome's piece in *GWS* #1 about his daughter who quit school for years, and when she went back found herself way ahead of the kids who had stayed in.

Ever since he wrote, I've been meaning to do a follow-up piece for *GWS*

about *How People Get Smart*. They get smart by giving constant attention and thought to the *concrete details of daily life*, by having to solve problems which are real and important, where getting a good answer makes a real difference, and where Life or Nature tells them quickly whether their answer is any good or not. The woods are such a place; so is the sea; so is any place where real, skilled work is being done—like the small farm where Jud's daughter worked, like your own orchards.

Like GWS, for that matter. In putting out this magazine we do a great deal of what most people would call routine clerical work. But in doing this work we have hundreds of little, immediate problems to solve. Every time we put out a new issue we find ways to do the work a little better and more efficiently. There is nothing like it for sharpening the wits.

Two summers ago I spent some time working with a small farmer in Nova Scotia, the neighbor and friend of the friends I was visiting. He had a large garden where he grew almost all his own vegetables, had about 20 acres in hay, raised Christmas trees. He also owned woodlots, from which he cut wood, for his own use and to sell. He was 72 years old, and did all this work himself, with the help of two horses. The skill, precision, judgment, and economy of effort he displayed in his daily work were a marvel to see. The friend I was visiting, a highly intelligent and educated man, no city slicker but a countryman himself, who had long raised much of his own food and killed, butchered, and cured or frozen much of his own meat, said with no false modesty at all that if he farmed for fifteen or twenty years he might—with plenty of luck and good advice—eventually learn to farm as well as this old neighbor.

No use trying to answer all those questions about the future. The future is a mystery and a gamble whether you send her to school or take her out. One thing we are sure of—school is a very destructive experience for most of the children who go through it. Keep her out of it if you can. As for access to the world, as she gets older she will want to see more of it, and will find ways to do it. If she needs your help she will ask for it. Meanwhile, if your own life and the lives of other adults around you that she knows are rich and satisfying, that will be the best possible example and encouragement for her. And unlike most children, she will not only have seen but shared most of the best parts of your lives.

The Work Ethic

Poster (advertising a savings bank) in the Boston subways:

WON'T IT BE GREAT WHEN YOU FINALLY QUIT WORKING?

Children And Play

Candy Mingins (R.D. 1, Albee Hill, Van Etten, NY 14889) wrote us two interesting letters earlier this year, saying in part:

One of the strongest revelations I have experienced in my life was during the first September out of School since age 5. I was 22, and had plodded along all the proper channels for seventeen years, without questions. I was a “winner.” But for some reason I dared to *not* take my designated course (to be a social worker, or some such thing) and decided to travel. Life was real! Never had I experienced such exhilaration. And all those compartments—chemistry, math, psychology, philosophy—were real questions and answers about the world. They were living. For the first time for me, the world was whole. And there were so many things to do!

I eventually took a job as a Head Start Teacher in a rural area where I wanted to live. I wanted to work with young children because it seemed like it would be an enjoyable job. And in many ways it was. I left teaching to try my hand at farming, building, and many other interesting activities. I returned four years later to two programs that I was more excited about: one, a cooperative nursery school organized and run by mothers, the other a home-based Head Start program where mother, child, and I sit at the kitchen table once a week to engage in an hour’s worth of activities. Both, I felt strongly, could work us away from the expert-worshipping that exists in education, because the premise was that parents are teachers and play is learning.

Three major stumbling blocks I have come to in this work are: 1) Most parents’ goals are to prepare their children as best they can for school, so that they can be winners (Ed. note: Or at least, not among the worst losers.) 2) Although there was progress, most parents see learning as something you get in school *given* by experts who know best. 3) Most parents are not willing to *get on the floor*. I mean this literally and figuratively. That’s where these children are most of the time—and that’s where you have to be willing to go if you want to really hear what they have to say. Also, perhaps it is a matter of “letting go,” or being interested or excited about the world, and getting your hands dirty exploring it. In your words, DOING. To too many people, teaching is lecturing—telling facts to deaf ears. In the realm of Doing, there is something very strange and unnatural about having a place and time so I

rely for the purpose of teaching children.

When parents were active, and creative—DOING—in their own right, that's when things began to flow with the children. During one home-based session we made paper bag puppets. L, her mother, and her grandmother were there. It began with L's mother R instructing her how to make her puppet until I finally convinced R to join us and make one also. This she did, and it met with sarcasm and ridicule from grandma. Finally grandma was convinced to join us too, and when everyone relaxed and let their creativity flow a bit, we created some wonderful characters, and had a nice play.

I'm not go in g to continue this work after June. There are other things I would like to do, and I'm finding that early childhood education is getting too Schooled ... falling more and more into testing, labeling, ranking, and preparing children for School, and in the process has lost much.

One other thing I'd like to share with you. A four year-old friend explained to me how she was learning to read. She told me that she has a *Little Red Riding Hood* record and a *Little Red Riding Hood* book. She listens to the record and looks through the book at the same time, and sometimes, when the record goes slow, she can match the words. She was not only learning to read on her own, *but she was perfectly aware of how she was doing it.* (Ed. italics.)

C and I are living examples of the effects of Education. I went obediently through 16 years of schooling, doing what I should (never more), and won gold medals for it. C, for the most part, went to school only when he wanted to. (He remembers first skipping school in kindergarten) His father wasn't at home, and his mother wasn't around very much (going to college and working) and, too, there was an intellectual environment in the family—lots of reading—and plenty of trips and day excursions to botanical gardens, museums, etc.

In ninth grade, C avoided school 90 days out of 180—finding effective ways to beat the system with out them realizing. He always did fine on tests and was always in the “top” classes. Often, in Science, he was way ahead of the cl ass curriculum.

At home, C would pick up his older sister's Chemistry book and read it cover to cover. Most of his learning was done this way—on his own.

Also, he began taking responsibility for maintenance of the house—using tools, puttering around. He put in a new bathroom when he was 13.

C's understanding of things, and how everything relates to everything else, is so much greater than mine.

Another amazing part of his learning (one I'd eventually like to write more about) is the game *Atlas*. The family didn't have much money, and did have plenty of German thriftiness—hence the children were not swamped with plastic toys and gadgets. They had to create their own play, so C and his brother and two sisters (all older) played this on-going game (invented mostly by his brother) for 8 years or more. It was a game of the World. Each child had tribes of people made from: toothpaste caps glued to marbles (the Liliputians); Hi-Q game pieces (the Microscopians); used magic markers with toothpick swords and aluminum foil shields (the Sudanis); cooking oil bottles decorated with paper (the Criscoeans), etc. The tribes fought battles in the garden, conquered territories, kept maps and records, held art shows, had a newspaper, and had their own languages and money systems.

It was an ingenious invention of play, which the children created entirely by themselves, and which lasted through time, always encompassing new interests and ideas as the children grew.

Tx for fine letters. When I visit (now rarely) classrooms of little children (whom I would rather watch playing in the Public Garden), I always find an out of the way spot and sit down on the floor. Soon children come up and start talking to me, showing me things, asking who I am, etc. Can I be sure that the same children might not have come up to me even if I had remained standing? No. But I think they would probably have waited a lot longer before doing it.

Sports

An article by Mark Sarner in the *Winnipeg Tribune*, about the physical unfitness of Canadian children (probably very like U.S. children in this respect), said,

Children are certainly not as active as they used to be. Increased organization and supervision of sports such as hockey have resulted in players spending much more time on the side lines than they did when games were spontaneous and unstructured.

Well, they never were “unstructured.” The difference is that they were structured by children, not adults. The further difference is that when children structure a game, they want to get the most activity for everyone, not just imitate an adult game. If some kind of rule in a truly child’s game stops the action, someone will say after a while, “Aw, this is no fun,” and they will change the rule. The adults who run “children’s sports” rarely ever think of this.

I seldom see Little League baseball. When I do, what strikes me most of all is not the famous pressure from parents, *but that so little baseball is being played*. Most of the time, the pitcher is the biggest and strongest kid on the team, and blazes the ball past most of the little kids on the other team. There is very little hitting, base running, or fielding—so kids don’t learn how to do them. If children were running their own sports, those big, strong, precocious kids would be out playing with bigger and older kids, where they could get some good competition, and the little kids would be facing pitchers their own size, and there would be lots of action.

In another Peewee League game, the pitchers were so little that they couldn’t get the ball over the plate. Some fool adult was calling balls and strikes, and most batters walked. A pitcher might walk seven, eight, ten, batters in a row, while kids slowly walked round the bases and some other solemn adult kept score. Sensible kids running their own game would tell the pitcher to get up close enough to get the ball over, and would tell the batters to stay up there till they struck out or hit something. Bases on balls make sense for adult baseball, but not for little kids—no kids playing ball for fun would ever think up such a rule.

The best remark I ever heard about Little League was made by former Yankee catcher Yogi Berra. He went right to the heart of the matter, said that when he was a kid he used to count a day lost when he didn't get in about 150 at bats, but that he had seen Little League games lasting for hours in which kids only got up to bat three or four times—and then, like as not, walked or struck out.

One year, when I was teaching at the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, still very small and informal, we had about half an hour between lunch and the first afternoon class. In the spring a great game evolved to fill up this half hour. Boys and girls would rush out to a little odd-shaped pasture with a small irrigation ditch running right thru it. Not having enough players to make teams, we played four-a-cat. In strict four-a-cat, four people bat in rotation, the other players are in the field. The batters hit and run the bases just as in a regular ball game. A batter stays on the batting team until s/he is put out. If s/he hits a fly ball which is caught, the fielder who caught the fly comes in and takes the batter's place, and the batter takes the fielder's place. If the batter strikes out or grounds out, s/he goes out to left field, and the fielding team rotates positions—pitcher goes to the end of the batting rotation, former first base becomes pitcher, second base becomes first base, and so on.

One trouble with this game was that the best batters were almost never put out, so most players didn't get a chance to hit. Also, the teen-age pitchers (who had lost a lot of their children's sense about games) were trying to strike out everyone, so the batters had to stand around for a long time waiting for a good pitch to hit. The first problem we solved with a rule—after three hits a batter had to go out into left field just as if s/he had struck out or rounded out, the fielders rotated their positions, and the former pitcher would join the batters. The fielders naturally kept close track of the batters, and when a batter made a third hit, a cry of "Rotate!"

The second problem I solved by making myself the permanent pitcher. What I was able to do and did, was make every pitch easy to hit. One day, which I still fondly and proudly remember, batters-hit-hard-fourteen consecutive pitches. Action and excitement for everyone! The sluggers would blast triples and home runs till their three hits were used up. The weak hitters got at bat in each full rotation—in a half-hour game everyone would bat at least two or three times. And everyone got to play all the positions. No one kept score—there was now way to—though the sluggers probably

remembered their home runs for a day or two. (My friend Hugh McKay hit one off me that I still remember.)

Wonderful games! It makes me feel good just to write about them.

A Home-Made Fable

The author of “The World At Two” (GWS #6) told me that she had full made up a story for her 2+ year-old boy, in which he was the hero, and all the other characters the animals on their small farm. He loved the story. Later she wrote it down and sent me a copy, saying, “You may find it a bit cute but a 5 year-old boy wondered—in a whisper—all the way through, “Is it true?””

When I asked her if I might print it in GWS, she said OK, but she thought it didn’t fit and that people might think I was crazy for putting it in. I think it does fit. Many of our readers have very young children who, like the 5 year-old, might just enjoy hearing the story. But it also makes a larger point, that children, whether in city or country, are more likely to be interested in stories in which they play a part, and which are full of things drawn from their everyday life. Parents, or other people who know the children well, are the ideal people to make up such stories. Even if they are not very polished, such stories are likely to be more interesting than most of the stories in books for little children.

A. S. Neill, at Summerhill, used to make up stories for the children there, in which they that were the leading characters, and sing or being chased by various spies, crooks, and villains. And as many know, *Alice In Wonder Land* was made up for the real child who was the Alice in the story. So, take a shot at making up stories for your children. As with everything else, as you do it you’ll get better at it.

Here is my friend’s story:

Pig In The Bed

On Tuesday last week a strange thing went on;

Jack came home early and his parents were gone.

He knew right away that something was up

When he took a look at his friend the pup.

(He was drinking a coke, taking sips as he spoke.)

“Hey Jack! Look out! Better step aside.

The horse and her colt are going for a ride!”
Jack turned around when the pickup truck
Made the sound that it makes when it’s just starting up.
The horse put it in gear and sputtered past,
Then before she started going too fast,
She yelled, “Sorry, Jack, to be taking your car,
But it’s been a long time since we’ve gone very far.”
Jack stared, then he wondered, then he said, “O.K.,
But will you try to get back by the end of the day?”
He shrugged and went on down to the kitchen,
But when he got there it was full of his chickens!
“Just fixing a little mid-day treat.
We get awfully tired of old corn to eat,”
Said the hens as they mixed and blended and baked
Until they came up with banana spice cake.
Jack looked at that cake and said, “Best let them be.
I’ll go in the living room and watch some TV.”
But there was the billy goat stretched out on the couch,
And when Jack tried to move him he started to grouch.
“I barely sit down for my favorite show
When along you come and tell me to go!”
The nanny and kids were there at his feet

Eating pretzels and popcorn, watching Sesame Street.
Finally Jack said, "O. K., I'll see you around,
But do you think you could please turn the volume down?"
Instead Jack went in to take a quick bath,
But once in the bathroom he started to laugh.
For there quite relaxed in the big bathtub
Was the fat mother cow, having a scrub.
Then Jack got mad. "What do you mean!
Using my tub! You're not very clean!"
"Just the point, Jack. It's been quite a spell
Since I've had a good bath. I was starting to smell."
Jack slammed the door. He was angry and red.
Let me think. I'd better stretch out on my bed.
He went into his bedroom and shut the door,
But stopped when he heard a loud ugly snore.
From his blankets a wiggly tail stuck out,
And on his pillow he saw a big pig snout!
"A pig in my bed! In between my clean sheets!"
The pig rolled over and begged, "Let me sleep.
There's no bed as soft as this in the barn.
I'm sure I'm not doing your bed any harm."
Poor Jack let out a sad long groan.

What can I do? My parents aren't home.

These animals have to go live in the barn.

This isn't a nut house. This is a farm!

Then his dog came along and said, "Listen, Jack,

You get rid of these animals before your parents come back.

You've got to act tough. Play the part of the boss.

Else this house and your truck will be a big loss."

"I've got it!" said Jack, and he started to scream:

"Up in the barn there's chocolate ice cream!"

The chickens took wing, the pig climbed out of bed.

The cow left the tub and the goats quickly fled.

Up the road the horse was parking the truck.

Jack ran to the freezer. "Whew! I'm in luck!"

He got out two gallons of chocolate ice.

"Plenty for everyone! As long as you're nice."

He passed it out fairly to all on the farm,

To the pig in the pig pen and the cow in the barn.

"Thank heavens you knew just what to do,"

Said the dog, passing his plate. "May I have some too?"

"Certainly," said Jack. "But what will mom say

When she sees I ate two gallons of ice cream today?"

Typing

When I was in the Navy, I taught myself to touch type. I had been typing, hunt-and-peck style, since I was 10, my Grandmother had given me a child's typewriter (only capital letters). At 10, I wrote long stories, or beginnings of stories, on it. In college, I used it to type up class notes. I could type much faster than I could write. But in the Navy much of my typing was copying, where hunt-and-peck doesn't work so well. I had time on my hands (after the war ended), I knew how touch typing worked, and I decided to learn it. I made a diagram of the keyboard, stuck it on the wall over the typewriter, and began to do all my typing looking only at the diagram, not at the keys. I also invented exercises to strengthen the weaker fingers of my left hand, words like "waxed, crazed, sweater," or for the right hand, "monopoly, million," etc. In a few months I could touch type much faster than I could do hunt-and-peck. By the time I left the Navy I was a skilled typist.

No skill I have ever learned more other unschooling families, (except possibly reading itself) has been more useful to me. I used it all the time in my work with the World Federalists. A few years later, when I came to Boston and began teaching elementary school, I typed all the letters that later made up much of *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*. I typed the manuscripts of my first three books, and the rough drafts of all the rest. I usually compose at the typewriter. Except for the first two issues, and a few stories in the third, I have typed everything in *GWS*. Without this skill, I could not have done or do, any of the work that has been so important to me.

It is not a hard thing to learn. All you need is a typewriter, a keyboard diagram (which usually comes with the machine, of which you can buy at the stationary store or make yourself), some time, and practice. It is certainly nothing you need go to a school or class to learn. All the young children I have known have been fascinated with typewriters, and Omar Moore found that children five years old or even younger could easily learn touch typing and like to do it. With electrics, finger strength is no longer a problem.

If I had a child learning at home, I would certainly get a portable electric typewriter. If I could not afford a new one, I would look for a second-hand machine, of which there are many. If that was still too expensive, I would try (using the directory) to share the cost with one or more other unschooling

families, with each family having the machine for a certain number of months.

When Omar Moore taught young children to touch type (as a way of teaching reading) he choose a different color for each typing finger. Thus index fingers (and all the keys they hit) might be marked blue, second fingers green, ring fingers orange, little fingers red. He marked each child's fingers with a little dab of paint or magic marker on the fingernail. He made colored caps for the typewriter keys, so that the children had to look at the chart to know which key was which (a good trick in teaching yourself). He found they very quickly learned the keyboard, and that their fingers soon became agile.

I would guess that a child who had learned to type rapidly might have a lot of fun writing stories, certainly much more than if he had to go through the slow and painful business of writing them by hand. (Though parents of children learning at home might also do well to look into italic handwriting, which was for a while at least taught in many British schools—it is easier to learn, quicker, and more stable, handsome, and legible.) Another advantage of being able to type neatly is that a child can write letters (asking questions, etc.) to adults without giving away the fact that he is a child, and so be reasonably sure of getting a courteous and sensible reply. It is, in short, another path into the adult world.

Many years ago I was talking to a 20-year-old friend, then looking for a job. I asked if she could type. She said No. I said it might be useful to learn. She said, "I don't want to learn it, because if I know how to type then they'll just give me some job where I have to type." Well, I suppose that way of looking at things is OK if you are thinking only of "good" jobs and "bad" jobs, or about what "they" are going to make or let you do. But if you are thinking instead of finding meaningful work, then it makes sense to think of making yourself as useful as possible to the people who are already doing he work. Being a good typist is one way. Also, if you are a fast and accurate typist, you will almost always and everywhere be able to find some kind of money-making job, if that is what you need in order to do something else that you want.

I would also recommend very strongly to parents who would like to or are trying to take children out of school that if they do not know how to type, at least one of them learn. It will be much better if all letters to school people

and/or other officials are typed. For one thing, it is faster, and there may be times when you will want to write very long letters and proposals. For another, it is easier to copy. Most important of all, it is impressive and even a little intimidating to the schools. This is important; it helps to give them the impression, without your actually ever having to say it, that if they get into a battle with you, they are going to lose.

A Case Lost

GWS #3 reported briefly the case of Tom and Martha Lippitt, who were convicted by a Cleveland Juvenile Court Judge, Angelo Gagliardo, of the charge of civil neglect of their children, because they had taken them out of a church school and were teaching them at home. Recently, a friend has sent us a more complete summary of that case. It says, in part:

On June 20, 1977, the South Euclid-Lyndhurst Board of Education took the Lippitts to Juvenile Court on a charge of civil neglect. (There is no such charge as civil neglect in Juvenile Court). Judge Angelo J. Gagliardo presided over this court. Mr. Lippitt was not permitted to consult with his attorney under penalty of contempt of court, witnesses were not permitted to testify on Lippitt's behalf, and the Judge continually lost his temper. Therefore, the record does not include the Lippitt's reasons for refusing to send their children to either a public or a private chartered school. These reasons include: immoral teachers, bad textbooks, the teaching of Secular Humanism. In the chambers the judge also ordered the plaintiff to bring both criminal and civil actions against the Lippitts for the same charge, neglect of their children. The Lippitts lost the civil neglect case and were ordered to enroll their children in either a private or public chartered school.

On November 2, 1977, Tom was brought to trial on criminal neglect charges. Tom demanded a jury trial. By this action the case was taken out of Judge Gagliardo's hands. The evidence proving Alice and Amy Lippitt were receiving a "proper" and "necessary" education was so overwhelming that Judge Murray from Madison County ordered a directed verdict of not guilty and said:

There has been no showing that what was taught, the methods or subjects, was anything other than what was proper and necessary. The testing of the children would indicate that they are at grade level and are being taught in accordance with religious beliefs which their parents are in a position to determine.

On December 7, 1977 Judge Gagliardo stayed the proceedings against Martha Lippitt pending the outcome of the civil neglect appeal. The Lippitt case was then placed before a three-judge panel: Judges Stillman, Krenzler,

and Wasserman. The judges denied Tom and Martha's appeal. The Lippitts had listed twelve errors in the appeal; however, the judges addressed themselves to only six of the errors ... it was not until about two months later that the last six errors of the appeals were ruled on, and then not completely, just as on the first ruling. The judges' opinion was mailed to the Lippitts without being journalized and Judge Gagliardo immediately issued a warrant for Mrs. Lippitt's arrest. The law allows a ten-day period to present a Motion for Reconsideration.

On March 10, 1978 Martha Lippitt was physically dragged out of her own house and her children were taken ... to the Metzenbaum Home for Children and deprived of any visitation rights. Martha was taken to jail and released on a \$500 bond. The parents had to put up a \$1000 guarantee that they would send their children *permanently* to the Heritage Christian School (a non-chartered school) or another school with an "approved educational" program. A fine of \$100 a day will be levied against the parents for every day they do not send the children to the Christian School. The Lippitts appealed their case to the Ohio Supreme Court, but the Court has refused to hear it. Next step? The United States Supreme Court.

What Can We Learn?

I have left out some other horrifying details about the way in which this judge runs his court, which would not have been out of place in Nazi Germany. If this report sent to me is accurate, the judge is an incompetent bully and tyrant. There are such judges in many jurisdictions, often appointed in return for political favors and support. The point is that where such judges exist, *lawyers know about them*. They also know whether or not they can be avoided, and how.

Any unschoolers thinking seriously about a court battle with the local schools would do well to find out in what court or courts, and before what judge or judges, they might have to appear. This is the kind of thing lawyers know. GWS has said in earlier issues that about school law itself we may know, and can surely find out, as much as or more than the lawyers. But about judges and courts, a good local lawyer probably knows a great deal more than we could find out. Of course, we should ask some questions, to find out what s/he knows. And it might be a good idea, if it can be done, to make a few visits to the courtrooms of whatever judges we might have to deal with.

One other thing. During the midst of these proceedings, Mrs. Lippitt left town with the children and went into hiding for two months. Understandable enough, but probably not a good idea. I have no objection to people getting their children out of school by whatever tricks they can think up. But if we are going into court, we had probably better do things by the book.

This is by no means the only such mistake the Lippitts made. Indeed, their whole way of bringing this issue before the court can be seen as practically a textbook example of How Not To Do It. Early in the proceedings, Mr. Lippitt said loudly and publicly, perhaps in court, perhaps outside, perhaps both—it makes little difference which, since his remarks (as he surely intended) received wide publicity—that the public schools were “cesspools.” In saying this, he needlessly attacked the beliefs and prejudices of a judge who was probably conventional and certainly (as the record shows) highly inflammable. The moral might be, if you are going to have to deal with a judge with a bad temper, find out what things make him angry, and don’t say them if you can avoid it. Beyond that, in attacking such a well-established

and powerful institution as the public schools, Mr. Lippitt could only have been seen by the judge as inviting him to agree with him. Now there might, somewhere, be a judge or two who might secretly admit to a trusted friend that they thought the—public schools were “cesspools.” But no judge is going to be willing to make, or even risk appearing to make, such a statement from the bench. There is no use asking judges to agree that the public schools are bad places. They will not, and asking them to do so will only drive them into the position of having to defend the public schools, a position they might not otherwise have chosen to take.

To this mistake the Lippitts, or one of their supporters, added another. At some point in the proceedings she began to picket the courthouse, marching up and down angrily, loudly, and obscenely denouncing the judge. The judge, as might have been expected, overreacted, and (no doubt breaking the law in half a dozen different ways) had her dragged into his courtroom, handcuffed, and forced her to repeat what she had said outside. This bit of 1960s style courthouse drama may well have seriously prejudiced the Lippitts chances of winning their appeal to a higher court. The courts, rightly enough, think of themselves as not only settling disputes and trying cases, but beyond that, as upholding an entire system of law and justice. They are likely to react very strongly and negatively when they feel that the system as such, the very dignity of the courts and the judges, are being attacked, as they clearly were in this case.

Now there might be times when defendants in court, like the famous Chicago Seven, might choose to use courtroom drama as a way of making certain kinds of political statements to the general public. That is OK if you have already decided that you cannot possibly get a favorable ruling from that court, and therefore, that your purpose in court is not to get a favorable ruling but to do something else, whatever that might be. But if you want a court to rule in your favor, above all in a matter as radical as unschooling—far more radical than opposition to-the Vietnam War—it would be wiser to treat judges and courts with all possible deference and courtesy.

The summary of the Appeals Court ruling says, in part:

Among a number of assignments of error, Lippitt, citing *State v. Whisner* ... argued that had he been criminally charged ... the state would not have prevailed. In *Whisner* the court held that the

elementary minimum standards of the state board of education should never be so comprehensive in scope and effect as to abrogate a citizen's fundamental right of religious freedom. In the present case, however, the court of appeals found that the minimum standards concerned do not present the same constitutional problem in that the South Euclid—Lyndhurst Board of Education merely expects the Lippitts to provide their children with an adequate education taught by a properly qualified teacher. Mrs. Lippitt does not have an elementary teaching certificate, and without it her qualification to teach *was not demonstrated to the Juvenile Court*. (Ed. italics)

The court of appeals, therefore, held that the interest of the state in *insuring* (Ed. italics) that the teachers of its school-aged citizens are reasonably competent and knowledgeable must be protected and enhanced. The court further stated that a certification requirement does not in any way conflict with the Lippitts' stated beliefs, nor does it render instruction at home impossible since Mrs. Lippitt could perform tasks necessary to qualify herself for elementary school teaching. In the present case the Lippitts claimed religious reasons for failing to send their children to both a private and a public school, yet they failed to demonstrate how a public or private education would undermine their religious values. They did not establish that they belonged to an accepted religious group which offered a well-structured alternative to school education.

The court of appeals concluded, therefore, that the Lippitts' First Amendment rights had neither been impaired nor unduly burdened by the provisions of the compulsory education laws of Ohio. The judgment of the juvenile court was affirmed.

Without the full ruling of the appeals court, we cannot tell how fair or unfair that ruling may have been, nor what are the chances that it may be overruled in a higher court. Certainly the Lippitts were able to convince Judge Murray in criminal court that they were qualified to teach and were in fact doing as good a job as the schools. But this was not part of the record of the juvenile court trial, and it was this trial that was being appealed. I don't know whether the findings of Judge Murray were submitted as evidence to the appeals court, or whether they considered it, or if they did not, on what

grounds, or whether their failure to consider it may be regarded by a still higher court as possible grounds for reversal. What little I have seen makes me suspect that the appeals court had grounds enough for taking the Lippitts' side, if they wished to do so, but that, perhaps for the reasons I suggested, they did not wish to do so.

It also looks as if Mr. Lippitt and his attorneys relied too heavily on *Whisner*, and did not prepare enough of a case to show that what they were doing at home was at least as good as what the schools were doing. It is not enough, in short, for parents to say what they don't like about the schools; they have to make a strong case that what they are doing will be better or at least no worse.

I underlined the word "insuring" in the summary of the appeals court ruling to make this point, that it may someday be wise or even necessary for an unschooling family to show in court that the requirement that teachers have a certificate does not insure competence at all, and indeed, that there is no evidence whatever to show that people with such certificates are, by whatever measure, more competent than those without them. It could probably also be shown that much of what people have to learn or do in order to get such certificates has only to do with the problems of teaching children in large groups, and is wholly irrelevant to the task of teaching at home.

Beyond that, it might still further be shown that much of what people have to study, and presumably, to appear to agree with, in order to pass education courses and receive a certificate, would and does indeed offend and outrage the religious convictions of a great many people. I have in mind here much of behaviorist psychology, which holds that such ideas as freedom, dignity, choice, and will are illusions and that we are basically like rats, responding automatically to changes in our environment. Many state courts might be ready to rule, if asked, that no one should be required to believe, or pretend to believe, or even to study, such ideas, in order to have the right to teach, whether at school or at home.

And we could add still further that to say to parents who are deeply distressed by things being said or done to their children in school that all they have to do is spend three years of time and \$7500+ of money—assuming that there is a school of education near them and that they can get into it—in order to get the teaching certificate that will allow them to teach their own children, is hardly a reasonable remedy for what many people will feel are

sharp and immediate wrongs.

A Case Won

From The New York Times, Jan. 26, 1979:

An estimated 5,000 Christian fundamentalist schools that have sprung up in the past few years are claiming the right to keep the state completely out of their affairs ... They do not want to be told what textbooks to use, what educational policies to adopt or even that they must be licensed. Representatives of 20 non-accredited Christian schools in Kentucky fought a 1977 ruling by the State Board of Education that parents who used such schools were liable to prosecution and their children subject to being listed as “habitual truants.” They hired William B. Ball of Harrisburg, PA, a lawyer who is a frequent defender of religious freedom. At least for the moment, they have won. Despite powerful opposition from many political leaders, a Kentucky Circuit Court Judge, Henry Meigs, ruled on Oct. 3 that the state had no right to make its regulations mandatory. Judge Meigs said the board must refrain from limiting the schools’ choice of textbooks and from forcing teachers to be certified. The state has appealed.

I am trying to get a copy of Judge Meigs’ ruling, in which, I have been told, he made a point that as far as I know has not been made in any previous court ruling on compulsory education. He said that no one has been able to show that teachers with certificates are any better at teaching than those without them. This is of course true, and a very good point for unschoolers to make. But this is the first time that a judge has said it. Perhaps we now can get some other judges to say it.

If Judge Meigs’ ruling stands, it may be much easier for parents, certainly in Kentucky and probably in many other states, to get their children out of school by calling their own home a Christian school. There is no reason, after all, why the word “Christian” could not just as easily be applied to schools which preach and practice tolerance, brotherhood, kindness, generosity, and love, as to schools which preach and practice (as some at least do) intolerance, racism, cruelty, greed, and hate.

The Ruling

Franklin Circuit Court Civil Action No. 883 14 Division 1

Filed Oct. 4, 1978

Reverend C. C. Hinton, Jr. et al. (Plaintiffs) vs. Kentucky State Board of Education, et al. (Defendants)

It would not be difficult to find in the record of this case abundant support for a conclusion that the regulatory scheme fashioned by the State Board, and sought by it to be imposed upon these plaintiff schools under the dubious authority of “approval” (KRS 156.160) is far beyond Constitutional limits of legislative delegation.

(Plaintiffs’) incontrovertible proof shows—and the demeanor of the witnesses confirms irreconcilable philosophical differences between their educational concepts, notions of textbook and curriculum content and teacher qualification. These differences are not fanciful or arbitrary, but very real and substantial, having a foundation in firmly held religious belief. Expert testimony in this case certainly established that there is not the slightest connection between teacher certification and enhanced educational quality in State schools.

The State is unable to demonstrate that its regulatory scheme applied to the *public* schools has any reasonable relationship to the supposed objective of advancing educational quality. Plaintiffs, on the other hand, have shown that without benefit of the State’s ministrations their educational product is at least equal to if not somewhat better than that of the public schools, in pure secular competence.

The rights of the plaintiffs named herein should be declared in accordance with the reasons herein set forth, and upon the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law annexed hereto; action and threatened action of the State against these plaintiffs or any of them heretofore enjoined temporarily, is now hereby enjoined (i.e., forbidden—Ed.) permanently, all at defendants’ costs. Given under my hand this 4th day of October 1978.

Henry Meigs Judge, Franklin Circuit Court.

I hope in the near future to be able to obtain a copy of Judge Meigs' Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law. I hope also to learn more about the specific kind of expert testimony that established that there is no connection between teacher certification and other state regulations, and educational quality. Meanwhile, I should think that unschoolers, either in their home teaching proposals to schools or, if they are in a legal contest, in their briefs, could make good use of these words of Judge Meigs.

(Note: the Kentucky State Board of Education is appealing this ruling to the State Supreme Court, and has said that if it loses there it will appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. This will not, of course, be a test of compulsory schooling as such, but only of the right of the State to apply certain standards and requirements to private religious schools.)

Legal Procedures

At the risk of explaining the obvious, a word on legal procedure. If someone—a private citizen, a corporation, or a government agency or agent, is doing or trying to do something to you that you think is against the law and violates your legal rights, you can appeal to the courts for what is called “injunctive relief.” That is, you can ask the court to “enjoin”, i.e. forbid that private citizen, corporation, government agent, or whatever, from doing to you whatever they have been doing. Such a statement from the court, saying in effect, “Stop doing that,” is called an injunction.

In two or three places in the country the schools and their attorneys have tried a new, and under the circumstances perfectly sensible, legal trick. Fearing that if they charge the parents with truancy they, the State, will bear the burden of showing beyond reasonable doubt, as in the Sessions case, that the parents’ proposed teaching plan is not adequate or equivalent, they have instead charged the children with truancy, thus putting the matters into Juvenile Court, where the ordinary rules and safeguards of due process do not apply, and where as in the Lippitt case, the parents may not be allowed to present any evidence to show that their home teaching is in fact adequate.

My guess, which I will check out with those more experienced, is that if and when the schools do this, the best counter move by the parents would be to ask for injunctive relief, i.e. sue the schools in regular court for attempting to deny them the company and custody of their children without due process. My guess, again, is that many or most courts would enjoin the Juvenile Court from having anything further to do with the matter. The schools could then decide either to charge the parents with truancy in a regular court or to drop the matter and let them teach their children at home.

Ask Your Library

A public library recently subscribed to *GWS*, saying that they were doing so at the request of one of their (what's the word?) users/subscribers/members.

Quite often libraries will order books and/or publications on request. Readers might ask any libraries near them to subscribe to *GWS*. More people will learn about unschooling-and the money will help *GWS*. Thanks.

A Teacher Writes

L.M has written us from N.C., saying in part:

As a former school teacher, a part-time teacher of my own children, and as a present day violin teacher, I agree with you general ideas. Schoolers are inhumane, in their continual testing, ranking, and grading of children and their rigid rules, and especially in their perpetual, secret, damaging record keeping.

Reading always seemed easy to teach, a matter of a few months' instruction. My oldest daughter learned to print words and copy letters from her brother's old alphabet blocks. I told her sounds, got her to practice writing words a bit, maybe half an hour a day. In a few months she could read her brother's 6th grade books. I did not care about that. What I liked was the wide reading she did by choice at the age of 5, and the imaginative stories she wrote. Nobody told her to write or gave her gold stars. Whatever satisfaction there is about teaching for me is to see a child using reading, writing or violin playing for her own reasons.

The younger daughter also learned to read-supposedly impossible because her IQ was tested at 40 or so! She also learned from those old blocks.

About the peculiar Learning Disability theory that these children see letters upside down, etc. how can this be? The eye test chart for illiterates looks like this

W E M E

and the person tested points out the direction of the figures, thus:



How could such a test mean anything if 1/3 of the population sees letters every which way? This letter is running longer than intended. Please let me know if you find any of it of use. (Ed. note: Indeed we do!)

I write a great deal, keep a diary, etc. so much involves the youngest daughter, and I really do not want publicity for her. She is a pleasant young person, spends a lot of time reading, and is not like the people usually describe as retarded. . She is doing about 100 times as well as all the dismal

predictions which were made when she was 4 years old. I suppose she is the reason I become so unhappy about all this ranking and classifying of young children, even when it is done by doctors, as in her case. It is even worse when don by Schools, as you call them.

S-chools refers to a distinction I made, in *Instead Of Education*, between S-chools and s-chools. S-chools are places where people have to go, either because the law tells them to or because they believe (with some reason) that without the tickets they can only get from schools they can't get descent work. What I call s-chools, on the other hand, are places like cooking schools, ski schools, schools of dance or martial arts, craft schools, etc. which, since they are not compulsory, and since they don't give credits, diplomas, etc., people only go to because they want to.

From a later letter:

In the 1940s I taught in a Nebraska country school. We were required to teach the "Dick and Jane" reading texts. But actually I sued some old-fashioned primers which were at the back of the school book cupboard. I can no longer recall title, author, or publisher, but the books appealed to young children. Each page showed a picture illustrating a picture sound, such as a baby reaching for an apple and making the first sound of the word. Also, there were a few other short words containing the sound. I would show and at first read the words to the child, and soon he or she would grasp the two ideas that letters meant sounds and that words are written and sounded from left to right.

In two or three months, without any long drawn out amount of drill, the children were able to read whatever appealed to them. Little children do want to read, and they do not need 500 rules. As you say, 2 principles will suffice.

The old-fashioned school was not so bad. The children had more freedom than they do now. We had fun, did quite a lot of singing, and I used to read aloud to them quite a bit. Perhaps because these farm children were needed at home to do household and farm chores, they were usually responsible youngsters.

Regarding attention span of young children, on Sunday I had a good time watching little J who is 9 months old, cheerful and busy. He crawls about on hands and knees, stands up on chairs. He likes doors, opening and closing them. He pushed a bedroom door almost shut and pulled it open over and over very carefully so it would not latch. He knows if it did latch, the he could not get it open. He pays attention to his projects for ten minutes or longer. As you have observed, little children are good learners without any teacher at all.

Learning Exchanges

A friend wrote to say that many of the Learning Exchanges that started in the past few years have closed because of lack of money. I replied in part:

“One reason, maybe the main reason they got in trouble is that they almost instantly got too fancy. They missed Illich’s point about being passive networks, and began to think of themselves as active organizations that has to plan and promote something. When Illich spoke of a card file, he meant literally just that, not programs, meetings, newsletters.

Here’s a model—To the Learning Exchange in Anytown, Ms. Smith sends a letter and a return postcard. In the letter she says (for example), I want to learn something about repairing appliances that she is willing to share. The Exchange looks under Home Appliances Repair in its files, takes out Ms. Smith’s card (and any others), puts down Ms. Brown’s name and address, and mails them back to Ms. Smith and others who sent them in. They can then get in touch with Ms. Brown and work out some sort of plan. But that isn’t the Exchanges business. Its work is done with it sends back those cards.

If Ms. Smith is happy with what she can learn from Ms Brown, fine. If not, and she wants to look for more information, she sends a new letter and card and repeats the process. If she also wants to find out about something else, say Chinese Cooking, she send in another letter and card for that. Ms. Brown’s card stays in the “Have Information” half of the file. Once every year or two-maybe, if it feels like it-the Exchange prints up, *cheaply*, a list of the people in its “Have Information” file, and maybe gives it away, maybe sells it for \$1 or so, more if it is fairly large.

How do people hear of it? Perhaps a few announcements on bulletin boards. People tell other people. A slow process? No doubt. But what’s the big hurry? Being in a big hurry is why all those Learning Exchanges have had to fold up.

Hard to see anything here that would cost \$10,000+ a year, need government grants, etc. No office, no rent, no phone, nothing but-literally-two card files and a mailing address, which might best be a post office box number. If people write in asking how to use the learning exchange, a form postcard could tell them that.”

Volunteers Needed

We need three kinds of volunteer help.

1) People who live in or near Boston who, either during week days or on weekends could do some work in the office. Some of this work might involve typing, some not.

2) People who live in or near Boston who could do typing work for us at home.

3) People in other parts of the country who would be willing to help us by writing, or better yet telephoning, some of the 8000 or so people who wrote to us after the Donahue show, or perhaps people whose subscriptions have expired and who have not yet renewed them. People tend to be busy, forgetful, and need to be reminded now and then to do what they really meant to do. We can do some of this reminding from the office, but no means all.

We are probably going to depend to some extent on such volunteer help for a long time to come. For anything you may be able to do we are grateful.

New Books On Our List

We have added three new books to the list that we sell here.

The first is my own newest book, *Never Too Late* (\$9 + 0.30 post). This is the story of how, in spite of non-musical back-ground, I became interested in music, and eventually decided to learn first flute and later cello, and the trials and problems, dangers, discoveries and joys about that experience. It is a book about music, about finding what one wants most, about struggling and coping with fear, about learning, about teaching, and probably about some other things as well. It was fun to write, and I think will be fun to read.

The second is *Gnomes* (\$13.50+0.60 post.). This is a charming, funny, beautifully written and illustrated “scientific study” of gnomes, for children of any age, not just for children. A wonderful book to read aloud. For fuller description, see GWS #3.

The third is a new book by Herbert Kohl, *Growing With Your Children* (\$8 + 0.30 post). The jackets describe it well:

This book is a book on child-raising unlike any other, a book that speaks in direct practical terms of the parents we wish we were and the parents we hope to become. It confronts the basic questions that underlie the daily issues of bedtimes and manners, schoolwork and messy rooms, broken toys and “talking back” questions that parents, in one way or another, find themselves asking over and over again: How can I help my child be strong in a world that saps strength? How can I pass on values to my children when no one seems to agree on what’s right or wrong?

What is important and different about this book is that it is not simply a book of tricks or techniques, unlike too many others one might name. There are tricks and techniques in it, many of them, things to say, things to do. But these tricks are useful and practical because they arise out of the ways in which Kohl thinks and feels about his children, and himself, and the world around them. He is not just a clever trickster, but a humane and intelligent person and parent who thinks about the meanings of things. I know of no book to compare with it. Unlike the trick books, it could make a real difference in the way we see and live with children.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Growing Without Schooling 9

May 1979

Since *GWS #8* went to press, many things have happened. Letters keep coming in from the Donahue show, probably by now about 9,000, though we've stopped keeping a daily count.

Newsweek had a full page story about unschooling in their 4/16/79 issue. The monthly magazine *Mother Jones* had a feature article in their /79 issue. The *Special Education Supplement* to *The New York Times* of 4/22 had a full page story about the Sessions family. By the time you read this, many of you will have seen the Hay 3 CBS-TV show "Magazine," on unschooling. The ABC TV show "20-20" is doing a program on unschooling, and (as I write) will be taping us here in the office fairly soon. I don't know when that will be aired.

In addition, I was on two TV talk shows here in Boston, one with Peter Perchemlides. I have one scheduled for Washington D.C. (WDVM—Ch. 9, 10-11 AH, May 15). Have also done a number of phone interviews with radio stations. Since the *Newsweek* article came out I don't think there's been a day when some TV or radio station, newspaper, or magazine hasn't called to ask questions.

For this issue we have about 1700 subscribers, almost three times what we had in November (but a long way short of the 7,000 or so we will probably need to be completely self-supporting). And just look at the Directory! (By the way, if you change your address, and are in the Directory, please remind us of that, so we'll change it in both places.)

Ivan Illich writes that in Germany, for the first time (as far as anyone knows) a family has unschooled their children. He sent me a news clip about it (in German, of course—can anyone translate it?). Still more news in later stories.

Coming Lectures

I will be speaking at the Alternative Schools Workshop and Conference of the School of Education, Indiana Univ., Bloomington IA 47401, from 3-6 PM, Sat. June 23, and also at another smaller meeting, probably earlier the same day. If any readers are near there, it might be a nice time for us to meet. Director of the conference is Thomas B. Gregory, Assoc. Prof. at the School of Ed. (Tel. 812-337-3015 or 2157). Perhaps I'll see some of you there.

I will also be speaking on Monday Sept. 24 at Western Maryland College in Westminster MD. More details on that in a later *GWS*. Theo Geisy has spoken of trying to arrange a meeting for me in the Northern Va.—D.C. area sometime in mid or late May. No definite plan yet, but those interested might get in touch with her (see Dir.).

Good News

In the last month four unschooling families have won favorable court rulings, two in Va., one in Mass., one in Iowa and I have heard a report, not yet confirmed, about still another favorable ruling in Va.

In Norfolk, VA, the Giesy family, who had been teaching their children at home (and other places) for some time while trying to get the approval of the local schools, finally registered their own home as a school. The local Superintendent responded by taking them to court. The judge, in a 25 minute statement, ruled in favor of the Giesy's. The Giesy's received much local publicity, on the whole favorable. Theo Giesy is sending me a copy of the judge's ruling; I hope to print some of it in the next *GWS*.

In King George, VA, the O'Toole family (whom I had just met at a conference in MD), not liking what was happening to one of their children in school, had taken the child out. The schools took them to juvenile court (hence Mr. O'Toole's Letter to the Editor, printed elsewhere in this issue), which ruled in favor of the family. (Note—both families in Directory)

In Somerset, Mass., Frank and Maureen Turano (he a police officer, she a former teacher) took their children out of school. Though Mrs. Turano, having been a teacher, was obviously competent by state standards to teach her children, the schools took them to court. Mr. Turano researched the law very thoroughly, reading state and federal rulings on this matter going all the way back to 1900. Like Joseph Palmer in Minn., he defended himself in court, and so strongly and ably—making at least one Constitutional point that I have not heard before, and about which we will write more—that the juvenile court judge ruled in his favor.

The Omaha World Herald of March 20, 1979, reported:

Bedford, Iowa—A Lenox, Iowa, couple (Robert and Ruth Cochran) can teach their two children in their home, a Taylor County Magistrate state Court jury decided Monday....Richard Jones, Taylor County attorney representing the State of Iowa in the case, said no appeal is planned.

For two years, the Cochran's children—Lillian, 14, and Clifford, 16—have been enrolled in a home teaching program of the Christian Liberty Education System of Prospect Heights, Ill.

The Rev. Paul Lindstrom of the Church of Christian Liberty, an

independent, non-denominational church that sponsors the correspondence-class program, said he believed the state was violating the couple's right to religious freedom and separation of church and state, guaranteed under the First and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution.

The Christian Liberty Academy provided the Cochrans with legal counsel for the trial, (Rev. Lindstrom) said.

Two Mass. families, one of them writing me for the first time, have told me about agreements which they have reached with their local schools, allowing them to teach their children at home. In the case of one of these families, the schools have agreed to allow the child to go to school part-time, to take part in special activities that she likes, including athletics. This is the first such arrangement I have heard of. I hope to be able to publish more, perhaps full details, in the next *GWS*.

Reminder

The things that schools and school people say, write, and do (or try to do) to unschoolers often make me so angry that I have to remind myself of a wise old French saying:

Cet animal

est tres mechant;

Quand on l'attaque,

il se defend!

Which means (for those who may not know French)

This animal

is very vicious;

When you attack him,

he defends himself!

School people feel that they are under attack by unschoolers, and indeed they are. No doubt they greatly overestimate the danger. But the attack is real. The schools have great power over the lives of many people, and most unschoolers would be glad to cut down or take away that power if we could. We mustn't be too surprised if they fight back in whatever ways they can.

A Discovery

I can't resist the temptation to share some of E's (aged 3) discoveries. She had shown some interest in letters and words about four months ago. She asked me to write the names of some friends, so that she could see the letters. We also wrote the names of objects on masking tape and taped them up around the house, like labels. This game was exciting for her for a short time, but then she lost interest. She said little about words for several months, except for an occasional reading of an alphabet book she had received for Christmas.

About six weeks ago, while we were driving by a Texaco station, she looked up at the big sign and hollered, "Hey! There's an E and an A, just like in my name!" Just how the wheels had been turning inside her head over the months mystifies me. But when she was ready her discovery of letters manifested itself in a really thrilling moment.

Now she spends time almost daily practicing E's and A's, and looks over any printed material she can find for any of the letters she knows. Sometimes she asks me to write things for her. This experience reinforces for me my belief that to put all children of an age together to learn the same thing at the same time in the same way is not only a criminal waste of time and an open door to frustration, but it simply doesn't work.

Child Artist

A father writes:

We have one of the happy stories about unschooling. Before M was born we had decided not to send her to school. We moved to the country thinking it would be easier there. Now I realize it might sometimes be more difficult.

We were lucky. The teacher and school board of our local school, where I am janitor, have been tolerant and helpful. The teacher is one of the good ones. M goes once a week on a day of her choosing. Any more than once a week, she thinks, would be awful. One defense that we have thought might help if we are given any trouble about not going to school is that she is bilingual and does learning in her other language at home (There are laws protecting bilingualism in CA schools). M's mother is Japanese.

M began to draw when she was 6 months old. Everything she did was treated as important art. By the time she was one year old she could draw better than anyone around her. Knowing that she could do something better than anyone, even better than the ever -competent giants around her, emboldened her strokes. In other areas it gave her the confidence to try something difficult, then to continue until she could do it well.

At one year of age she was given an easel and some tempera paints. On her second birthday she got non-toxic acrylics, the medium she has preferred since. She enjoyed painting so much that she began calling herself an artist.

We became curious about other children artists so we checked out the children's art scene in San Francisco where we were then living. We made the surprising discovery that M is a child artist who does not paint children's art. Her work would look absurdly out of place in a show of children's art. Especially so since she began using acrylics because it is always assumed that children's art should be done with water colors. For obvious reasons acrylics are easier to use than poster paints or tempera but they cost more. I know people who make 5 or 6 times my subsistence wage who tell me they can't afford acrylics for their children. What this really means is that they think children can't do anything worth that much.

Probing deeper in this direction via an understanding of adultism might begin to explain what I mean when I say that much of what is known as children's art is an adult invention.

In all the contacts we have had with the children's art establishments in San Francisco and Tokyo we have had nothing but unpleasant experiences. They are amazed but they are even more skeptical. I think they are hoping she'll turn out to be the 40-year-old midget in one of your books. (Ed.—this refers to an episode in *Escape From Childhood*) Finally we know they are the enemy. We avoid them, scorn their nonsense books on children's art ("Children will generally not be ready to paint before they are 5 years old"), frown back at the saved missionary smiles they are in the habit of turning on their flock. When they used to say M's work was very good for her age I asked them if they would say Picasso's erotic drawings, done in his latter years, were good for his age.

It is recognized that children have their original imagination destroyed in the socializing process and that as adult artists they must struggle to regain it if they are to create an original vision. There must be some way for people to grow up without losing this although it rarely happens. The most obvious thing to do is to stay out of school and maybe to prevent their exposure to phony children's art. One indication of what might have happened to M if she had been forced to go to school full time is that when she draws at school her drawings are stiff and uninteresting. They are like children's drawings are supposed to be, cute and easy to patronize. She also prints her signature on them like the other children do. She has always signed her name in cursive and has used nothing but cursive at home since she learned it when she was 4 years old. She's 7 now.

M's conversations about what was going on in the paintings while she was doing them were so interesting that I decided when she was 4 years old to get some of her old paintings out to talk about them with her. She enjoyed seeing her treasures again. About the same thing she said originally was repeated but more concisely. She called them poems. During her fifth year she began writing her poems and stories by herself. One of her 4 year old poems about a painting described what she imagined she did when she was wandering around the world with us five years before she was born: "When I was in Mama's stomach it was very dark so sometimes I wanted to get out. From a secret door I was looking out of Mama's stomach through her navel. Everywhere Mama went I was watching from my secret door. Each time I looked out she came to a new town. I saw the whole world. That's the place I was born.

With his letter the father sent me some reproductions of M's early work, five paintings done between the ages of 26 and 38 months. They were printed in Japan, perhaps by some museum, in connection with a show on children's art. I am guessing, but they look like the postcards of paintings that one can buy in museums. The paintings themselves are stunning. Three of them would stop you dead in your tracks if you saw them in an exhibition of "adult" art. The colors, the shapes, the drawing, the design, the underlying idea of the paintings, are extraordinary. I wish GWS was rich enough to reproduce them.

I am ready to believe that M is an exceptionally talented child. But that is what I felt when I first heard 4-6 year old children, students of Suzuki in Japan, playing difficult music of Bach, Vivaldi, etc. in perfect time and tune. Perhaps other children might do work of equal beauty and power if their talents were taken seriously and given scope.

Scientists

From latest issue of Outlook (see GWS #1 -new address, Mountain View Publishing Co., 2929 6th St., Boulder CO 80302, \$8. 50/yr.)

A three-year-old has moved into a new house and has played in the sunshine on the new roof. He goes downstairs to supper and when he comes back steps into a changed and darkened world. With a wondering glance he says, "The big shadow is all around." Another three-year-old sees a thin cloud float across the moon. She watches intently, then says to herself, "Like ice, like ice."

Requiem

About eight years ago a mother wrote me some very interesting letters about her daughter (then about 17). She told me about a chant that the girl, when two years and nine months old, had made up one day while swinging on the swing, and seeing something disappear with a crunch into the mouth of her cat. (If either mother or daughter read this, I hope they will write.) The chant went like this:

Oh, we went downtown ..

Downtown my mother

and Mary Jean went.

We saw some pretty turtles,

some pretty little turtles.

Yes, we did. O yes we did!

Pretty, pretty little turtles..

They wiggled and wiggled,

They wiggled their heads,

They wiggled their legs,

And their tails they wiggled,

Wiggled ... O!

My mother buyed me

Two little turtles

Two little turtles *and*

One little turtle made

The *other* little turtle
Not lonesome ... O!
He was s'posed to make him
Not lonesome ... O!
Did he make him not lonesome?
NO! He climb out, out ...
He fall on the ground ... O!
Oh, oh, oh, OH!
He climb out
Over and over AGAIN!
I just can hardly believe it!

I look
And I look
On the ground I find that little turtle, O!
I can hardly believe it!

But he wiggle and he climb!
He fall out on the table, O!
That ignorant little turtle!
He fallout on the floor, O!
The poor little,

The ignorant little turtle, O!

And the Poco-cat

Ate him all UP!

Bad, bad Poco!

That turtle scratch him,

He scratch him, that Poco,

In the *stomach*!

I think!

I think he scratch poco

In the stomach!

My *mother* will buy me

Another little turtle. Maybe.

For the GOOD little turtle

to play with.

Poor, ignorant little turtle!

Oh, Oh, Ohhhhh....

(Turned out later the cat hadn't eaten the turtle, who was found under the child's bed.)

Smokescreen

The mother who wrote, “Time Of Our Own” (GWS #5) wrote later that (as so often happens) neighbors reported to school authorities that her children were not in school. I asked how that had all worked out. She replied:

“No excitement, which is good news. After being turned in last winter (we got out of that one because the oldest wasn’t yet at the compulsory age in this state) we decided to do a little smokescreening, so enrolled them at a private school, and they started school in September like everyone else, as visibly and audibly as we could manage -new clothes, lunchboxes, much talking about it with neighbors, etc. Then we quietly pulled them out. We don’t do anything foolish, like let them wander all over the neighborhood or go to town in the middle of the day, and so far, so good.

I think the private school tactic was good, not only for the obvious reason, but because it offers us a broader margin of safety with the neighbors’ suspicions. Holidays, “early dismissals,” even “special programs” are all unknown to the neighborhood—much more is “legitimate” before it becomes reason for suspicion—like being seen not in school at an odd time.

The other day I heard this little tidbit on the radio, one of those “human interest” news spots;

A mother had parked her car on a steep hill, leaving a baby and a 5-year-old inside while she ran a quick errand. Suddenly she saw the car rolling down the hill. An 11-year-old boy, playing nearby, also saw the car, dashed across the street, ran alongside and reached through the window. He managed to turn the wheel enough to get the car off the street, where it rolled a little way and then stopped, occupants unhurt. Had it continued to roll down the street it would have almost certainly have struck another car or crashed into a building at the foot of the hill.

In talking to police officers later the boy’s mother explained that her son had been home that day because he had been *suspended from school*, and she hoped the incident would enable *him to start feeling better about himself again*.

And I wonder—how can we as a society allow such hurt and damage to be done to a child that it takes such an exhibit of incredibly quick thinking and selfless courage to even begin to think about repairing the hurt? D, now 6,

stood at the edge of the garden the other day, cheeks pink and eyes round, her yellow hair jeweled with mist, and asked, in a voice to match that delicate fragileness, “Mommy, do birds have birthdays?” With what fragile and tentative fingers of curiosity do children make friends with the world! And with what clumsy thoughtless responses do we punish and inhibit such adventuring imaginations, pushing them back inside the straight-walled edges of our adult perceptions. I try to imagine what response her question would have met in a first-grade classroom, and I can only shudder.”

Einstein's Questions

Someone (I once read somewhere) asked Einstein how he had got started on the train of thought that led to the Theory of Relativity. He said that it had begun with two questions that he had asked himself, and couldn't stop wondering about. One was, "What does it really mean to say that two things happen at the same time?" The other was, "If I were riding through space on the front of a beam of light, what would I see, how would things look?"

Most people, I would guess, would call the first question obvious and the second one silly. It would be a rare science class indeed in which either question would be taken seriously, or Einstein encouraged in his efforts to answer them. And indeed, his teachers (I have been told) generally reported him as being dull and a dreamer.

“Testing” Adults

In his very good new book, *Growing With Your Children* (see GWS #8), Herb Kohl—like just about everyone who writes about children—says that they have to keep testing adults in order to find limits. I don’t agree. They do it all the time, no question about that. But I don’t think they have to do it, and I don’t think we ought to let them do it. There are other and better ways to find out the rules of family life and human society.

One year, when I was teaching fifth grade, I had a boy in my class who had been kicked out of his local public schools—no small feat. He was a perfectly ordinary looking, middle-sized, middle-class white kid, didn’t pull knives or throw furniture, no Blackboard Jungle stuff. It took me a while to understand why the public schools had shown him the door. In a word, he was an agitator, always stirring things up. One day, when everyone was trying to do something, I forget what, and he was trying to prevent them, or get them to do something else, I turned on him and shouted in exasperation, “Are you *trying* to make me sore at you?” To my great surprise, and his (judging from his voice), he said, “Yes.” It took me a while to understand, or at least to guess, that he had learned from experience that the only way he could be sure of getting the undivided attention of other people, children or adults, was to make them sore at him.

As the year went on, he improved, became only difficult instead of impossible. But he was still a long way from being at peace with himself -the roots of his problem were deeper than I or my class could reach in a year. Our school only went through sixth grade; what became of him later I don’t know. Meanwhile, he had taught me something valuable.

At about that time I was beginning to know the interesting but angry and difficult child of a friend. One day I was at their house, talking with his mother about something important to both of us. The boy kept interrupting, more even than usual. I knew by then that children hate to be shut out of adult talk, and tried from time to time to let this boy have a chance to speak. But on this day it was clear that he was trying to keep us from talking at all. Finally, looking right at him, I said, not angrily but just curiously, “Are you trying to annoy me?” Startled into honesty, like the other boy, by a question he had perhaps never really asked himself, he smiled sheepishly and said, “Yes.” I

said, still pleasantly, “Well, that’s OK. Tell you what let’s do. Let’s play a game. You do everything you can think of to annoy me, and I’ll do everything I can think of to annoy you, and we’ll see who wins. OK?” He looked at me for a while—he knew me well enough by this time to know that I would play this “game” in earnest. He considered for a while how it might go. A look at his mother showed that, for the time being at least, he could not expect much help from her if the game went against him. Finally he said, “No, I don’t want to play.” “Fine,” I said. “Then let us have our conversation, and you and I can talk later.” Which is what happened.

That was many years ago. From many encounters I have since had with many children, I have come to believe very strongly that children as young as five and perhaps even three are well able to understand the idea of “testing”—doing something to someone else or in front of someone else, *just to see what that other person will do*—and to understand that this is not good. If I thought a child was doing this to me, I would say, “Are you testing me, just doing that to see what I will do?” If the child said yes I would say, “Well, I don’t like that, it’s not nice and I don’t want you to do it. I don’t do things to *you* especially things I know you don’t like, just to see what you will do. Then it’s not fair for you to do that to me.” Children like big words; I would introduce them to the word “experiment.” If they tested me, I would say, “You’re doing an experiment on me.” If they said, “What’s experiment?” I would say, “If I pulled your hair to see how hard I could pull it before you began to cry, that would be an experiment.” I might go on to say that it’s OK to do experiments with *things*, trying to stand blocks on top of each other, or mixing paints to see what color you get, and so on. But it isn’t nice, it’s very bad, to do experiments on people, unless you ask them first and they say it’s all right. It’s especially bad to do experiments on them that you *know* they don’t like.

Where the line is between good experiments and bad—not an easy one for adult scientists to find, even those who look for it—is something that slightly older children might find very interesting to talk about. We would probably agree that hurting animals just to see what will happen—which some people do is bad. What about trying out medicines on animals to see which ones work, or work best, or maybe hurt the animals in other ways? What about making animals sick so that we can tryout medicines on them and see whether any of them make them better? These questions are worth talking

about.

Finally, I would say to children, “Do what seems interesting, or exciting, or fun whatever you want to do. If I think some of those things are unkind, or destructive, or dangerous, I’ll tell you, and ask you not to do them. But don’t do things just to see what I’ll say.

As I said, I think children are perfectly able to understand these ideas, to see that they are fair, and to act upon them. When they do, it will make our lives together much easier.

On An Island

Gail Myles, 341 Locke Rd., Rye NH 03870, writes:

In August, 1977, I moved with my three sons to an island we own off the coast of Maine. This decision was the result of my husband's and my opinion that they were not learning in public or private schools. Because we were taking them out of N.H. we had no hassle from the school district. I have worked as a volunteer for several years in the Rye schools and informed the teachers and principals of the plans. Many teachers agreed this was a good idea.

We sent to the Calvert School for their courses and had to have the boys take a placement test. Here was our second confirmation of their not learning in the schools they'd been attending. Bud (13) was to be in 8th grade and was placed by Calvert in 7th only because I promised I could bring him up to level; Mike (11), a straight A student was placed in 4th, when he should have gone to 6th; and Tim (8), who was the only son who I knew had a love for learning still within him, was placed at grade level—third.

The boys were greatly disturbed at the prospect of this adventure. I found the Count of Monte Cristo's earlier experiences in prison very applicable to their "trauma." They were to live four seasons through experiences only alluded to by Outward Bound programs and alone with only unmechanical mom. Dad would visit when possible, perhaps once a month for a couple of days.

That was the situation and we stayed till April 1978. But it would take the equivalent of a novel to tell you of the benefits of the total experience and the tremendous heartbreaks upon our readjustment to the "hard knocks" of "real" life.

What you have been saying in the books and GWS is true but there is so much more. We now have three boys, 15, 13, & 10, who know there is a better way. Learning can be exciting, in fact one of the most exciting things we ever do. It only takes an interest in a matter and someone who will answer or learn with us the answer. It takes two to ten hours a week to do the busy work for certification. Learning goes on every minute of our lives.

I never expected the boys to express any appreciation for this experience. I figured they might be sitting at a lunch with some business friends when they

were thirty and mention the year. What I couldn't have predicted is that they would see the difference so soon. They learned to dig clams with the clammers of Maine, the salt of the earth, in forty degrees below chill factors, they lived through situations where everyone takes responsibility for the lives of each other, they came to like and understand opera because it was available to us through Texaco broadcasts, an interest none of us had prior to this, they learned that out of the eight unexpected puppies born five had to be destroyed because of the food shortage, and probably the best thing they learned was to get along with themselves and each other. They had to, because there was no one else and if you want something from someone you have to give in return. That should take care of this "social life" garbage. To feel your worth in an adult world side by side with hard working people, is there a better reward? I don't think so. They even had tears at departing from this small coastal community they knew as "in town."

My rewards were beyond measure. No yellow monster took my favorite friends away every morning; when they were exposed to a new vocabulary word I could use it pertinently in everyday happenings, if we wanted to know molecular theory we could work from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. till it clicked, everything they were exposed to in Calvert Curriculum was learned by all, they spent early evenings putting on operas they made up, shows for Dad's pleasure were presented, sometimes taking three days just to prepare the staging. We read books, books, and books till 1 a.m. and no one had to be up at 6:30 for the monster.

An additional reward was the result of the history, literature, mythology, and architecture we were exposed to; we went to Athens, Greece, in April, a trip we would never have been interested enough in taking or felt a need to take if "doors" hadn't been opened to us. Bud came to love the Parthenon and had to see it. Tim was a walking encyclopedia on mythology and gave Jack and me the tour in the Archaeological Museum, and Mike was our history guide -we didn't even need a Greek service. Mike is also a gifted writer, and after reading his final composition for Calvert the teacher said she wished she could fly up to meet him, said he knew what writing was all about—she wanted to fly to Troy and Greece as his subject was the Trojan War. He had made her *feel* something inside.

I enjoyed the Calvert system. Their writers are excellent and really speak to the kids. It was a personal relationship in which they looked forward to

hearing from someone who was writing to them. Letters were scarce and they learned the value of the written word. But I must say we used the curriculum to our needs and interests and only took the grading so that the boys would not be denied the credit upon returning to public school. This was completely their choice they are encouraged to set policies regarding their futures.

Not knowing the courses well, I went to the island without a large set of reference books and I neglected to bring Shakespeare with us. In one of Mike's history chapters there was a reference to "the noblest Roman of them all." In order to get the point of the title the student was to read the particular scene of *Julius Caesar*. Mike was furious that he couldn't get his hands on that play and I am sure he would have read a great deal of it if I had had it available. Now when we returned to Rye Tim was still finishing up his course and had touches of history offered to him. In each case he would jump to Mike's book, nice paperback, and read more on that event. When he read this particular chapter we had the play available and he and I read it with great interest. That's when you present Shakespeare to a 9 year old!

Bud went on in June to graduate with his 8th grade but not without hassle, hassle, hassle from the local bureaucrats. Mike was practically a peptic ulcer victim from the intimidations he suffered and Tim stayed home until this fall when he elected to return. In Oct. he was going to quit, and only the concern and interest shown him by his exceptional teacher helped him decide to stay in. He is now thinking of staying out next year. He wants to see who will be his teacher and Jack and I are confident he will make the best decision.

We plan in the next year or two, upon the completion of our sailboat we are building, to live abroad and travel with the boys. Their education will be so superior that we have no doubt they will be able to be whatever they choose. If they see people suffering and decide to become a doctor then they will at least know why they are studying medicine.

One closing note—the idea I hate most about public schools is that they should have my children all day when I feed, clothe, doctor, transport, and care most for them, and I am denied those hours with them and the sharing of their learning experiences. I can not reinforce their education if I am denied the subject matter they are exposed to and am only left with tired grumps who eat, do homework, and flop to bed.

Reading Game

A friend (*GWS #3*, “Capable Children”) writes about a good reading game that she plays with her children. She writes a number of sentences, and the children circle those that are true and scratch out those that are not. One day they were going to the grandparents’ house for lunch. There was one of those common arguments about which child sits in what seat, which produced this list of sentences (instead of circling or scratching them out, as the children did, I will just mark T or F):

F does not want to read books in the back seat. T

F wants to read books in the front seat. T

We are going to Grandma’s house. T

We are going to eat lunch there. T

We are in a green car. T

We are in a yellow car. F

We are in a green airplane. F

We are in a purple rocket. F

We love Grandma. T

Grandma loves us. T

We love liver. F (Ed—this one scratched out many times. Is there a child in the world who likes liver? Maybe, with enough bacon.)
and so on.

One of the many things I like about this game is that it gives children, and parents too, a way to get outside of, to see from a different perspective, what may at the time have been unpleasant events. In this case, what had been a quite fierce quarrel about who sat where was turned, so to speak, into History, something which the children could use. Of course, we have to steer clear of sentences which might just start the quarrel all over again.

We might add a little extra spice to this game by making some surprise sentences, in which we don’t know until the last word whether the sentence is true or false. Thus: “Grandma’s house is covered with spots,” or “Our house is full of elephants,” or “We are riding in a green boat,” etc. And it might be fun to have the children contribute words to the sentences as we make them

up.

Money

A mother writes:

Thought I'd share with you M's "coming of age" as a consumer. M recently turned three. She received a dollar inside a birthday card sent by one of her friends (a 92 year old). Last year when he sent a dollar I took it without even showing it to her and bought her some balloons with it. This year she opened all her own mail and instantly recognized that it was money and that it was a present for her. She was quite pleased and put it in her wallet which until now was only for *playing* "grownup," and had held only small change. She discussed the dollar, and that she could buy something—whatever she wanted—for herself.

Next day when she got a five dollar bill in another card we made a fuss again. We discussed the difference in value—on our fingers—of ones and fives, and I thought, "This is going great!"

Next day, when she got a card with a check for *ten* dollars, I thought, "Oh, no; this learning experience is getting out of hand." I hoped she wouldn't realize what a check was so I could spirit it away, but she was too sharp. "More money!" she exclaimed. So we explained what a check was, and traded it for two fives. M had previously studied the one and the five and pointed out that there were different men on them and asked their names (she's very into everything having a "name.") So she understood they were different, but we didn't want to introduce a third variable in the form of a ten dollar bill because of the already confusing time we are presently in with counting: she has trouble remembering where to put 3 and is not very consistent with the order of anything over 5. So we felt we were helpful in keeping things more simple, but I wondered later if perhaps it was really just a symptom of a passion to be in some kind of control.

Then M asked me what she could buy with all her "moneys." I suggested she look in the toy catalogues. She got very excited over a construction set (tinker toy), and I told her she could look for one like it next time we went to town. So next time Daddy went to town M grabbed her purse and went along to shop for her present to herself. When she found her "struction set" and went to the counter to pay for it—her first purchase—Daddy told her to give the woman a Lincoln, expecting her to get back two Washingtons. Drats!—

she gave her a Jefferson! M took it right in stride. Perhaps we should have left it alone, but at home Daddy traded it for 2 Washingtons. Controlling it again.

After she played with the tinkertoy set for a couple of days, she expressed disappointment that she couldn't build a house with it. She checked the catalogues and zeroed in on a Lincoln logs set. The next shopping expedition to town turned one up—for a Lincoln and three Washingtons. We pointed out that she'd spent a lot of money and didn't have that much left. I sense that she has a very balanced feel for money, a good sense of its value, so I'm not worried that she'll either hoard the rest or blow it recklessly.

With all this concern with cash, M didn't lose track of the fact that the money was sent as presents from people who love her. We took pictures of M posed with her presents and a big smile to send along with the thank you notes.

I wonder who found this whole experience more thrilling and instructive, M or us? Liberating, too. M took another step in independence, and we learned—I hope—to give up a little of our desire to control what she experiences. Just flowing with things and being there to answer questions and sort out the confusion if and when it arises—just being a lot less *anxious* about what's going to happen.

Life becomes a lot less tense and more joyful if we can give up our script for how we'd like things to be. How much better and happier and more healthful to not be attached to things being a certain way.

But giving up our script is not just a way to health and happiness. It's also a way to knowledge. We can learn only what we are allowed, or allow ourselves, to be exposed to. M showed us that she was capable of assimilating more than we would have guessed and would have deliberately exposed her to at this time, that the more room we leave for spontaneity the more room we've left for growth. We also need some structure in our lives, but that structure should be as unlimited, as unconfining, as possible—a scaffolding into an uncircumscribed space.

GWS Local Chapters

Nancy Plent (see Dir.) writes:

One mother suggested that we might advertise in local papers that the Monmouth County Chapter of Growing Without Schooling was meeting monthly. I promised I'd check with you on using the name GWS in this way. We don't want to make it a club, cult, movement, or real organization of any kind, but thought the use of the name would attract people who had heard of GWS, and acquaint others with it."

I said, and say here, that think it's a fine idea. If any groups of people anywhere else want to try it, by all means go right ahead. Anyone who wants to start a "chapter" of GWS is welcome to do it.

As a matter of fact, if people want to establish some sort of "membership" in the local chapter, charging whatever seems like reasonable dues, that's fine too. They could use the money for various kinds of local promotion or advertising, for holding meetings, for getting extra copies of GWS to distribute, or whatever. Just make sure that people understand that this is the local chapter dues, not some kind of national dues.

I can even see a local chapter charging \$5 a year dues, or even \$10, and saying that all members of the chapter would receive GWS. Thus they could use part of the local dues for a group subscription, and have some left over for local expenses.

A word of warning, though. Don't let the local chapter get so busy that it burns out the handful of people who do most of the work. This was a problem we had when I worked with the World Federalists. We tried to find people to organize and run local chapters, but then gave them so many things to do that after a year or two these active people were all worn out. In most membership organizations it works out all too soon that the members exist to serve the organization. I don't want that to happen with us."

Later, Nancy writes:

"A comment on "What To Tell Strangers." My neighbor took her son out of school a couple of months ago. She saw that nothing terrible had happened to me, the principal didn't give her a hard time, and she had none of my phobias about not talking too much lest we rock the boat. Once she had decided she was doing the right thing, she told EVERYBODY who would

listen. I began thinking of tactful ways to shut her up, when she started reporting that this neighbor or that friend had stopped being shocked. They were starting to ask thoughtful, almost approving questions.

Impressed, I tried answering the next few strangers with “He learns at home,” or “We have our own school at home.” Sometimes people froze up and stopped the conversation. More often, they asked about the legality, recalled their own unhappy school days, and mentioned the Donahue show. I’m convinced. The more people who know, the sooner the surprise wears off and acceptance begins.”

As readers know, I have up till now been a low profile man. But perhaps the time has come, at least in many places, to take a more vigorous, outspoken, and confident position. We seem to be at the beginning and perhaps even in the middle of one of those big changes in public attitude that happen from time to time. For a great many reasons, most (but not all) of them their own fault, the public schools seem to have lost most of the great amount of public admiration and trust which they enjoyed for so many years. Most of the paper stories I have seen recently about unschoolers have put them in a very favorable light.

In Maine a state legislator has introduced a bill to do away with compulsory school attendance. She is in no way an unschooler; her argument is that since truancy laws don’t keep kids in school, why not give up the fiction that school is compulsory, and say instead, “Go if you want to, and if you don’t, stay out of the way of those who do.” No one expects the bill to pass. But it is interesting to see how the newspapers have reacted to it. Ten, maybe five years ago, they would have cried out on their editorial pages that this misguided woman was attacking the very foundations of American democracy. Not now. They are not yet quite ready to support such a bill, but they say that it is an interesting idea that everyone should think about.

Another one of our readers, who lives and works in a fairly conventional part of society, told us recently that within the past few months he has had serious conversations about unschooling—by “serious” he means, at least two hours long—with more than twenty different people.

Truth Leaks Out

A student in an exclusive private secondary school, mostly for “gifted” students, writes:

My——teacher, who is one of our better teachers, very funny and respected and enjoyed by the students, said to us one morning, “It’s a fact, you know, that none of you want to be here.”

Silence. It was true, of course, but no one knew what to do about it. There had to be some catch. Why would he admit this to us? I was glad he had said it, though. I waited. Then it came.

“And it is also a fact that if you were not here you don’t know what else you would do.”

Down came my hopes that perhaps he was actually on to something that I had never heard from a teacher before. He continued to talk about how society puts us here because they don’t know what else to do with us. Well, that was a surprise. At least there was no pretense—he didn’t try to fool us into thinking that we were there to learn.

But then, what he had said was that we are there for only that purpose, yet if we weren’t there, there would be nothing for us to do either. That, in other words, we really do not fit in *anywhere*, and so, we might just as well be cooped up as not! This from one of our most open, frank, and honest teachers. I *knew* that they felt this way, but hear it is something else.

I was talking to a 5-year-old friend of mine. I asked her, “What if you didn’t have to go to school? Would you still go?” She said, “But I would have to go.” I said, “Why?” “To learn.” I persisted, “But what if *everyone*, all the parents and teachers decided that no one had to go anymore?” She shook her head. It was an impossibility, such a question could not even be answered. She is *already* imprisoned. And I am watching another 5-year-old friend resist learning to read when a while ago she wanted to learn so badly.

Helpers

A mother writes:

My daughter (3) is in the kitchen teaching herself addition and subtraction on the Little Professor Calculator—a machine I don't really approve of—and every time I give her a gentle hint, she flies into a rage, but when I leave her alone and watch her out of the corner of my eye, I see her doing problems like $3 + 5 = 8$! When she was 2, she still hadn't said a word and I could see that our pediatrician was getting worried, but suddenly, a few months later, as I was zipping up her sleeper, she burst out with, "No! Me do it!" and she's been talking ever since.

Years ago I went to a meeting of Catholic educators, where I heard a talk by a wise, funny old man who had been teaching all his life. One thing he said made us all laugh, and has stuck in my mind ever since: "A word to the wise is *infuriating*!" Yes it is, because it is insulting, and little children pick up this expression of (often loving and protective) distrust or contempt, even when we're not conscious of sending it.

About talking. Two young people I know, fluent talkers, both of them the youngest child in large families, did not begin to talk until they were three. The parents of one were beginning to worry, but since their child was lively, interested in everything, vigorous, and social, I urged them not to.

The story is told that Thomas Carlyle never spoke a word until he was four, when one day, hearing his baby brother crying, he said to his amazed parents, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, "What ails wee Jock?"

Why Schools Began

Many have called me cynical and just plain mistaken for saying what I do about the real purposes of schools (GWS #6). But David Nasaw's new book *Schooled To Order* (Oxford Univ. Press. NY) shows that from the early days of the 19th century the rich and powerful in this country have always seen school, first and foremost, as a way to contain, control, and subdue the children of the unruly poor. This was true—I was surprised to learn this even when all our poor were native-born Americans, long before the first waves of immigrants came to our shores.

I learned also from this book that when the Irish first came to this country they made very strenuous efforts, despite their own poverty, to provide education for their children in accordance with their own beliefs. These efforts were in time destroyed by the movement for tax-supported government schools. This had generally been true of American poor and working-class people. They understood all too well that a chief purpose of government schools was to kill the independence and ambition of their children. They wanted their children to believe that they were as good as, and had the same rights as, anyone else, a very subversive and dangerous idea. But they could not long support their own schools and the government schools as well, and these independent ventures died out.

Mr. Nasaw gives us one quote that is almost too good (or bad) to be true. In 1908 James Russell, Dean of Teacher's College of Columbia University, said to a symposium of the National Education Association:

How can a nation endure that deliberately seeks to rouse ambitions and aspirations in the oncoming generations which in the nature of events cannot possibly be fulfilled? If the chief object of government be to promote civil order and social stability (Ed. note: Not quite what the Declaration of Independence says), how can we justify our practice in schooling the masses in precisely the same manner as we do those who are to be our leaders? Is human nature so constituted that those who fail will readily acquiesce in the success of their rivals? Is it any wonder that we are beset with labor troubles?

In this same vein James Callaghan, then Prime Minister of Great Britain,

said not long ago in a major speech on education that what Britain needed was “round pegs for round holes.”

I hope that any people who still think that schools were designed to help the poor to rise will read Mr. Nasaw’s book.

A Wonderful Book

To the list of books we sell here we are now adding Patricia Joudry's *And The Children Played* (\$7 + .30 postage). Many people have recommended it to us, and I loved the book myself every time I read it. But I have hesitated to recommend it, lest the book give people an excuse to say or think, "Well, I'd be glad to try to teach my own kids if I lived in a beautiful old English farmhouse and knew people like Rex Harrison and Leonard Bernstein, but I'm just an ordinary person living in an ordinary town, etc. etc."

I still worry a little that some people will react to the book in this way. People wanting reasons to oppose unschooling will find plenty of them in the book. On the other hand, it is such a vivid and affectionate picture of children growing up free and happy, and such a true and funny picture of the generally frank and blunt ways in which such children deal with each other, and such a detailed and convincing description of how these children, though largely free of external "discipline," develop an internal discipline that would put most of today's adults to shame, that in the end I have to hope that as many people as possible will read it.

At a time when Patricia Joudry could not sell any of her plays, and they had almost no money, and feared that at any minute they might be thrown out of their house, the children were busy playing. Mrs. Joudry writes:

Play is children's work, and we learned to respect this as we did our own. They were lucky, for they had space and clumps of materials left around by the builders. They played with the earnest dedication of artists. Melanie played house; Stephanie played spaceship; together they played safari. They played store, they played charge accounts, they played creditors, they played lawyers, they played landlords, they played magic princes that came on the scene and saved the day.

Did we think they hadn't known what was going on? Our anxieties lingered but theirs they got out of their system with play. Watching this, we came to realize that children's play is more than work, it is therapy (Ed.—but good work is the best therapy). But it can only be therapy when it is free, wholly created and directed by themselves."

"They also played school ... It was amusing to hear Melanie teaching

Stephanie (Ed.—her older sister) math. With the corrections she got from her pupil, she picked up quite a bit.

When they got tired of playing together, they played separately. A favorite was to make up a story, tell it aloud in a low murmur, acting it out as they went. I sometimes walked into a veritable buzz, like a hornet's nest of stories, as each of the three of them walked round in a private world, filled with high drama and every kind of contortion.

John and I had been answering the question (how are they going to learn to get along with other people) by saying that you learn to get along with people, or you don't, in your own home. We just couldn't believe, as "they" did, that the best way to get socialized is to be thrust at a tender age into a class of forty, to fight for your existence.

(People) all asked, "How do you get those children to be so good?"

We really didn't know. We never told them to sit still and keep quiet, but wherever we took them they sat still and kept quiet. We were as surprised as anybody. They developed charming Pleases and Thank Yous, though we never told them to. We hated seeing children badgered to mouth empty phrases. I can't believe John and I were as polite as all that, but they must have picked it up somewhere.

Their voices were modulated; they were well under their own control. Within themselves, they were at peace.

(Felicity) had not learned a thing by the time she was seven. She only knew who she was, that she loved life and trusted her parents, her sisters, and God, and knew how the earth yields and how life is made, and why: little things like that. We felt that it would be useful for her in addition if she knew how to read, but that didn't seem to be in the cards. I made a few attempts to teach her, but her brief experience of school had turned her off learning altogether.

We kept quoting the old occult phrase: "When the pupil is ready, the teacher will arrive." One day Melanie and Figgy (nickname) got into the mother and kid game. It was the old "Eat your supper, get to bed, you're going to school in the morning" routine. The next morning the

game was still on and Felicity went to school. Melanie switched from parent to teacher. She started the Kid on the alphabet.

That evening at supper, Melly announced calmly, “It doesn’t look as though this teacher is going to come along. So I’d better be it.”

Before she went to bed that night, she turned their bedroom into a Bed-Schooler. And The Full Moon School was born. Its founder and teacher was twelve years old.

Every morning from then on Figgy raced through her breakfast with an eye on the clock. “I have to hurry, I’ll be late for school.” Then she’d tear off to their school room, where the teacher and pupils were already at their places.

Melanie was the rest of the pupils, and all the teachers. There were four teachers, two male and two female, for balance I suppose. Some were lenient and some were strict. The imaginary children possessed their own unique characteristics, and some were well—behaved, while others weren’t.

Felicity learned to read, to do sums, and spell long lists of words. They did simple Chemistry experiments, had Botany classes outdoors, cooking classes in the kitchen ... and creative projects beyond calculation.

This was all in the mornings. In the afternoons, Melanie attended the Full Moon School as herself. She settled down alone at the long worktable and went to work on her books. She undertook H.G. Wells’s *Outline Of History* as well as Geography projects like mapmaking; she read poetry and Shakespeare, she wrote compositions, and delved into many books chosen at random from the library.

Whenever we had an interesting guest—and we had many the children would gather quietly in the sitting room, and listen through long evenings around the fire, Melanie just sitting and watching the faces, Stephanie knitting (so as not to waste time) and Felicity slowly nodding. Because their ears and their minds were wide open

everything they heard went in. And whatever they noticed came out—fortunately after the guests had left. They learned their manners in the only way that children can learn—by example. Sometimes there were lapses. But they were learning how to behave in the world and wanted to be guided and corrected—though not humiliated in the process.

Those Voices

A memory. When my sister and I were about four and five, perhaps even less, we visited our grandparents. There was a landing on the second floor, with a railing, through which we could just see down the stairs into the room where the adults sat talking after dinner. After we had been tucked into bed and good-nights said, and the grownups had gone back downstairs, we would slip out of bed, crouch down by the railing, and listen to the grownup voices. We couldn't catch more than a few of the words, and in any case couldn't understand what was being talked about. But the pull of those voices was fascinating. Usually after a while we would sneak back into bed. But one night we fell asleep there by the railing, where the grownups found us when they went up to bed. I don't remember what came of this, whether we were scolded or punished, and sternly warned not to get out of bed again, or whether the grownups said nothing about it.

Since then I have seen in many other families that it is very hard to keep young children in bed if a group of adults are having lively conversation not too far away. The children will find a hundred different reasons for coming to check out what the grownups are doing. But, some might say, that's all very fine for privileged families that have interesting visitors. But what about most families, average families. The answer is, first of all, that all people are interesting. As Studs Terkel and Robert Coles have shown in their (very different) books, everyone has many good stories to tell. As long as real people are talking, not just people on TV, children will want to hear their voices and see their faces, and will learn much from them.

Word Game

When I was little, perhaps six or seven, someone gave me a good book for Christmas. It had perhaps thirty or forty pages. On each page was a word. The rest of the page was blank. The object was to make as many different words as I could out of the letters in the given word. Beneath the given word was printed the total number of words possible, a great challenge and frustration, for I never came close to it. I can only remember two of the given words. One was *Ingrate*, which held more than 100 words. The other, the last word in the book, was *Spectroheliograph*, which held more than 200. They left a couple of extra blank pages, to make room for all of them.

For many months I worked in that book, finally did all I could, grew tired of it, set it aside, lost it, forgot all about it. In the late '40s the game turned up again, called The Word Game, in the pages of the *World-Telegram*, then one of New York's evening papers. Quite often I rode a commuter train out of the city to a suburb where I would be lecturing in the evening. One friend with whom I used to ride was a Word Game fan. Each night the paper would give us a new word, and we would try to reach the listed total before our stop.

In time I left New York, the paper gave up, and I forgot about the game until the other day, when someone wrote about playing it with her children, and having a lot of fun with it.

It's a great game; I recommend it. (By the way, you can't make much out of the word "SCHOOL.")

Grammar

Talking in *How Children Fail* (av. here) about how our use of words may confuse young children, I wrote the following:

The conventional teaching of grammar adds to the confusion. We talk about, and use, nouns and adjectives as if they were very different, but in fact they are often very much alike. A green ball, a green top, a green bicycle, and a green stuffed animal are alike in that they are green (adjective) and that they are toys (noun). When we call them green, we mean they are members of a class that have in common the color green. When we call them toys we mean they are members of a class that have in common the fact that children play with them. Why should a child be expected to feel that there is something very different about these classes? Why is the greenness of a ball different from the ball-ness of a ball? I don't feel the difference. They are both ways of saying something about the object. We tell children that the distinction between one part of speech and another is a matter of meaning, when it really has to do with the way we fit them into sentences.

I later found out that this way of looking at and analyzing language was called Structural linguistics. For a while this far more sensible way of teaching grammar (if it has to be taught) found its way into a few school textbooks—I once helped edit a series based on this idea. But I suppose the Back To Basics movement has driven even this tiny speck of common sense out of most of our schoolrooms.

Worms

Why do we ask the questions we ask? How do we get our answers?

A few years ago, when in Canada, I read in *Maclean's* magazine a very short article, about worms. It said that in Western Canada a man who (like many others) had been raising worms for fishermen had found by experiment that these worms would eat—and turn into the richest topsoil almost any kind of organic wastes, including manures, paper, cardboard, sawdust, wood chips, cotton mill wastes, food scraps, etc. This excited me very much. I wanted to find out all I could about it.

Curiosity is rarely idle. I had strong reasons for mine. Since 1948, when I read William Vogt's *Road To Survival*, I have been interested in what we now call ecology. Even though I then lived in New York City, I subscribed to the magazine *Friends of the Land*, and read many other books about conservation, organic farming, etc. I have known for a long time that all over the country we were exhausting and depleting our soils, that every year we sent billions of tons of topsoil down our rivers and into the Gulf of Mexico, that the six feet or more of black topsoil we found in the great plains when we got here was in most places down to the last six inches—if even that. I knew that someday we were going to have to pay a heavy price for our greed, wastefulness, and stupidity—and the inflation we are groaning about now is only part of that price.

This was not my only concern. I am a city man. I like cities. For twenty-one years I have lived in one of the best of them—Boston—which I love more all the time, and do not plan to leave. A world or a country without cities would not be desirable or even possible. If all cities were destroyed and the survivors in the country had to start from scratch, they would very soon be making new cities again – for reasons Jane Jacobs has made plain in *The Economy Of Cities* (av. here).

But our cities right now have many serious problems. One is that they, or the people in them, generate an immense amount of wastes -sewage, garbage, paper, cardboard, etc. Merely getting these out of the city is a problem. Harder yet is finding some place to put them that does not poison our lands, rivers, oceans. Another problem is that cities, all over the world, are filling up with people for whom there are no jobs and no prospects of any. It has

seemed clear to me for some time that cities were not going to be able to feed and employ their poor, far less be healthy and prosperous, unless they could learn to do again *what once they all did*, which was to raise much of their own food. But how, and in what soil?

Now it looked as if the worms might be the answer to all these problems. Perhaps they could turn the organic wastes of the cities into rich topsoil, some of which the cities could use to raise their own food, and the rest of which they could send into the country to enrich the land there—which is, after all, what the Chinese have been doing for thousands of years.

So I needed to find out all could about these worms. What to do? Sign up for a worm course somewhere? There were none. Anyway, I like to get answers more directly. The *MacLean's* worm article was signed. I wrote the reporter, in care of the magazine, asking if he would send the address of the Canadian worm farmer, and anything else he knew about worms. Back came a nice answer, with the address and several useful clippings. I wrote the worm farmer (enclosing a little money to pay for his time and help the work along -never a bad idea). He wrote back, saying that one very good source of information was North American Bait Farms (1207 So. Palmetto, Ontario CA 91761). I wrote them, got back a list of books they publish, and other information, bought and read some of the books. One of the best was *Earthworms For Ecology And Profit*, by Donald Gaddie. It looked more and more as if worms really could do all that people claimed.

It occurred to me that if was going to talk about raising worms in the city, maybe I ought to do it first. It is one thing to say, “These books say you can raise worms in the city.” It is quite another to say, “I am doing it.” Besides, in doing it I might learn things not in the books.

Late last fall, when the Public Garden was full of piles of leaves, I went out in the early mornings with a plastic garbage can and brought back eight loads (about 250 lbs.), which I piled up in the small sunken court outside my kitchen door. I packed down the leaves with concrete blocks (left from an old bookshelf) and began pouring my gray water (wash water, dishwater, etc.) on them, though without knowing quite what I was going to do with them.

One day I thought, since I have all this good worm food here, I might as well order some worms and get started. Which I did. The worms arrived Dec. 7. I put them in the bottom of a red rubber wastebasket, with the peat moss that came with them. From time to time I added some leaves or food scraps to

the wastebasket. As the months went by, the worms multiplied, the wastebasket slowly filled up. Soon I needed more boxes.

The worm book (Gaddie) said that worms didn't like plastic and should be raised in wooden boxes (but not cedar). Having wooden boxes made seemed expensive. Might it not be cheaper to raise them in cardboard boxes (of which the city is full), lined with plastic garbage bags. Since these can double as freezer bags, it seemed unlikely that they would trouble the worms.

I ran a small pilot project, put some worms and dirt in a plastic bread wrapper. After a month the worms seemed to be thriving. So I put three plastic garbage bags into cardboard boxes, and into these put some of the worms and dirt from the original wastebasket. The worms seem to like their new homes. As they continue to multiply, I will use more bags and boxes. Before next summer I should have enough so that they will eat all my food wastes.

I have also been feeding them cardboard (from boxes), cut into narrow strips with a big paper cutter. Recently, hearing that the *Boston Globe* (unlike the *New York Times*) uses ink with very little lead in it, I have given them shredded newspaper. Too soon to tell yet whether, and how fast, they will eat that. Certainly they like the rotted leaves best. They like banana peels better than orange peels these are acid, and have to sit around for a while before the worms will eat them.

Commercial rabbit farms (one of which I have seen) use worms to eat up rabbit manure. Before next summer I plan to try them on dog wastes, which are plentiful (!) in my neighborhood. Late next spring I will plant some worms in some of the grassy/weedy areas near my apartment where people relieve their dogs, and see what happens. I am hoping they will survive, and thrive, with no more food and attention than this.

In time I want to find out whether, by shaking worm castings up with water and settling or straining out the particles, I can get a liquid that will grow plants hydroponically. I also want to find out whether, using such a liquid, plants will grow in a medium like rough terry cloth. No doubt other questions will come to mind. As they do, I will think of other ways to get answers, and to share them with any others who may be interested.

Home-Builder Schools

In New England we now have three places where people can go to learn how to build their own homes, for a third or less of what it would cost them to buy them, even from a large-scale builder.

The first of these was the Shelter Institute (Center and Water Streets, Bath ME 04530 207-443-9084), founded and still run by Pat Hennin. After a while Pat's partner, Charlie Wing, split off and started his own house-building "school," Cornerstones (54 Cumberland St., Brunswick ME 04011 207-729-0540) . And a third such school has been formed in Mass., Heartwood Owner-Builder School (Johnson Rd., Washington MA 01235 413-623-6677)

Interesting to note that Pat Hennin was a lawyer, his wife Patsy a schoolteacher, and Charlie Wing a physics professor. I don't know who runs Heartwood.

An article about Shelter Institute, published a little over a year ago, said that it had over 2000 "graduates" from every state, who had built about 250 homes so far. Figures would be higher now. Many, perhaps most of these people came to the courses with no experience in building whatever. Many had not done even simple carpentry or repairing. After a few weeks of class time and hands-on work outside of class, usually helping former graduates to build their houses, these novices are ready to design and build their own. Not that it is easy or quick, no part-time job—figure about an hour and a half for every square foot of house.

The courses at all three places run about three weeks and cost (as of a year ago) about \$250 per person or \$350 per couple. Write for more up-to-date information.

I see this as being interesting and perhaps useful and important to unschoolers for a number of reasons. In the first place, many unschoolers don't have much money (sometimes by choice), so that building their own house may be the only way in which they (and in these days most people) can *have* a house. In the second place, because housing is becoming so expensive everywhere, there will surely be a need and a market for home-building schools in many other parts of the country, and this is work that some unschoolers might want to do. Beyond that, many people write that their teen-aged children have nothing interesting or worthwhile to do, and I would

guess that many of them might be quite excited about the idea of learning how to build houses even if they weren't planning to build their own for a while. By the way, another good source of information about inexpensive and unconventional ways of building houses is *Mother Earth News* (Box 70, Hendersonville NC 28739), which many GWS readers probably know.

Don't want to give the impression that you have to go to school, even one of these good schools, to build your own house. Last time I saw my friend Karl Hess, he showed me photos of a very nice looking house which he and his wife built for themselves in the hills of West Virginia, working, as he put it, "with the book in one hand and the hammer in the other." But I think any one of these schools might make the job much easier.

College At Home

Many people ask us about ways to get college degrees without actually having to go to a college, which more and more people can't afford.

The best information I have seen about this was in an article in the Feb. 78 issue of *New Age* (32 Station St., Brookline Village MA 02146, pub. monthly, \$12/yr.), by Nancy DuVergne Smith, "Alternatives in Higher Education." It says, in part:

Undergraduate Degrees

There are at least three organizations which provide opportunities to complete undergraduate studies along non-traditional paths—the Regents External—Degree Program of the University of the State of New York, Thomas A. Edison College of the State of New Jersey, and the Board for State Academic Awards of the State of Connecticut .

All three programs accept students from *across the globe* (Ed, italics, demand no specific entrance requirements, and impose no limits on course or exam preparation time, residence, or class attendance. Moreover, the cost incurred in each degree program is a fraction of that levied by standard colleges or universities. Credit toward either associate or bachelor's degrees is earned in the following ways: transfer of other college credentials, standard proficiency tests, formal course work, or college-level exams administered through the U.S. Armed Services or by government or business employers, or "special assessment" of a student's expertise in areas such as the arts, agriculture, or labor relations . Students complete degree requirements by studying faculty-designed subject outlines, then measure their learning against tests administered periodically around the country by each institution.

All three of the state-accredited schools charge a \$50 entrance fee and an average of \$20 per examination. Total costs for an associate degree are estimated at \$200; for a full bachelor's degree, less than \$500. Contact each program for further information:

1. The Regents External—Degree Prog. of the Univ. of the State of NY (99 Washington Ave., Albany NY 12230) offers Associate of Arts, Science, or Applied Science (nursing) degrees, Bachelor of Arts and of Science.
2. Thos. A. Edison College of State of N.J. (Forrestal Center, Forrestal Rd., Princeton NJ 08540) grants degrees ranging from Assoc. of Arts, Science in Management, or Assoc. of Applied Science in Radiologic Technology, to Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.
3. The Board for State Academic Awards of the State of Conn. (340 Capitol Ave., Hartford CT 06115) offers Assoc. of Arts and Sciences degrees; a bachelor's degree program is planned.

University Without Walls

Nonresidential programs in which students earn credits demanded for degrees through highly individualized studies away from the campus center, internships, and other work or experience related projects are available through over thirty universities and colleges around the nation affiliated with the University Without Walls. The program was initially funded in 1970 by grants from the U.S. Office of Education and the Ford Foundation, through the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, Antioch College, Yellow Springs OH 45387. Participating universities and colleges include:

University (hereafter U.) of Alabama, New College, University (sic) AL 35486

Antioch College (hereafter C.)/Philadelphia, 1227 Walnut St., Philadelphia PA 19107

Antioch C./West, 3663 Sacramento St.; San Francisco CA 94118 Bard C., Annandale-on-Hudson NY 12504

U. Without Walls/Berkeley, 2700 Bancroft Way, Berkeley CA 94704

Chicago State U., 95th & King Dr., Chicago IL 60628

U. Without Walls/Flaming Rainbow, P.O. Box 154, Tahlequah OK 74464

Florida International U./Miami Dade Community C., 300 NE 2nd Ave., Miami FL 33132

Friends World C., Plover lane, Huntington NY 11 743

Goddard C., Plainfield VT 05677 Hispanic International U., 3602 Navigation, Houston TX 77003 Hofstra U., Hempstead NY 11550

Johnston C., U. of Redlands, Redlands CA 92373

Loretto Heights C., 3001 S. Federal Blvd., Denver CO 80236

U. of Mass., Amherst MA 01022

U. of Minn., Minneapolis MN 55455

Morgan State C., Urban Regional learning Center, Baltimore MD 21212

Northeastern Illinois U., Bryn Mawr at St. louis Ave., Chicago IL 60625

U. of Pacific, Stockton CA 95204 Pitzer C., Claremont CA 91711

Roger Williams C., 35 Richmond St., Providence RI 02866

Shaw U., Raleigh NC 27602

Skidmore C., Saratoga Spgs. NY 12866

Stephens C., Columbia MO 65201

Universidad Boricua, 1766 Church St., Washington DC 20036

Universidad de Campesinos libres, 841 W. Belmont Ave., Fresno CA 93706

Westminster C., Fulton MO 65621 U. of Wisc. at Green Bay, Green Bay WI 54302

Independent Programs

Empire State C. of the State U. of N.Y. has designed an individual study program through which students may earn associate or bachelor's degrees through personal efforts but are only required to meet with guiding professors several hours every few months at one of the twenty learning centers located in New York state. For more info, write Empire State C., SUNY, Union Ave., Saratoga Spgs. NY 12366

The Vermont State C. systems offer an external degree program combining independent study, traditional course work, experiential learning, correspondence, or media courses. Write Vermont State Colleges Office of External Programs, Box 823, Montpelier VT 05602 Students pursuing a degree through the Open U. at the U. of Maryland/University C., College Park MD 20742, complete their studies off-campus, except for an introductory weekend seminar each semester.

The UM bachelor's degree program is patterned after the British adult-oriented Open University system, as are similar programs at University College, Rutgers, the State U. of N.J., New Brunswick NJ 08903, and the U. of Houston, Houston TX 77004.

Syracuse U. Independent Study Programs (Rm. 21, 610 E. Fayette St., Syracuse NY 13202) Bachelor of Science in business administration or Bachelor of Arts in liberal studies, independent work with one eight-day visit to central campus each trimester.

Associate degrees or college credit through WTTW programs sponsored by TV college, City Colleges of Chicago Central Office (180 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago IL 60601)

Bachelor of General Studies degree through non-residence, self-directed study programs involving periodic faculty contacts offered by External Degree Project, Roosevelt U., Chicago IL 60605

Metropolitan State U. of Minn. has no central campus ... students ... rely on community resources to enrich their individually developed study plans. Write Metropolitan State U., St. Paul MN 55101

Bachelor of Arts is available through a predominantly off campus program offered by Upper Iowa U. Students must attend four-week seminars on campus periodically. Write: Director, Coordinated Off-Campus Degree Program, Upper Iowa U., Fayette IA 52142

External Degree Programs of California State U. and C. system offer bachelor's degrees in business administration, liberal arts, and the humanities to Cal. residents through 19 centers located across the state. Write: Consortium of the Cal. State Univ. and Colleges, 5670 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles CA 90036.

Graduate Programs

The Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities of Yellow Springs, OH can now claim credit for over 200 graduates. Three of the graduate arms of the consortium allow students to carry on learning programs in the world through their jobs, at home, on university campuses, or through projects of exploration, service, or research. The Doctor of Philosophy degrees offered by the Union schools, as well as degrees sponsored through the consortium's undergraduate wing, the U. Without Walls, are nationally recognized and are the first such programs to win regional approval as candidates for accreditation status by the North Central Association for Colleges and Secondary Schools.

Tuition costs amount to \$2800 for each of the maximum four years allowed to complete the PhD program, admission is selective, and candidates able to obtain PhDs through conventional routes generally are not accepted.

Write: Union Graduate School West, P.O. Box 7999, San Francisco

CA 94120; Center for Minority Studies/Union Graduate School, c/o Coppin State College, 2500 West North Ave, Baltimore MD 21216; or the Union Graduate School, 106 Woodrow St., Yellow Springs OH 45387

The Goddard-Cambridge Graduate Program in Social Change is a Massachusetts-based extension of Vermont's Goddard C. which offers a nontraditional means of earning a master's degree concentrating on either social and cultural issues, Third World studies, feminist studies, or selected independent topics. Write: Goddard/Cambridge Graduate Program, 186 Hampshire St., Cambridge MA 02139

The U. of Oklahoma College of liberal Studies offers a year round admission program leading to a master's or bachelor's degree in liberal studies. Costs and program details available from the university (Norman OK 73069)

Masters of Arts degrees in humanities and in vocational education are open to legal residents of Calif. through a minimum attendance program created by the External Degree Program of Calif. State University and Colleges.

Credit By Exams

Credits earned through satisfactory completion of the College-level Examination Program (CLEP) of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) can validate up to a quarter of the requirements for baccalaureate degrees and are accepted by over 1700 U.S. colleges and universities. CLEP tests...in English composition, humanities, mathematics, natural and social sciences, and history -are administered the third week of every month at over 900 centers in the U.S. For complete information on CLEP tests, contact: CEEB, BB8 7th Ave., New York NY 10019.

CEEB also conducts Advance Placement (AP) Examinations which evaluate knowledge of specific subjects, often on material covered in customary freshman and sophomore courses. Contact: CEEB, Box 977, Princeton NJ 08540

For further information on all these matters, read:

External Graduate Degree Programs at U.S. Colleges and Universities, Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S., One Dupont Circle, Washington DC 20036. 10 pp ., free.

On-Campus/Off-Campus Degree Programs for Part-Time Students, by Linda Gordon and Judy Schub, National University Extension Association, One Dupont Circle, DC 20036. 119 pp., \$4.

A Guide to Independent Study through Correspondence Instruction, Nat'l University Extension Association, Suite 360, One DuPont Circle etc. 60 pp, \$.50

Schools And Jobs

Joyce Mitchell's *The Work Book—a Guide to Skilled Jobs* (Bantam \$2.25) might be interesting and useful to unschoolers in a number of ways. One thing it does is show us the world of work as a great many people, including high school students, see it, and are encouraged to see it. Don't misunderstand me—it is (as far as I can judge) a very realistic and truthful book. Some quotes:

In the 1980s ... skilled jobs will be the bulk (up to 80%) of the work. Only 20% of all jobs will require a college education. At the same time, fewer than 2% of the labor force in this country will work on the assembly line, and semiskilled operatives and unskilled labor will be a declining 25% of total employment.

The length of in-school preparation is the simplest way to define a skilled job (Ed . italics added).

The book then gives a long list of jobs, with information about training, salaries, job opportunities and prospects. Most of these jobs were routinely done not very long ago by people many or most of whom had not even finished high school. Why all this need for extra training?

The stock answer is that work has become more complicated. But Ivar Berg, in his book *Education And Jobs: The Great Training Robbery*, pointed out that this is not so, that studies have repeatedly shown, in a wide variety of fields, that there is no connection between the amount of job “training” and actual on-the-job performance. So what is the “training” for?

I suggest that it has two real and serious purposes. One is to limit the number of people who can get into any field of work. Make every lawyer (doctor, plumber, etc.) go to some school, cut down the number of schools, and presto! You have held down the supply of lawyers (or doctors, etc.).

The other purpose of training is to serve as a kind of job tax. To get the “best” jobs, you have to go not just to college but to graduate schools, which you can't get into unless you have been to a “good” i.e. exclusive and expensive college. All this may cost you about \$50,000. To get somewhat less desirable jobs, you need somewhat less expensive training, i.e., pay a smaller tax, and so on down the line.

Why do employers want their employees to have paid a job tax, and usually the highest job tax they can afford? Joyce Mitchell's book suggests an answer. On page 6 she writes:

the truth is that on the average, workers change basic jobs every 5 years ... under the age of 35 most workers look for a job every year and a half, and after 35 they look every 3 years.

These people look for new jobs because they have grown tired of, or can't stand, the ones they had. This is a nuisance for employers, who have to find replacements, and then train them *on the job*, where all real training is done (in law and medicine as well). They think, quite sensibly, that if you have paid a big tax to get the job you have, you are more likely to stay put, and accept whatever comes to you, instead of chasing after a better job.

Why not then require a college degree of every office and factory worker? Because there aren't enough people who have college degrees *and are willing to work more or less indefinitely at those jobs*. It is hard, for example, for a woman with a college degree to get a routine office job, because employers think, "With that degree, she is only going to work here until she can find something more in line with what she thinks she deserves." What the employer wants is someone who thinks, "This job may not be too good, but it's the best job I am likely to be able to get."

When Joyce Mitchell called her book *The Work Book* I don't think she was making a sly reference to school workbooks. But the connection is there; the school workbook gets you ready for the life work book.

Also from *The Work Book*:

As in Japan today, there will be so many benefits which provide workers and their dependents with cheap medical insurance, paid vacations, good recreation, a guaranteed retirement, and all kinds of security that most people will feel that they can't afford to work outside of the government, large corporations, or jobs covered by strong unions.

In other words, you can't argue with Big Daddy, can't even talk to him, but as long as you do what he tells you, he will take good care of you.

Friendly Prof.

Prof. David N. Campbell (2828 C.L., School of Education, Univ. of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh PA 15260) has already helped a number of families (including the Perchemlides) in unschooling efforts—advice on curricula, evaluation, etc.—and has said that if any other families are looking for this kind of help they can get in touch with him directly. (If any others in this field would like to be listed in *GWS*, please let us know.)

Just to set the record straight, Dr. Campbell is the inventor of the portfolio plan by which the education of the Perchemlides children will be evaluated (see *GWS* #8).

A Useful School

Dr. Carl Hedman, Prof. of Philosophy at the Univ. of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, has been working for some time with the Multicultural Community High School there. The Milwaukee Journal of 3/20/79 printed this letter from him:

We at Multicultural Community High School, Inc. were delighted to see *The Journal's* editorial on March 2 challenging the notion that we can solve our school problems by creating "a batch of new laws ... to help keep schools get the kids in line."

Our experience with hundreds of young people over the last seven years has shown that 9 times out of 10, the kid who raises a rumpus at the traditional school—and we're not talking about the person who commits an act of violence—does so out of boredom or frustration.

Almost always we've found that the so-called behavior problem disappears when the person leaves the big traditional school, with its "go there, do this" mentality, and when that person no longer has to fend off the cliques that form when large numbers of people are involuntarily herded together.

On our model, we don't try to lock up kids all day. Instead, our students voluntarily study hard for a couple of hours in our modest classrooms out in the community and then go off to part time jobs.

Some people may object that it would be too expensive to provide such individualized learning situations for large numbers of secondary students. Of course, if one assumes that each mini-school must have all the latest equipment and be staffed only by highly paid professional educators, then no society could afford this model.

But if one shares our belief that it doesn't matter what one's physical surroundings are, and that almost any adult can, with support, serve as an educational resource person, then a whole new picture begins to emerge. We don't think, by the way, that such models suit only the so called slow learner or problem child. We have found that all kinds of young people prosper at our school.

One can begin to imagine a radically different future in secondary education, one where professional educators turn to the community rather than to the courts for help; where they cease to threaten and begin to find ways to use community resources, community centers, parents, older siblings, etc. to create a city full of one room schoolhouses to nurture the intellectual and emotional growth of our adolescents.

As we said in *GWS #3*, MCHS is part of the Milwaukee Public Schools, which tolerate it and use it as a place to dump troublesome students. People who still feel strongly committed to working with and (if possible) changing public schools might find it interesting and useful to try to get something like MCHS going in their own community—perhaps for primary as well as secondary school students.

A note on facilities. When I was a visiting teacher at Berkeley in 1969, the students waged a huge “strike,” actually more a boycott than a strike. As part of this boycott, my students (in four sections of English) asked me to meet the classes in the off-campus apartments where most of the students lived. We did, jamming twenty or twenty-five people into small living rooms and bedrooms. It worked fine, in fact, it worked better—the crowded and natural atmosphere made for much more lively and interesting classes.

The University was very alarmed by all this, kept urging the faculty to insist on meeting their classes in regular university classrooms. The last thing in the world they wanted people to learn was that most of those fancy and expensive university buildings were not necessary, and that people could share ideas and learn things anywhere.

Summer Work

From July 21—August 11 (3 wks.) the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Resource Center for Nonviolence will co-sponsor their second work project at RED WIND Native American Community in California.

RED WIND, located 30 miles from San Luis Obispo, is a traditional, self-governing community where about 60 people live and work. (It is not a reservation.) Here Indians and non-Indians share in building an alternative to mainstream culture that includes farming, schooling, and craftwork in a 400 acre site in the high desert.

Workcamp volunteers will participate in the ongoing life of the community contributing to the goal of self-sufficiency. There will be time for recreation and discussions on the spiritual basis of Native American culture, nonviolence, social change, and related issues. Volunteers are expected to provide their own transportation plus a contribution of \$20 for food and expenses. Please return applications by May 15.

Ages 17 and up. Write FOR, Youth Action, Box 271, Nyack NY 10960 212-L08-8200, or Resource Center for Nonviolence, Box 2234, Santa Cruz CA 95063 408-423-1626.

The Crowded Court

The March 26, 1979, issue of *U. S. News and World Report* published an article, “Supreme Court—Trials and Tribulations,” which included these extraordinary and in some ways alarming figures. In 1930 the Court had 984 cases on its docket—cases waiting to be heard—and issued opinions in 134 cases. In 1940 there were 1078 cases waiting, 137 decided. For 1950 the figures were 1448 and 87; 1960 -2178 and 117; 1970-4202 and 108; 1978 4704 and 129! I can well understand that the Justices see and think about this incredible and hopeless backlog of cases with something close to terror.

It’s an ill wind that blows no good, as the saying goes. Considering the nature of the present Supreme Court, I think that its overload is probably good news for us. What it means is that the Court will probably not take the time to hear, and so will not overturn, decisions by state and lower Federal courts that are favorable to unschoolers. If we can win in the lower courts, then we are home free; by the same token, if we lose in the lower courts, the Supreme Court won’t save us. Since I think this Court would and will be very hostile to unschoolers—they said as much in the *Yoder* case—I will be glad to-see-them leave us alone.

I still think that, busy as they are, they will take time to reverse any lower court that rules against compulsory schooling on too broad grounds. But narrow rulings will probably be allowed to stand.

On Evaluation

A recent issue of *Manas* quotes from the book *Stage Theories Of Cognitive And Moral Development: Criticism And Applications*, a collection of reprints from the *Harvard Educational Review*. Lawrence Kohlberg and Rochelle Mayer write, in part:

After a deluge of studies in the sixties examining the effects of programs on I.Q. and achievement tests, and drawing policy conclusions, researchers *finally* (Ed. italics) began to ask the question, “What is the justification for using I.Q. tests or achievement tests to evaluate programs in the first place?”

1. The current prevalent definition of the aims of education, in terms of academic achievement supplemented by a concern for mental health, cannot be justified empirically or logically.
2. The overwhelming emphasis of educational psychology on methods of instruction and tests and measurements which presuppose a “value-neutral” psychology is misplaced.
3. An alternative notion that the aim of schools should be the stimulation of human development is scientifically, ethically, and practically a viable conception which provides the framework for a new kind of educational psychology.

Advice about means and methods involves value considerations and cannot be made purely on a basis of “facts.” Concrete, positive reinforcement is not an ethically neutral means. To advise the use of concrete positive reinforcement is to advise that a certain kind of character, motivated by concrete reinforcement, is the end of education.

Many present and would-be unschoolers are arguing with school authorities about methods of instruction and evaluation. I think they might find some very useful ammunition in the above quotes. The schools, by their

methods, tend to turn out people who will work only for money. People who want their children to grow up into the kind of people who do their work for other and better reasons have strong moral and/or religious grounds for refusing to subject their children to the schools' methods of teaching and evaluation.

We should not fool ourselves, however, that the people at the Harvard School of Education are the friends, or even potential friends, of unschoolers. They are just as interested as any other educators in keeping alive the myth that only people with long and complicated "training" can be trusted and allowed to teach children. What they are trying to do is market and sell a whole new system of training.

Meanwhile, we may be able to make good use of some of their objections to the present system.

A Place For Doing Things

I have been reading school brochures for years. Most of them irritate or infuriate me. Mabel Dennison has just sent me one that I like, from the Sandy River School where she teaches (R.F.D. #3, Farmington ME 04938, Tel. 207-778-2386).

I print it here in *GWS* for several reasons. Many people, not necessarily unschoolers, write us that they are planning to start a school, and ask for advice. Many unschooling parents are also thinking about starting schools to shelter them from compulsory attendance laws. And in time many parents who are not interested in schools or worried about shelter may begin to think of making some kind of cooperative activity center where their children, if and when they feel like it, can get together and do interesting things. The Sandy River School brochure says, about as well as anything I have seen, what such a school/shelter/camp/activity center might be.

The brochure begins with two photographs, one of a group of children of different ages leaping off a sand dune, the other of two boys holding up a fish which they caught through the ice. Over the first photo is written SCHOOL?; over the second, OR SCHOOL VACATION? The brochure then says, in part:

Teachers And Children

These photographs are school pictures; they are not vacation pictures. They show some of the kinds of things we expect our children to be doing at the Sandy River School: jumping off a sand dune, ice fishing. We expect children to be on teachers' laps and climbing on their shoulders.

School activities are similar to what children do on weekends and during school vacation. They watch, they listen, they read, they play alone or together, they tryout whatever tools and equipment they can get hold of. They bicker, they tease, they pick scapegoats, they practice mock warfare, they gang up girls against boys. And at times they are remarkably generous and caring of each other.

We think that adults who spend time with children should be able to tolerate at least some of the noise and confusion that children create. We feel that adults don't have to deny the desires and choices of children as much as they usually do. We want adults to expand and affirm their own powers of strong feeling and creativity and to become people who can interact with children as well as order them.

Teachers at the Sandy River School organize regular math, reading, and music practice to add to the normal activities of children. They offer lessons in whatever they know well or can do. They act as companions and guides for the interests of children. They offer suggestions and support. They do what they like doing, whether children are interested or not. They plan, not so much with possible learnings or a curriculum in mind, as simply with the activity itself in mind: making soup, taking a walk, using such and such art materials. Daily life at the Sandy River School is very ordinary and unpretentious.

Teachers supervise children from a distance. They offer more adult supervision, companionship, and guidance than children probably get in vacation, and less adult supervision in the form of direction and teaching than children usually get in school.

We evaluate our children for their overall well-being; their quickness, bright eyes, wit, intelligence, graceful movements, more than for their mastery of subject matter.

Learning

We believe that intelligence develops by organization of an ever-increasing amount of skill, memory, knowledge, and experience. Children do this for themselves. It is not necessary for us, and it is probably harmful to children, to parcel knowledge into increments of the next step. Children practice what they need to practice. They absorb what is new, what they are in contact with. They ask what they need to know. Eventually children become aware that they have

learned, aware of their initiative and power as learners. Very gradually thinking and learning become more deliberate, and somewhat self-conscious.

There is nothing wrong with a child's following one bent or interest, or pursuing one or two activities. He/she is just as likely to develop other interests later. A small amount of deeply assimilated learning is worth years of unwanted learning. Wanted learning can be built on, in geometric proportions; unwanted learning is choking, deeply disordering, and destroys integrity.

A Proposal

If you started with the premise that children's normal activities are valid and that their choices are valid as well, you could set up a school, at which attendance was voluntary, with an indoor and outdoor play area. You would also have classrooms and workshops which would be open and available when there was an adult available to take care of the equipment and act as supervisor, companion, and teacher if requested. There could be a library, a gymnasium, a science lab, a shop full of wires and buzzers and old TV sets, a room where stories were read aloud, movies shown, and assignments given, a storeroom of skis, skates, and sports equipment. You could find out at what age children would make use of what. Or suppose that the schools, as they are, were open to children and that children were free to make use of the activities and equipment that attracted them. Or suppose places of adult work were open to perusal and limited participation by children. These are the kinds of changes in educational policy and practice we would like to see in this country.

Order, Routine, Discipline, Limitation, Structure

The usual, and we think unnecessary, routines of school include

assignments, curriculums, testing, tracking and administrative procedures. Regular occurrences, and the rules associated with them, are the routines of a free school: who will feed the cat, who sits in the front seat of a vehicle, trading lunches, daily and weekly scheduled activities, returning library books every two weeks. Fights and disagreements are settled by children alone or by children and adults together. When a child decides deliberately to study recorder playing, the study is as disciplined and structured as anywhere else. When a young person helps an adult build a chimney they build it from the ground up, and find out how well it works. The cheerfulness, happiness, knowledge, and skill of each adult and child are conditions, and ordering forces. Part of the order of math, science, and music, that has been spoiled in schools for many people, is self-evident in daily life.

It is a waste beyond words of the time of life of a child, of the only childhood there is, to divert a child from his or her usual activities of play, talk, movement, invention, and exploration. These are the most intelligent activities he/she could possibly be engaged in. It is a second waste to obscure natural conditions; both the tough hardships of life, and the simple order and beauty of life, by interposing unnecessary limits and controls over children.

We are glad our children are in motion most of the day. We see that they are noticeably strong and healthy. We believe that their fulfillment as adults depends on their lives being built now on experiences that are chosen and self-determined. We want our children to grow against the natural limitations of life, and, we think because of this, to take on with spirit and competence some share of the much needed work of the world.

These are strong and lovely words. Many parents might find it helpful to quote parts of this statement in whatever home teaching plan they might submit to schools.

Two minor disagreements. At one point the brochure speaks of giving out assignments which it later contradicts. Consider this a slip of the pen. A child

working, by choice, on some art, craft, sport, or field of activity or study, might ask a teacher for some special work to do at home outside of school, but any such “assignment” could be given out anywhere, wherever the two people happened to be. And the brochure speaks of “classrooms.” A mistake, I think; a room which is used only for “classes,” whatever that word might mean in such a place, would be no good even for that. A room is a room, and people should be able to use it for anything that can be done in it, including hold a “class,” if that is what they want to do.

Learning Disabilities

Still planning a longer article on “Learning Disabilities.” For the time being, here is a question that it might be interesting and useful to ask school people and other L.D. believers:

How do you tell the difference between a learning *difficulty* (which we all experience every time we try to learn anything) and a learning *disability*? That is to say, how do you tell, or on what basis does someone decide (and who is the someone?) whether the cause of a given learning difficulty lies within the nervous system of the learner, or with things outside of the learner—the learning situation, the teacher’s explanations, the teacher him/herself, or the material itself? And if you decide that the cause of the difficulty lies within the learner, who decides, and again on what basis, whether or not that inferred cause is curable, in short, whether anything can be done about it, and if so, what?

If any readers ask this question of schools, I would like very much to know what answers (if any) they get.

To An Editor

One of our readers in Virginia, who is trying to take a child out of school, wrote the following letter to a leading Virginia newspaper, I think the Richmond Virginian-Pilot. I don't know yet whether the paper printed it, but it seems a good model for other parents to follow.

To The Editor:

This letter is in reference to the March 15 article on the Giesy family from Norfolk. The Giesys have chosen to educate their own children instead of using any of the traditional school programs.

I cannot help but cry out to my fellow Virginians. I cry out asking that we examine what we meant when we passed a compulsory attendance law. Did we intend that children have educational opportunity or did we mandate that children spend their day, between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., in certain officially designated buildings.

I suggest that the Virginia legislature never meant to enact legislation that would make it a *crime* for parents to educate their own children.

The U.S. Constitution and long tradition of the commonwealth has spelled out the importance of individual rights. These rights of men, women, and families call for restraint by the State in its attempt to prescribe the manner by which a family chooses to educate its children.

I am, as well as many of you may be, a supporter of a healthy public school system. The survival of such a system does not depend on stamping out alternative educational programs. Rather, the healthy growth of our public system depends on the existence of as many alternatives as possible.

I take this opportunity to speak to you of these matters because I, too, find myself and my family at odds with the attitude of the official educators of our society. I, too, am being threatened by the local superintendent of schools to return one of my children to schooling which is acceptable to the superintendent, else my wife and I will have criminal charges brought upon us. The State Department of Education claims that a teaching credential is required for a parent to teach his own child. An elementary analysis of the education courses required for a teaching credential will readily show that it is designed specifically for those who will teach in classroom settings, not home environments.

The Department of Education gives no credit to parents for the experience gathered over the years. This experience is generally of greater value than courses on class room management to parents teaching in a home educational setting.

If the Department of Education is fixed upon the concept of credentials for parents who want to teach their own children, then perhaps they should lobby with the State Council of Higher Education to create a "Home Teaching Credential," the characteristics of which might be more suitable to home teaching. Such certificates could be obtained via correspondence courses, tests, classes at community colleges or through continuing education programs of universities. Credit could be given to parents for the experience they already have.

Indeed, the people who should act on this are the people we have elected to represent us in Richmond. It should not be a problem which is dealt with by the vested interest at the Department of Education.

I call on John Chichester and his colleagues from the Senate Education Committee to address the inequity that the Virginia Department of Education has been visiting upon some in our State.

The Law Summed Up

Let me sum up what the courts have had to say about the right of parents to teach their children at home. The law is an ever-changing body, and this is the law as of today.

1) Parents have a right to educate their children in whatever way they believe in; the state cannot impose on all parents any kind of educational monopoly, of schools, methods, or whatever. *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, and most recently *Perchemlides*.

2) The state may not deprive parents of this right for arbitrary reasons, but only for serious educational ones, which it must make known to parents, with all the forms of due process. Again, *Perchemlides*.

3) A state that would deny parents these rights by saying that their home education plan is inadequate has a burden of proof to show beyond reasonable doubt that this is so. Parents are assumed to be competent to teach their children until proved otherwise. This Assumption of Competence is kin to and part of the general Assumption of Innocence (of the accused) which holds in all criminal proceedings. *Sessions*.

4) In order to prove that the parents' education plans are inadequate, the state must show that its own requirements, regulations, etc. are educationally necessary and do in fact produce in its own schools better results than the parents get or are likely to get. *Hinton et.al.* (Ky.)

Texas Law

A parent writes from Texas:

I thought you might like to know that it is not against the law to un-school your child in the state of Texas. There is a compulsory attendance law but if a parent signs a waiver that is all that is necessary to withdraw him from the school system. However, in many cases it is not even necessary to sign a waiver. We did not and neither did a friend who withdrew her son and put him in our local university, where he is doing well. The university will not give him his earned credits until he is old enough to take a G.E.D. exam, but they are holding them for him .

That is certainly interesting news. We need to know a bit more—where does one get the waiver, what does it say, to whom does one give it after signing it, is this true in all school districts or only certain ones? We'll be grateful for any information Texas readers can give us about this.

Judge Greaney's Ruling

In *GWS #7* we said that a Massachusetts Superior Court judge had handed down a ruling favorable to the Perchemlides family, and that in a later issue we would print some of the most significant parts of this (very long) ruling. (We will continue to send copies of the entire ruling for \$2.)

Judge Greaney's ruling says, in part:

II. Constitutional And Statutory Claims

Central to the Perchemlides' complaint is their assertion that under the United States Constitution, parents derive certain rights and accrue certain protections to choose an alternative to public school education for their children. It is important to note at the outset the exact point of the argument. Plaintiffs do not argue that there exists a federally protected right to *home* instruction, *per se*, but rather that federal protection attaches to a home education alternative which is supplied by state statute and state court decisions. In reply, defendant willingly concedes that parents have a "fundamental right" to send their children to non-public schools as long as those schools meet valid educational standards set by the state.

For reasons discussed below, I conclude that although it is the right and duty of the superintendent or the school committee to inquire into, and either approve or disapprove home education plans, the parents' constitutional right to decide how their own children shall be educated places reasonable limitations on that inquiry and thus circumscribes the discretion of the local authorities. Due in large part to the novelty of this situation for the Amherst school system, and to a genuine misunderstanding about the scope of parents' rights to home educate their children, the superintendent and the school committee have, in the Court's opinion, applied some standards to the review of the plaintiff's plan which are inappropriate, and the matter must be returned to them for further consideration.

Constitutional and Statutory Protection of the Right to Home Education.

On a number of occasions, the United States Supreme Court has held that certain personal rights can be deemed “fundamental” or “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty” and are included in a guarantee of “personal privacy” that emanates from the more specific guarantees contained in the Bill of Rights. Because the Constitution does not mention “privacy,” courts and commentators have disagreed about the precise constitutional source of the guarantee. Older decisions looked to the concept of liberty contained in the first section of the Fourteenth Amendment. *Pierce V. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925); *Meyer V. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390 (1922). More recent cases, while not entirely abandoning this ground, have drawn upon the First, Fourth, Fifth, and Ninth Amendments in various contexts. *Roe V. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113, 152-53 (1973). Whatever the precise constitutional source of the individual right to privacy, the Supreme Court has stated that the right not only protects against the unjustified disclosure of personal matters, but also protects the individual’s “interest in independence in making certain kinds of important decisions.” *Whalen v. Roe*, 429 U.S. 589 n.26 (1977).

It has become an axiom of constitutional law that one such kind of decision that individuals may make without unjustified government interference deals with matters relating to “child rearing and education.” *Smith V. Offer*, 431 U.S. 816 (1977); *Carey V. Population Services International*, 431 U.S. 678 (1977); *Whalen V. Roe*, supra; *Paul V. Davis*, 424 U.S. 693 (1976); *Wisconsin V. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 20-5(1972); *Griswold V. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479 (1965); *Pierce V. Society of Sisters*, supra. The Supreme Court has repeatedly reaffirmed the authority of the *Pierce* holding that “the fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only.” *Pierce V. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 535. The nature of the parents’ right on a constitutional level, and the fact that it draws support from several branches of the Bill of Rights was concisely expressed in these terms by Justice Douglas concurring in *Roe V. Wade*:

“The Ninth Amendment obviously does not create federally enforceable rights. It merely says, “the enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.” But a catalogue of these rights includes customary, traditional, and time honored rights, amenities and privileges. Many of them, in my view, come within the meaning of the term “liberty” as used in the Fourteenth Amendment ... (one) is *freedom of choice in the basic decisions of one’s life* respecting marriage, divorce, contraception, *and the education and upbringing of children.*” (Judge Greaney’s italics)

Thus, parents need not demonstrate a formal religious reason for insisting on their right to choose other than public school education since the right of privacy, which protects the right to choose alternative forms of education, grows out of constitutional guarantees in addition to those contained in the First Amendment. Non-religious as well as religious parents have the right to choose from the full range of educational alternatives for their children. There will remain little privacy in the “right to privacy” if the state is permitted to inquire into the motives behind parents’ decisions regarding the education of their children. As plaintiffs here point out, the plaintiffs in *Pierce* included a secular military academy, and the holding in that case did not mention religious beliefs of the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment. See also, *Farrington V. Tokyshige* 273 U.S. 284 (1927); *Meek V. Pittenger*, 374 F. Supp. 639, 653 E.D. Pa. 1974).

Without doubt, then, the Massachusetts *compulsory attendance statute might well be constitutionally infirm if it did not exempt students whose parents prefer alternative forms of education.* (Ed. note: These are my italics, and these words from Judge Greaney’s ruling should certainly be quoted by unschooling parents in any state which does not make something other than school attendance a specifically legal alternative.)

B. Scope of the State’s Regulatory Powers.

Just as the Court in *Roe v. Wade* recognized that the state has important interests in regulating the abortion decision, the state has an

important interest in regulating the education of school age children. The defendants accurately point out that attempts by parents to deny that the state has any right to set educational standards for school age children have been consistently rejected by the federal courts.

The Perchemlides do not dispute that under the police power the state is obliged to see that children are educated and to set reasonable standards that define and limit the term “education.” Neither do the Perchemlides seek to do that which is proscribed by *Wisconsin v. Yoder*—to “substitute their own idiosyncratic views of what knowledge a child needs to be a productive and happy member of society” for the standards set by duly elected and appointed officials. On the contrary, the plaintiffs appear essentially willing to conform their home education program to the state’s bona fide academic and curricular standards. (Ed. note: As to which of these standards are in fact bona fide, see Judge Meigs’ ruling in *GWS #8*, also very much worth quoting in any home education proposal.)

The state may not, however, set standards that are so difficult to satisfy that they effectively eviscerate the home education alternative. (Ed. italics.) ... (the state) may not use regulations or standards as a means of discouraging alternatives which are not identical to the public schools. *Farrington v. Tokyshige*, supra; *State v. Whisner*, 351 N.E.2nd 750 (S.Ct. Ohio 1976)....

It follows from the very nature of the right to home education that the school committee or the superintendent may not reject a proposal submitted by parents on the ground that the home environment is *socially* different from the classroom environment....

Under our system, the parents must be allowed to decide whether public school education, including its socialization aspects, is desirable or undesirable for their children....

III. Judicial Review

Given the competing interests present in this case the proper role of the court is as follows: *First*, it must measure the substantive standards used by the superintendent and the school committee against the

constitutional limitations already outlined. *Second*, it must analyze the procedural due process aspects of the case to determine how much process is due the parents and whether they obtained the process due. *Third*, once satisfied that constitutional standards have been employed and due process protections accorded, the reviewing court should do no more than examine the school committee's articulated reasons for its decision to see whether it can determine "with some measure of confidence whether or not the discretion...has been exercised in a manner that is neither arbitrary nor capricious" and whether the decision to deny the home education request "was reached for impermissible reasons or for no reason at all." *Dunlop v. Bachowski*, 421 U.S. 560, 571-73 (1975).

IV. Findings As To Standards And Procedural Due Process.

The school committee members and superintendent have stated that in evaluating plaintiffs' proposed plan, defendants applied the same standards used in approving any other form of alternative education. Such plan had to be equal in thoroughness and efficiency and in the progress made as that of the public schools. "That is the statutory standard used in evaluating *private school programs*. Nothing in the statute makes this standard directly applicable to the "otherwise instructed" language in which the Supreme Judicial Court, in the *Roberts* case, found a right to home education. Indeed, the way the statute is written indicates that applying criteria used to evaluate private schools may not be appropriate to a home education request. The statute very carefully delineates the type of schools that form a permissible alternative to public day schools and then reserves alternate education as a separate, distinct classification in this language: " or of a child who is being otherwise instructed in a manner approved in advance by the superintendent or the school committee."

There are certain ways in which individualized home instruction can never be the "equivalent" of any in-school education, public or private. At home, there are no other students, no classrooms, no pre-existing schedules. The parents stand in a very different relationship to their children than do teachers in a class full of other people's

children. In view of these differences, to require congruent “equivalency” is self-defeating because it might foreclose the use of teaching methods less formalized, but in the home setting more effective than those used in the classroom. For example, certain step-by-step programs of graded instruction, involving the use of standardized texts and tests periodically administered, might be unnecessary when the parent-teacher enjoys a constant communication with the child, and so is able to monitor his or her comprehension and progress on an individualized level impossible in a school setting.

In summary, the record shows that school committee members had somewhat contradictory notions about what standards to apply to the Perchemlides application, and that most of the committee members relied upon impermissible standards, to one degree or another. Much of the difficulty encountered by all parties in this situation could be avoided were the school committee and superintendent to draft broad standards setting out their expectations for home education programs. Although I decline to rule that such standards are required in this context, it is significant that federal courts have viewed, in other contexts, “the establishment of written, objective and ascertainable standards” as an “intricate (sic) part of Due Process.” *Baker-Chaput v. Cammett* 406 F. Supp. 1134 (D. N.H. 1076), and cases cited.

Some of the reasons cited for the rejection of the Perchemlides’ plan, such as lack of group experience, improper motive, and bad precedent, clearly intrude too far on the parents’ right to direct their children’s education. Other strictly academic standards used may have been perfectly appropriate, but even here it is impossible to know whether the authorities disapproved the plan because Richard could not be expected to learn as much as he would in public school, a permissible reason, or because the actual program of study was not a carbon copy of the public school curriculum, a requirement which is not imposed by statute and intrudes too far on the right to home education.

Let's Use It

We print these words from Judge Greaney's ruling so that from now on people will quote freely from them in any home education plan they draw up. These words, in short, are not here just to make people feel better (though we hope and expect that they will do that) but to be used.

We have quoted the parts of the ruling that are most important and helpful to us. But any who think that they may have some sort of conflict with the schools would probably do well to read the entire ruling (av. here for \$2). It is an excellent lesson in how thorough and careful judges think -something we cannot know too much about.

No more than lawyers do judges like to lose. For a lawyer, losing is having a court rule against you; for a judge, it is having a higher court reverse you. Judge Greaney has taken great pains to build a ruling that will stand. He has left no weak spots through which a higher court might overturn it. Since his ruling is so strong, there are (so far) no signs that the school district in this case is planning to appeal it.

What has this to do with us? The lawyer, in preparing a legal brief, tries to construct an argument so solid that, in effect, all the judge has to do is sign it. Our job is to put into every home education proposal a legal argument that is so strong that the schools' lawyers will not be able to overturn it in court, or better yet, will not even wish to take it to court. The more we can learn to think like a careful judge, the better our chances of winning in court if we have to go there, or of staying out altogether.

That's why we have had, and will have, all this legal stuff in *GWS*.

School Or Club?

Nancy Plent also writes:

One more thing I did want to say is about the other mothers I'm meeting. None of us worry about social adjustment stuff, we all know that kids can keep occupied with friends of all ages and with their own interests. But every one of us feels that our kids need more kids. They are feeling "different" and left out, no matter what their situation. E often greets a sunny day with, "Boy, it's a great day to ride green machines! I'll call Tommy and, oh, he's in school today." No big thing, maybe, but it happens often, to all of our kids, and we worry about it.

For this reason, the talk always comes around to "maybe if we started some kind of school." We know it is a problem without an answer right now, but we bat it around wistfully all the time anyway. I can only see an answer when we find more people doing it, convince more people that they should do it. I'm giving it all I've got.

Some thoughts on this. It would be a fine thing if in any community there were more places for children, and indeed people of all ages, to get together and do various kinds of things. I talk about what such places might be like in early chapters of *Instead Of Education*, and even more in the appendix of that book, which describes a remarkable place called the Peckham Center, which existed for a while in a part of London in the late 1930s.

But places like the Peckham Center are quite a way down the road. If we had a thousand unschooling families, maybe even five hundred or less, in a not too spread out area, they could probably find the resources to make themselves something like the Peckham Center, a family club. In some ways, the country clubs that rich folks belong to are a much better model of what we want than a school. Take away the eighteen-hole golf courses, the elaborate tennis courts and other facilities, the palatial clubhouse, and what's left is very close in spirit to what we are after. You don't have to play golf just because you go to the golf club. You don't have to do anything. There are certain kinds of resources there for you to use, if you want, but you can spend the day there sitting in a chair and looking at the sky. Why not an

inexpensive version of the same thing? A country club without the country—or perhaps a different kind of country, just a little patch of field or woods or whatever is handy.

If we can keep the idea of a family club in mind, we will probably make fairly sensible choices and decisions. But if we start thinking and talking about “a school,” we are very likely to repeat a cycle that by now people have gone through hundreds of times.

It begins with a small group of Founding Families (hereafter FF), who want to start a small cooperative school (maybe day care center). By doing all the work themselves, and keeping everything modest, they hope to be able to pay the expenses out of their own pockets and what little they can raise. They start their school, and the first thing that happens is that they find that most of the new families who bring their children into the school don’t want to do much of the work. They want to use the school, not build it or keep it going. The FF struggle for a while, trying to get parents to pledge so many hours of work per week, and so on. But the work load grows until finally the FF have to think about hiring some help.

At this point, most of those parents who are doing some work stop doing it. “Why should we have to do this, when we’re paying a teacher (or teachers)?” The teachers begin to do the work of the school, and the task of the parents becomes 1) to have meetings to argue about what the teachers should be doing, and 2) to raise money to keep the school going. Many parents are glad to do the first task, while the FF find themselves doing most of the second.

After a while one or more of the following things happens: 1) the school can’t raise the money it needs, and has to fold 2) the parents are torn apart by arguments about what the school should do, and the school breaks up 3) a group of richer parents who have enough money to keep the school going take control, and make it into a conventional school.

Even if the school avoids all these disasters, the FF eventually become exhausted by their struggles to keep the school alive, and give up. People who started the school because they couldn’t stand what conventional schools were doing to their children, say, “I’m exhausted, I can’t do any more of this,” and send their children right back to those same schools.

Of course, the children are better off for having escaped those schools, even if only for a few years, so perhaps this makes all the struggle

worthwhile. But when unschoolers write about starting a school so their children can meet with friends, I don't think this cycle of events is what they have in mind.

By the way, the cycle works about the same when the school is started by teachers. I know one of a small group of teachers, who after years of frustration started their own school so that, at last, they could teach children in a way they believed in. With great effort and sacrifice they kept the school going, and growing. But as it grew it needed more money, and became more and more dependent on a group of rich parents. One day this group said to the teachers and other parents, "We want this school to be more like regular schools. If you want to go along with us in this, fine. If not, and you outvote us, we'll take our money elsewhere." Most parents voted to go along with them. They then said to the teachers, whose work had built the school, "If you want to do things our way, fine; if not, good-bye." Good-bye it was. End of dream.

The money part of this sad scenario may change if things like voucher plans ever go through, which seems more likely now than it did even a year ago. But it will still be true that the more people come into your school, the greater will be the pressure to turn it into some kind of conventional school even the kind of pseudo-progressive school I wrote about in *How Children Fail*. If your school is a true school, it will be used more and more by people who are not unschoolers. The advantage of having a club is that families will have to unschool their children, and take for themselves the responsibility for helping them grow and learn, before they can take advantage of your club. So you will be dealing with people who agree with you on basic issues. But, as I say, if you form a regular school, which any people can send their children to, I don't know how you are going to keep it from being taken over sooner or later by people who are not unschoolers.

If readers have ideas about these matters, which I'm sure many will, I hope they will write.

Homeschool Guides

Richard & Joyce Kinmont, Rt. 2 Box 106-C, Brigham City, UT 84302, have sent me a copy of their book, *American Home Academy, The Journal Of A Private Home School* (\$4.25, +.50 post., + .20 sales tax in Utah), about how, and why, they unschooled their children and began teaching them at home. Many unschoolers, above all in Utah, will find it very encouraging and helpful. It is partly philosophy; partly a day-to-day account of what they did with their children, the most detailed and useful I have seen; and partly an account, again very detailed, complete with copies of letters from both sides, of their dealings with the school authorities.

On page 59, Mrs. Kinmont writes:

If you decide not to enroll your children in the public school system, your local district may feel faced with a problem. At best they may be honestly concerned that your children are being well taught. At worst, they may feel threatened by your automatic no-confidence vote and the money their district will lose by not having your children enrolled. In either case, they will probably feel that they hold a stewardship over you. Do they? Should they?

Certainly they shouldn't. If the public schools held stewardship over private education, there really wouldn't be any private education. Who, then, should hold stewardship? Who will check to see that the students are being well taught? The answer is, the private schools should answer to the same people who are now checking on the public schools to see that they are teaching the children well—the *parents*. If the parents don't take the responsibility, no one else can. Both public and private education must answer to the parents!

if your school board feels obligated by the compulsory attendance law to know that you are in fact teaching your children, and if they are well motivated, it should be easy to satisfy them. If they are really interested in stopping you and in possessing all power, you will have a more difficult -but not an impossible—time.

Here is Mr. Kinmont's first letter to school authorities, in this case the

State Board of Education:

This letter is to inform you that we have established a private school, known as ... located at the above address.

Our school is in operation at least 180 days per year, at least 5 1/2 hours per day. Our curriculum includes reading, writing, math, social studies, music, art, physical education, science, health, crafts, industrial arts, fine arts, free enterprise, and the Constitution. The student body consists solely of the members of our own family.

To the best of our knowledge, this letter completes our legal obligation. If there are any further requirements *established by law* (Ed. italics:—Mr. Kinmont emphasizes this point in all his letters to school people), please let us know and we will promptly comply.”

On the facing page, this quote from Justice McReynolds in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*:

The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations. (The Oregon Compulsory Education Act) interferes with the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control.

Later quotes from *People v. Levisen*, 404 Ill. 574, 90 N.E. 2d 213 (1950):
the law is not made to punish those who provide their children with instruction *equal or superior to that* obtainable in the public schools. It is made for the parent who fails or refuses to properly educate his child.

We do not think that the number of persons, whether one or many, make a place where instruction is imparted any less or more a school.

Mrs. Kinmont later writes:

“A few weeks after this visit (from school officials) received from a friend ... a message from an attorney that I should under no circumstances allow any school administrators into my home. I now see that this is very good

advice. It would be nice to believe that these men are really only trying to help, as they say they are and as they should be, but we must be prepared for the possibility that they are really looking for ways to intimidate. In every case I know of where they have been allowed in, it has worked out badly for the family involved. Since this advice was unsolicited, and from a good man, we will heed it.”

The following letters from Mr. Kinmont to the Director of Pupil Personnel of the local school system seem to me a model of what such letters should be:

Thank you for your letter of ... We believe it would be most beneficial to be able to insure that our program is giving the equivalent of instruction required in public schools. In order to do this, we will need the following:

1. A copy of that part of the Utah Code which identifies the instruction required in public schools.
2. A copy of the public school curriculum by grades.
3. The minimum learning requirements in each subject.
4. The final examinations which determine that the minimum information has been learned.
5. A description of the action taken when a student does not meet the minimum learning requirements in any subject.

To further insure that we will be in compliance with any possible future court decisions, we would also appreciate receiving the following:

1. The full text of the Attorney General’s opinion.
2. The qualifications you would require of a private school teacher if—that responsibility were ever legally granted to the District.
3. Copies of the laws you mention relating to health of children, construction of buildings, course of study, etc.

We appreciate the kind tone of your letter. As my wife informed you

on the telephone, however, we no longer feel a personal visit to our home would be necessary or appropriate.

We would be happy to inform you about our courses of study. We cover a great many subjects; and you are, of course, only concerned with those courses which are required by law. So if you will please provide us with a copy of the law which identifies the required courses, we will be happy to provide you with the information you requested.

To insure that we have met the minimum standards of the public schools, we do want to set up some minimum learning requirements and testing procedures for those courses prescribed by law. Again, we are awaiting information from you as to what these classes and the minimum standards are.

Some final remarks by Mrs. Kinmont:

If we should ever be required by a court of law to enroll our children in the public schools, we would do so. But I would continue to teach them during non-school hours, and *I would spend a great deal of time in their school classrooms* (Ed. italics—and I would sure like to be a fly on the wall during some of those visits!)

This little book is not meant to be a tirade against the public school system. No matter how great their schools were, we would still want to teach our own children. Ours is much less a step away from the public schools and much more a step toward family education.

Help your children develop their creativity. As they do, you will find them more and more going off and learning things on their own. Then they will begin bringing exciting new creations and ideas to you. (Andrea wrote about a new idea yesterday: when a pencil is used up it is not really gone, but is spread all over dozens of pieces of paper.) Sometimes you will feel like you have pushed a small snowball over the side of a tall mountain and you are standing in amazement watching it gather speed and grow to giant proportions.

I do strongly recommend this book—the Kinmonts wrote me that they

were preparing a newer and more up-to-date version – above all for parents who would like to teacher their children at home but don't know how to begin.

Joyce Kinmont said to me in a letter that if she were starting al over again, knowing what she does now, she would do much less teaching, less planning of the children's learning. But that is all right. Parents who start to do this have to do it in a way that makes them comfortable, otherwise their worries will worry the children and the whole thing won't work. If it gives parents a little needed security at a first to say that we will have Reading at 9 a.m. and Arithmetic at 10, that's OK.

Just a few days ago I received from Phil Donahue's office another booklet on home schooling, along with a letter from the author, Mary Bergman, who had asked that these materials be sent on to me. The booklet is called "Legal Papers And Letters Used for Establishing PIONEER TRAILS ACADEMY." I can't find anything in it which says how much it costs, but you can find out from the author, at Pioneer Trails Academy, PO Box 265, Morgan UT 84050. It is from this book that Richard Kinmont got the text of the letter that he first wrote to the State Board of Education; I gather that the Bermans have been schooling their children at home for longer than the Kinmonts—their first pupil is about to graduate from college. I hope to be able to quote some material from the booklet in the next GWS. Meanwhile, here are encouraging words from Mary Bergman's letter:

We use these books with seminars for setting up families into schools. *This summer we established over three hundred home schools* (Ed. italics).

I would like to answer several of the questions which were asked on this program. First, and most important to the average inquirer is the social adjustment of a home taught student. They are more outgoing, friendlier, more self-confident, better conversationalists, and stronger leaders than the public school variety. Our children graduate from our home academy and are admitted directly into college with no difficulty. At present 19-year-old Cathy is a graduating senior (Ed. note: She entered at 15.) at Weber State College; Mark, our 17-year-old, is an advanced freshman at Southern Utah State; and Kevin, our 13-year-old, is being considered for early admission to a prestigious technical institute.

Math By Discovery

Joyce Kinmont wrote to me late in Jan., saying, in part:

I have finally been able, this year, to drop the public-school-at-home routine. I see my friends struggling with that problem, and I realize that it does take time.

I spend only 2½ hours a day with my children now. The first hour we study religion together, the next 1½ hours. I help them read something, write something, and do a page in their math books. The reading and writing they enjoy, but math is boring. I am still looking for a “John Holt” math program—something that asks questions and calls for experimentation, etc. Is there such a program?

I wrote back, in part:

Yes, there is such a program (or programs). (Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.) It is in my book, *What Do I Do Monday?*, which you can get from us here. I enclose a copy of a few pages, to give the general drift of it. I think it may be exactly what you are looking for.

A few quotes from those pages:

we learn best ... when we feel the wholeness and openness (to us) of the world around us, and our own freedom and power and competence in it.

My friend and I did some (beginning work in calculus)—all stuff he had had in the course. But now he said, “So that’s it. Why didn’t anybody tell me about that? It’s so simple *when you see what it’s about.*”

Exactly. What I had done, clumsily enough, was not to try to hand him a lump of knowledge, which people had already handed him and which he could not take hold of, (Ed. note: He was a brilliant student at Harvard at the time.) but to take him on a kind of human journey with the people who had first thought about and discovered these things.

Instead of wasting endless time trying to get children to memorize meaningless and disconnected “facts” and recipes, we should use

numbers inside the classroom to do what people use numbers to do outside the classroom—to measure, compare, analyze, predict.

(Doing these experiments) we can see what an extraordinary amount of work with numbers—observing, recording, adding, subtracting, plotting—would be involved in all this. I hope that teachers will not think that the *point* of all this activity, all this investigation of skill growth and skill loss, (Ed. note: What the experiments were about.) is just to do some disguised arithmetic. Whoever thinks this way will completely miss the point, and will, in addition, spoil all this activity for the children. The *point* of all this investigating is to find answers to questions; the only use of the arithmetic is to help us find them. People did not think of measuring things so that they would get good at arithmetic; they measured things because they wanted or needed to find out or remember certain things about them, and they became better at arithmetic because they used it to do their measuring, and found that it helped. But it was the measuring, not the arithmetic, that was of chief importance. The need, the act that requires the skills, *creates* the skills.

(For more discovery math, see GWS #4 and #6.)

Tidbit From Manas

in France, Fontenelle, although a popularizer of Cartesian cosmology, saw where this excess of simplicity might lead. In *Purity of Worlds* (1686) he wrote:

“I perceive,” said the Countess, “Philosophy is now become very Mechanical.” “So mechanical,” said I, “that I fear we shall quickly be ashamed of it; they will have the World to be in great, what a watch is in little; which is very regular & depends only upon the just disposing of the several parts of the movement. But pray tell me, Madam, had you not formerly a more sublime Idea of the Universe?”

A Private Reader

A mother writes:

The best thing I wanted to share with you is that E is reading. I was prepared to see him a non-reader still at the age of 10, 12—who could tell? He was fascinated with the shapes of letters on his father's truck when he was two, picked out letter shapes in sidewalk cracks, read short words on signs, played games with beginning sounds (his idea, not mine) and generally always liked words.

Getting from that stage to actually reading books left a blank in my mind. If he didn't want me to help him, didn't sit down and work at it, how was he going to read beyond the shopping center signs stage? It must be at this stage that school people nervously rush in with methods and phonics rules, and at time I had to stop myself from doing the same. Teaching habits die hard. He knew so much! But he wasn't pulling it all together, wasn't even interested in opening a book to see if he could read the whole thing. I was dying of curiosity to see if he could, but I kept on biting my lip every time a "lesson" threatened to come out.

He started about three months ago curling up with a comic book in the mag. section of the supermarket every week. Sometimes he'd buy one, and after we read it to him once, he'd take it off to a corner and study it for a while. He began "reading" them in bed. I knew something was happening because he got very quiet at these times, never asked me what a word was, and never made comments on the pictures. It became clear to me that reading was a private thing to him. After a while, he picked out easy books for bedtime reading and offered to read them to me. There were very few words he didn't know, and I'll never know how he learned the others. But it doesn't matter. He did it because he wanted to. I just hope I can keep on resisting all the pressures to do otherwise and let him set his own priorities.

Even the newest books on child raising are full of time-tables for kids. *The Mother's Almanac* (Doubleday) advises to ignore "bad words" in the very young, but swearers after the age of four should have their mouths washed out with soap and be given a hug after they stop crying.

It also included this gem:

Almost every child will point to what he wants, instead of trying to name it, which will annoy you more and more. (Ed. note: Why?) When he points to his juice next time, pick up the salt cellar, the pot holder, the tea strainer, saying “Is this it? You mean this?” And finally, when he is almost furious, “Oh, the bottle. Say BOT TUL,” and say the word face to face, several times, after you give it to him. He’ll be too angry to say it then, but he’ll try the next time or the next.

(Ed. note: On the whole, I am against book burning, but I think a good case could be made for burning that one, as cruel in spirit as it is stupid. When little children of that age point to things, they were asking *us* to name them, without teasing, insult, or sarcasm. They probably have a hunch what the things are called, but they want to test the hunch a few times to be sure of it before committing themselves—above all in families where they run some risk of being scolded or laughed at or otherwise humiliated if they make a mistake.

As for the soap, I’d like to make the author of that book eat a whole bar of soap—and no hug afterwards! There is a sensible and courteous, and therefore *effective* way of dealing with the whole question of forbidden words, about which I’ll write a separate short piece. But it shows how much cruelty toward children is in our very national bloodstream that a publishing house as established as Doubleday would publish such a book.)

The mother continues:

Not long ago we took E bowling. He’s been crazy about the idea since he was tiny, and always got a turn when grandpop’s bowling ball. As in a lot of things, we had better sense than to show him how or mark his score when he was tiny. For some reason, his new height led us to assume he wanted to play like adults. We bowled by frames, marked the scores, coached his throw when it began to go off, and watched unhappily as he got worse and worse and enjoyed it less and less.

Finally it dawned on us. He just liked the feeling of throwing the darned thing, and didn’t really care about score. In fact, every number we wrote made his actions stiffer and his face more anxious. We told him the game was over and we would just roll a few with him. Immediately his pleasure in the game returned and he rolled a couple of strikes.

We play golf and tennis the same way. Bat the ball around, sometimes

make up our own rules and contests, and quit whenever it bores us. Like the mother in *GWS* who learned she didn't have to be all that aggressive in Monopoly, I'm seeing that I have to question a lot of things we all grew up thinking of as the "right" way to do things. *GWS* serves to "remind" me of something new with each issue.

Many Thanks

Many people have very kindly responded to our request for volunteer help. We are gradually beginning to organize our work to make more and more use of it. If you volunteered, and we don't get something to you quickly, please be patient—we will have something for you sooner or later.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Growing Without Schooling 10

July 1979

Unschooling is still much in the news. Iowa has ended its prosecution of the Sessions family, and New Hampshire (according to a news report) has dropped its case against Betsy Tompkins, largely because the local school district has (wisely) decided it is costing too much money.

In Minnesota a small town jury found Mrs. Wunsch guilty of violating compulsory attendance laws, but the verdict was so obviously prejudiced, and against the whole weight of the evidence, that the judge (rightly and legally) overturned the verdict.

Rev. Paul Lindstrom of the Christian Liberty Academy writes that in the nine unschooling cases with which his organization has been involved, the parents have won seven and lost two.

Two families, one in Indiana (a first for that state, as far as I know) and one in New Hampshire, have persuaded their local schools to cooperate with their home schooling plans.

A mother on Cape Cod tells me that she has been teaching her children at home with the *enthusiastic* cooperation of the local schools, who welcome the children any time they want to go to school for special projects, field trips, etc. More on this in the next issue.

The ABC "20-20" show taped us here in the office, and also taped much of the Ohio meeting of the National Coalition of Alternative Community Schools. They tell us they plan to air this show in early September, but probably won't be able to give us a definite date until just a few days before the show. This is too bad, as it won't give us time to send out a notice to GWS readers. Needless to say, we will do so if we can.

So many readers and supporters called up radio station WRNG in Atlanta,

GA, asking them to talk about unschooling, that the station is going to do a phone interview with me at 7 p.m., Tues. July 9. Readers in other places may be able to get radio stations to do the same.

I may also appear on the Joel Stevak TV show in Philadelphia, 9 a.m. on Mon. July 16, but that is not yet definite.

Donna Richoux has moved from St. Louis to Boston to work with us at the office -and her help is very valuable, too.

The group of people who took out a 74X sub to *GWS* have since bumped it to 86X! Someone wrote that, not knowing how to get in touch with us, she asked all the libraries in her area about *GWS*, and none had even heard of it. If libraries in your area don't know about us, please tell them.

News From N.H.

Last month we successfully got our son J, who is seven and in second grade, excused from school until June. We will have to reapply for each successive school year, but presumably the process will become easier as time goes on.

According to a recent policy set out by the N.H. State Board of Education, a local school board can give parents permission to teach their children at home if the parents can prove that their children are suffering a “manifest educational hardship” by remaining in the public school

We proved “manifest educational hardship” in J’s case by showing that, basically, he had learned everything he knows *at home*, not at school, and that because we have the time and dedication etc. to teach him, it was a hardship to keep him in school, where he spent the day doing mimeographed papers, and had no individual time with the teacher.

Since then the changes that have occurred in J have been unbelievable. Gone are the fits of temper that erupted every day around 4 p.m., gone are the headaches, the lines of tension around his mouth, and gone is his depression. He used to complain bitterly that he had no time to read (schools don’t let you read these days until you’ve mastered the 1,000 “skills” deemed necessary to learn this “most difficult subject”!), and consequently he read every free second he had outside of school and rarely played. He didn’t eat his lunch because it got stale at school, he came home with wet, cold feet acquired at recess and he barely spoke to us. We had thought, “J is going through a stage. All kids are like this etc.”, but boy were we wrong! These days J sleeps well, eats well, *laughs, plays and learns*. He gets his (apparently psychologically necessary) reading done in the morning, does his “school work” happily because we learn about the things he wants to learn about - Indians, dinosaurs, binary numbers—and then he has time to do woodworking, skiing, art, and playing. The school board was worried that J would become a social misfit, but just the opposite has happened.

And Providence, R. I.

Peter Van Daam writes:

There was a radio poll a few weeks ago. More called in saying that they could teach children better at home—739 Yes, 664 No.

That same radio interviewed the R.I. Commissioner of Education who admitted that the State does not know how many children are learning at home, but that they have legitimate reasons for doing so (which he listed).

Last Friday local public television featured Brigitta and me on a panel about home-based education.

The lawyer representing the R.I. Dept of Education made a strong observation that everyone seems to be getting “hung up” on due process. (Ed. note: An odd way, to say the least, for a lawyer to talk about a Constitutional right.)

The state’s largest community action group has invited us to their congress in two weeks where they will help me introduce a resolution affirming the parent’s right and responsibility to control the education of his child and the state’s obligation to assist the parents to fulfill that obligation.

The state-wide Coalition for Consumer Justice had a special “new issues” committee meeting where I presented the concept of children as unwilling consumers of unwanted (and harmful) services in unresponsive schooling structures that refuse to acknowledge any accountability. They are following that up.

A major radio station taped a 1/2 hour session for its “community access” program which apparently has a broad audience. And one of the major TV stations is coming to our home this Sunday to focus in on the perplexities faced by two parents sincerely concerned about their parental responsibilities,

So, I think home-based education is much more a community issue, People recognize and greet us. Three families nearby have taken their children out of school after counselling with us, A fourth wrote two days ago seeking encouragement and information.

I find that people respond most profoundly when I bring up the issue of love and individualism. They seem to identify with my desire that my children learn to be vulnerable, open, giving, kind, patient, long suffering and tolerant rather than another organization person who has found his own edge

over his fellow man.

Peter also sent me a copy of a letter from the Principal of the school where his daughter was enrolled. It says, in full:

Because Julia has not attended school at all this year, in what was to be her third grade experience, and state law requires children to attend school between the ages of seven and sixteen, I am compelled to retain Julia in the third grade. She will be carried on a third grade register here at King for the 1979-80 school year until that time (sic) she appears in school or the matter is adjudicated.

An interesting example of petty and vindictive school harassment. The principal is not “compelled “ by state law to do any such thing. If the Van Daams had been out of the country for a year or more, the local school would have tested her to see where she should be placed in school.

The Principal’s letter notes that copies were sent to two other school officials, one a “Student Relations Coordinator,” the other a “Segment Administrator.” What do these people do, I wonder, and how much do they get paid for doing it? Taxpayers might like to know the answers to these questions. They might find in them some of the reasons why schooling has become so expensive.

Paul Goodman wrote, many years ago, I think in his book *Compulsory Mis-Education* (well worth reading), that there were more public school administrators in the state of New York, with a population of 17 million, than in all of Western Europe, with a population of 200 million. And would guess that there are more administrators per pupil now than there were then.

Unschoolers facing a possible conflict with their school district might find this matter worth looking into. How many non-teachers are on their school district’s payroll, what do they get paid, what do they do?

The Providence Journal—Bulletin of 4/29/79 carried a news story, saying, in part:

This was the first organizational meeting of a still unnamed group of Rhode Island and Massachusetts parents who believe in educating their children at home—a volatile constitutional and educational issue

that has abruptly burst onto the local scene.

Thirty adults and a dozen or so children showed up for the session that had been called by Peter and Brigitta Van Daam, the East Side couple who were arrested April 11 for keeping their eight-year-old daughter, Julia, out of school. Their Family Court case has been continued to May 15.

The group included an auto mechanic, a Newport policeman, the chairman-elect of the Libertarian Party of Rhode Island, and a commercial artist.

Some came only to observe, but at least six of the families who participated are educating their children at home.

Most are doing so without the approval of school authorities—like the Van Daams and another Providence couple who didn't want their names used for fear it would speed the truant officer to their door.

Others reported that they have won School Committee permission for their home programs.

David Kendrick of Rehoboth, Mass., for example, said he has been given the okay to educate his nine-year-old daughter at home this year, using a correspondence course supplemented by a tutor who visits once a week.

Virtually all asserted that home education is a constitutional right that supersedes state laws requiring school attendance for children between the ages of 7 and 16.

Most indicated that their interest in home education was rooted in their dissatisfaction with formal education, particularly public education .

The group represented a wide range of philosophic and religious points of view.

At least one parent came with questions and left convinced. (She) said that she intends to take her two children out of the Providence

elementary schools tomorrow.

In The Woods

I moved to Canada, to the country, without electricity or running water, with firewood to cut and food to grow, and eventually children to care for and learn with. Somewhere along the line I decided that my children would never go to any school unless they wanted to go. And that if they wanted to go to school we would find a school we were all happy with. I have given this more importance than most other things.

I like spending a day as often as possible (usually about once a week) when I have no other responsibilities than to be with children, follow their interests, show them things I think they might like, talk, read, explore. Most of the time I am very busy, and of course that's great learning time for us all. But so much of the time I'm either too busy or tired to really respond to some questions or help a child with an intricate problem or project or to just fall into their play and antics.

In *GWS* I've been reading about unschooling and learning not being separated from life and that we all are teachers and learners. At the same time I think a healthy community can include the adults (especially those who want to) spending part of their time giving undivided attention to children rather than always relating with children while in the midst of other responsibilities.

When I devote a day to the children, I let a few other children in the area know they are welcome to come over for the day. This gives the children here a chance to spend the day with their friends—a big thrill. We usually have a wonderful time together. We all enjoy a great deal of creative activities painting, dancing, using clay, drama, costuming, singing. We also really enjoy going for walks or doing something in the garden or orchard. or talking. Something they always want me to do is to read to them (none of them read really fluently yet). I let everyone choose a book or story. Those who can, do part of the reading. We read all kinds of books -simple and complex, with and without pictures.

I often write on a scrap of paper a few ideas of things to do together before the day starts. Sometimes we do those things, sometimes we don't. I am very willing to follow the lead of the children I find these days very fulfilling and worthwhile. Whether or not we call it school is irrelevant to me.

Last fall we had a school group meeting twice a week. Mostly 2-4 year olds and mostly girls with one 5 year old girl and a 6 year old boy. Altogether there were about 12 children. It was quite a delightful group.

This is the day I remember best from that time: We began painting, and working with clay, and playing in the yard in front of the house. As lunch time neared we decided to have a picnic in the little pine tree forest. (This was one of the favorite nice weather activities.) The little pine trees are about 12 years old and a wonderful size for little people to climb and create fantasy worlds within.

As we were eating, I noticed some tiny green plants growing within the browns, reds, oranges of the fall leaves. I looked closer at the little plants and suggested that the children near me help me look for the various tiny plants growing around us. We found my favorite spring greens sorrel and peppergrass—and some clover and a couple of plants none of us were familiar with. We nibbled the greens and were pleased with our discovery.

Soon the wonderful game of “roaring lions in the forest” began. The other mother and I sat to rest for a while. One child (3 years) stayed with us looking at the plants. She was a very quiet child and often stayed by herself very absorbed for long times with her interests while all the others very easily related and played and talked with each other. Sometimes I wondered if she wanted help getting to know others, if she was lonely and frightened in her solitude. But from observing her I’d decided she was actually quite happy on her own a lot. She almost never talked at school, but I knew she could talk because I’d heard her talk to her older sister quite freely. So when she began talking to me about the plants I was delighted. We looked very closely at many little plants and she pulled some out to look at the roots. Then she looked at the different levels of dead leaves—the brand new, bright crunchy ones were pushed away by her delicate finger, next there were softer brown ones, then black matted ones, then dirt. We talked throughout this examining of the magic of plants and earth.

When that was complete we moved off to join the others who led us through the pines to the edge of the swamp-cedars and black gooshy mud and water. Someone took shoes and socks off and within a very short time all shoes and socks came off. There was a great deal of splashing and stamping and singing and joy. Someone fell down and got his pants mucky. (I thought—what are his parents going to think? they were obviously having way too

much fun to stop them.) Soon all clothes were being taken off and put on the moss under the cedars. And the jolly dance continued. The little girl I described earlier was joining right in with all the others looking quite radiant. One child stayed back from the muck and the wet. He didn't seem disturbed by the others dancing in the muck, but obviously it didn't appeal to him. Exploring the swamp went on until it was time to dry off, get dressed and go home

I thought about that day and wondered how most of the parents would have responded. Some, don't think would have allowed the naked water play—others probably would have. Some probably would have felt there wasn't much happening that day as much of it was spent on a long walk. But I was glad that the other mother who was there was as willing as I to follow the littler people on their adventure and I loved that day!

Calvert News

A mother writes:

I had no problem enrolling Sean in Calvert—we move a lot—and all they require is for legality's sake—a change in address every four months. If we didn't move every four months then I was required to go to the school and get an approving letter from them, which I've never had to do!

I've been very pleased with the Home Course—it is variable and easy to work with and learn from. Sean finished a 9 month course in 6 months and is looking forward to his 4th grade course. He got “messed up” (to put it mildly) his 3rd year in public schools and cured me of that.

Growing in Denmark

From a Danish government pamphlet, by Frede Petersen, about Carl Nielsen (one of my favorite composers):

It was in Hans Andersen's island of Funen ... that Carl Nielsen, Denmark's greatest composer of recent times, was born on June 9, 1865. His parents were simple, indeed poor, people; the father was a housepainter but would do odd jobs on farms in order to augment the income of an ever-growing family. Carl was the seventh of twelve children.

The craft of music came to play no small part in the life of this large family: Painter Niels, as he was invariably called in the neighborhood, was also a village musician. Music was his chief interest and he was a valued player at feasts and dances in the island, where he also taught music and dancing.

Scarcely anyone has described this island more lovingly than Carl Nielsen.

If, from a lofty mountain in the middle of Funen, we could look down over the whole island, tracing its outline against the blue sea, we would make the delightful discovery that, viewed this way too, Funen is one of the fairest of lands. We would reflect on all the island's beauties for the hundredth time and never weary—the breadth in proportion to the circumference, the blue inlets in relation to the sky, the little plains and the plump hills in contrast to the woods and hedges—oh, there is so much! Nowhere else in the world have I seen lanes and footpaths wind so snugly sweet, making you want to lie down on the ground and kiss it. We have all read in books of men kneeling and kissing their native soil. But that would be in the *great* moments, perhaps after long absence, and the grand manner comes easily then. Here it is quite different; not solemnly, but spontaneously, sincerely, suddenly; as if one's heart wanted to pop out and play with little red and blue balls in the spring air, hopping and skipping for joy like lambs that do not bleat but cluck.

His boyhood in Funen tending geese and cows, in close contact with Nature, developed his sense of all that showed growth and energy. He would lie for hours in the field watching the drifting clouds, the rhythmical waving of the corn, or a little feather floating over the rippling surface of the pond. This awareness of the exuberant life around him is reflected later in his art.

His first steps in music were taken when he was a small boy. One day, when he was ill with measles, his mother gave him one of his father's violins which hung on the wall, and on it he tried to find the tunes she sang to him. His father's only comment on this early start was to take the violin from him and tune it. Later, his father gave him regular guidance and soon Carl was able to go with him to play for dances, weddings, and other feasts. To this primitive form of music Carl Nielsen ascribes no little importance in the development of his compositional talent. In the long run, however, the routine playing, as second violin, of rude three- and four-part dance rhythms failed to satisfy him. Like his companions he soon began to improvise counter melodies and rhythms to the simple harmonies which governed this dance music. He also composed tunes, and in his reminiscences he quotes one which provoked his father's distaste on account of its liberal syncopation, which "nobody could dance to."

Besides this utilitarian music, Nielsen in his boyhood made some acquaintance with the classics, which were played *under simple forms* (Ed. italics) in local music societies, and together all this helped to refine his sense of music. At the age of fifteen, after an interrupted period of apprenticeship to a local grocer, he was encouraged by his father to practice for a month on a new instrument, the bugle, and apply for a vacant post as bugler in the regimental band at Odense, which he obtained in competition with other applicants. His career as a musician was thus marked out. He continued to study the violin, mastered the elementary secrets of piano playing, and soon began to compose.

How different it was to be poor, in that place and that time. Today we

think of music, especially classical music, violins, pianos, etc. as being for the middle and even upper middle class, wholly out of the reach of the poor, most of whom, though poor by today's standards, would not have looked poor to the Nielsen family, who in ten years could not have saved up the price of a TV set (if there had been such a thing).

A Danish friend of mine told me a little about his boyhood in the Danish countryside in the 1920s. His family raised (among other things) strawberries; but except perhaps once a year, for a very special treat, the children could not eat them—they needed every penny they could get by selling them. One of the minor tragedies of his young life came one day when, as he was about to eat the dozen or so berries that were to be his treat for the summer, he mistakenly put salt on them instead of sugar.

J. B. Priestley, in one of his books, describes the lives of working-class poor people in the wool district in Yorkshire in which he grew up. It was not at all uncommon for these families, living on the edge of bitter poverty, to have a piano in the house, on which at least one member of the family could and regularly did play some of the great classics. Miners, factory workers, mill workers, sang in great choruses of hundreds of voices, which every year sang "The Messiah" and other great works. (Many of these choruses still exist, though whether many working class people still sing in them I do not know.)

And though Carl Nielsen had to start doing real work very early in his life, at the same time how much space and leisure there was in that life, time for his interests and talents to show, and grow.

Like the gypsy children of whom we wrote in an earlier *GWS*, who learned to play by playing in a working gypsy band, Carl Nielsen was from very early in his life a working musician. He was not studying music so that someday he might make music. He was making music as he went along.

And in Canada

A mother writes:

I made up my mind two days ago not to force Michael (8) to read. I had pretty well decided I'd better and had even gotten together all the necessary stuff, but then I finished a book, *Better Late Than Early*, by Raymond Moore. Do read it.

Anyway, that same afternoon I happened to watch Michael out the window—he was hanging around the yard waiting for his father to come home (so he could grab a ride on the back of the truck—the excitement in that being in jumping *onto* a moving vehicle). So I just stood there watching him a bit—and I became quite overwhelmed by a feeling of the universe unfolding as it should. He was puttering around like he usually does—not doing anything in particular, just “bonding to the earth” as Pearce says in *Magical Child*.

Then, all of a sudden, he must have heard or seen a bird. (He's been quite deeply interested in birds lately.) And I watched in awe as he stalked it with all the grace, agility, and instinct of a long-ago Indian who was native to this prairie bush-land. The bird must have flown away, because just as suddenly he turned back in an 8-year-old sauntering down the road, quite at peace with the world out there because it made no demands on him.

I can't quite find the words for how I felt—a just-rightness—seeing my son growing up so at home with himself and the earth. And knowing that this is what made the exhausting battle with the School Authorities all worthwhile, and that this in essence is what we are fighting for: our children's right to grow as their individual natures move them.

I resolved then and there not to *make* him read. And if it comes down to a real crunch make him read, or go to jail—we will move. However, there are so many avenues of delay available in our case that by the time we come to the end of them, he may have already started reading and writing. He's almost 9 now.

P.S. The mother has just written me that he has started reading—without saying a word about it.

From a Mother

We read to our 4 year old, J, every night and try to pick up things we've read in National Geographic or GWS that he would be interested in as well as children's books. J particularly enjoyed the poem in #8. I wonder if a mimeographed collection of such child-centered stories would be enjoyed. (Ed.—Yes.) We've made a story up for J too, probably most everyone has. No great literary merit, but the intention in the making shines through them. Also compared with vast amounts of what passes for literature for children, they are quite good, I'm sure.

He also enjoyed most of the story about A and her apple picking. It has provided him with much fantasy material about how he can make money when he gets a bit older, how he wants to pick fast and well and help pay his own way, what he'll spend the money on (a telescope and "gas balloon"—this last from the NG story of the first men to ride a balloon across the Atlantic).

Want to substantiate what was mentioned in #8 about the rapid growth of children's attention spans when they are regularly read to. J would listen until our tongues were numb if we would read that long. We've read all the Little House (Laura Ingalls Wilder) books, *The Wizard Of Oz*, *Charlotte's Web*, *Heidi*, *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Alice In Wonder-Land*, *Through The Looking Glass*, to mention many but not all of the lengthy books, in the past two years (J aged 3 to 4) Now H, age 2, when tired will also climb up to hear stories such as these. From *Swiss Family Robinson*, J developed some funny locutions as crying "Seize her" of his sister who interfered with his play or "I gave chase" in his hunting games. This is the first place, I know, where they learn to relate what they don't understand to the context of what they do, to pick out the key words or phrases which once understood, open up the meaning of the rest. The first and primary place is probably that intense attention they give to adult conversation, not only but especially when it deals with love/hate, sex, death/ birth, people they know, and all that good stuff we all pay attention to. They usually know to keep quiet at the time. Then weeks or months later, you'll get a question like, "Why did Uncle John not want to marry Sarah and whose baby was it anyhow?" (We try to answer as fully as we can and honestly.)

Some books, though, e.g. *Wind In The Willows*, have proven for us too wordy. We realize we're out of step, but neither W nor I enjoyed it and after a few chapters, we set it aside explaining that J could read it himself when he was able to if he chose. Another thing we've done is to pick out interesting parts of books, the whole of which was too advanced to be appreciated, like the chapters about the wolves in *Never Cry Wolf* (Farley Mowat) or the story line in *Hans Brinker* (which has a long section about a skate trip the rich boys take, intended to educate about Holland, which we skipped).

On learning to read, I've noticed as two of my own children and several others have passed through this stage, they've been able to recognize and form the letters, put them into words, copy them, and thus write quite legibly and competently before they read more than a few words. They can write many things, real things, letters to one another (with no phone we send many notes), letters to Grandma, make lists (things to buy a favorite), write stories. These need not be perfect or even be sent. That can be left up to the child. Attention span here again incredible. The diligence. All this writing and being read of notes, lists, leads obviously and simply to that flash of recognition that is being able to read.

Learning to type. I too taught myself to type at about age 12 when at loose ends one summer. I had a teach—yourself to—type book which was quite sufficient, cost maybe 75¢ at that time. I wouldn't have the abstracting job I have now if I weren't a typist, and, since it's piece work, the pay rate would be much lower if I weren't a fairly skilled typist. I've never had any sort of instruction, but have had plenty of practice, mainly all the times when I've been doing schoolwork or making money with it. A good practice gimmick would be to borrow foreign books or journals from the library. I often have foreign journals to abstract and they have very different letter combinations from English: central Europe strengthens those zxcvb, little finger, left hand, letters; Japanese many vowels, and so on.

I also taught myself to knit from a book and have some of my most creative pleasure from it. I learned and knit and that's how got to be good at it. Just as with typing or any other skill. In the middle class milieu where I grew up everyone made a great fuss about talent. This person was artistically talented or that one academically talented. I have learned, at some cost, since then that although some people may do some tasks with greater initial ease, anything that you do over and over again you will get to be good at. My

mother, who considered herself to have a rather good voice, could not stand to hear me sing because I “had no talent.” Of course, since I never sang, except secretly to myself, when no one including myself could hardly hear me, I still can hardly sing. We all do this so often to children. I see people constantly instructing 3 and 4 year olds in the *proper* way to draw a house or face, what color valentines must be, which clothes go together. We refuse to let them practice, play, do, try for themselves. Perhaps we have been raised so terrified of error that we are terrified of what might strike our children. They might fail first grade.

Anne Herbert writes in the Winter “78 *CoEvolution Quarterly* about how our whole culture deceives us into thinking a thing must be done perfectly or not at all. No amateurs in life. Perhaps the root of this is things no longer made by hand. I remember growing up being mystified as to how things as perfect, gleaming and sleek as cars were made, being told they were made in factories, and deciding factories must be where machines lived as obviously only a sleek and gleaming machine could produce another. Such a Black Box theory of artificery was only natural, I think, in a home where nothing was made, grown, or even devised. The middle class suburbs in the 50s and 60s. Everything, food, clothes, furniture was bought and every job was done by a hired expert: the cleaning lady, even; the garage man; the plumber. What was done was done by the rules. There was a certain form for writing a letter, decorating the house (it’s hard to think of examples, so little was done). School was a place where you went to learn the rules, to become an expert, and then if you did everything just as you were told, you’d get an A in life.

This belief in error is, anyhow, just the flip side of a belief that there is a Correct color for objects, anyhow. The elementary teacher’s idiocy of white rabbits, orange pumpkins, the Pilgrims were the first to set foot in the new world, and all the other little knowledges that mask unadmittable and vast ignorances—the human lot.

When I mention not sending my children to public school to my family, I get two standard reactions (and occasional violent, disturbing, personal outbursts -this fear of violating the norm is so deep. I’d be interested in hearing how others deal with tantrums, threats, and such, if they see them also). The two standard reactions are: But you loved school, and But you did so well. First on loving it. I wouldn’t go so far as to call it love, myself. It was all that I knew. I went. We all went. Everyone went and always had and

always would as far as I knew. Insofar as I was emotionally involved in it, as implied, it was because I did well and therefore, people gave me attention. The main reward was that I felt good about myself because I did well in school, was smart. I only hoped to do even better and discover, thus, that I was brilliant, equivalent to me at that time to being one of the chosen few.

I almost fainted on the school bus on the way home from the final day of first grade when my seatmate, a mature second grader, told me that I could fail, be kept back. That my report card, which I could not read, might say that I had failed. Of course, I had done well all year, but it never occurred to me that this was a summation; the whole thing had seemed arbitrary all year. With a child's clarity I saw that it was unfair. R, my neighbor, who sat next to me and couldn't read and still wet his pants in class was failed; he just wasn't ready to read and for that they failed him. So who knew what they might have gotten me on. And What Would My Family Do To Me?

J, 4, took another quantum leap. We're market gardeners. He asked for and has his own plot, marked off with string (to his specs) for which he raised plants in the greenhouse and in which he's raising radishes for money. This is all on his own, but we try to help carry out his suggestions and ideas. Including when he's asked me to thin his radishes as he was "too tired." However, yesterday while I was working steadily transplanting, he took up a hoe and hoed every part of the garden that needed it *because he saw it needed to be done*. It took about an hour of hard work in which he did as good a job as I. Usually when he does something well I find myself commenting with some praise, but this time such was obviously, even ridiculously, superfluous. As if I would tell my husband he was a good boy for working so hard. J was at that time in that enterprise my equal. I was thrilled.

A Book of Free Things

A reader recommended to me a book called *The Rainbow Book* (a book of items children can send for free), by Pat Blakey, Barbara Haislet, and Judith Hentges (Parkway Press, Inc., 3347 East Calhoun Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55408—\$3.50). I sent for one, and like it very much. It tells children, in lively clear language, and shows with good illustrations, how to send away for things, how to write addresses, send self-addressed stamped envelope, etc. and then lists a big variety of very interesting sounding pamphlets, folders, maps, buttons, etc. that they can send away for. (One of these is a free copy of *Cricket* magazine, recommended in *GWS*).

Many children like writing letters, and most love getting things in the mail. I would think they would have a lot of fun with this. Reading and writing for an immediate, real and serious purpose.

Books—and Guns

A mother writes from Ontario:

About helping children make books: I really enjoy getting together with a young friend or friends, folding several pieces of paper into the size and number of pages that we want, cutting edges where necessary. Next we either staple or sew a binding. If we want to we add a cover (not always needed). Covers are easily made from pieces of wallpaper books. (Wallpaper books are a great free source of beautiful paper for all kinds of projects!) Or a cover can be a piece of cardboard folded and covered with cloth—glued, stapled, or sewed together with the pages.

So now we have a book or books. We work on them together or individually—what we feel at the time. Often the children draw pictures in their books that go with a story they are making in their minds. After they have drawn the pictures they tell me what words they want written on each page, and I write the words. Some children of course can write their own words. Some of the children like me to write out the words on a separate paper for them to copy. Some books just have drawings. Some even remain empty. Some get swept up and thrown in the fire by someone who doesn't realize it's a book. Sometimes several of us work on one together. Anyway, they're usually a lot of fun to make and read or look at.

One of C's books had a beautiful white satin cover. He made himself a quill pen from a chicken feather. This book had to be drawn and written with a quill as it's a story set in the Middle Ages. It's a story of two mice princes who are cousins and have adventures with a blimp, a rat, and a lovely kangaroo. I've decided to make marionettes of the characters in this story which I'm in the process of doing. C has helped with some of the sewing and shaping and drilling of the wooden controls for one of the mice. A plans to help make the kangaroo.

Writing about this story brings to my mind a topic which concerns me at times: violent play and play with toy weapons. The story of C's I was just describing has quite a bit of sword brandishing and arrow shooting, being about two princes of the Middle Ages named Swift Sword and Fast Lance. No one is injured in it, there are no gory scenes. I don't feel it's harmful for him to fantasize about mice, rats and kangaroos running around with swords.

But sometimes I wonder about violent play in general—whether or not it can lead to a realer violence and where limits should or shouldn't be drawn. I guess I'd like some feedback on what other people observe and think about this.

Here are some of my observations and thoughts: I was raised in a pacifistic family where peace is truly attempted. I never wanted to play with guns or watch violence on TV or in movies. My younger brother occasionally wanted to play with guns I probably tried it a few times myself. Our parents let my brother have a few toy guns when he really wanted them. I don't remember ever wanting one. I do remember that my mother had a rule that if we played with guns we were not to point them at people or animals and pretend to kill them. We both accepted the rule

Now as a mother, toy guns again have entered my life. When C first wanted a toy gun I balked. I tried to talk him out of it explaining that to me it's not a good idea to pretend to hurt or kill even with toys. But he *really* wanted a gun. I never did, so how can I totally understand? I finally got him a cap gun for his 4th birthday. He was thrilled, but lost it almost immediately.

Since then (he's 8 now) he has had a few other guns, some he bought with his money. Once he won a prize in a Halloween party contest with his dinosaur costume—the prize was a gun. I think he was happy, but a little worried as to whether or not I'd approve.

In general he's gone along with my mother's rule of not aiming at anyone and pretending to kill. He's had a few experiences with men friends with real guns—gone hunting with one and was offered the chance to shoot at a target with another. He chose not to try it and said he felt he wasn't ready. Gun play isn't such a passion for him now as it was when he was 4. He has other more intense interests. Basically I have felt that I didn't want to say “No this is something you can't do.” I thought that by doing that I would possibly just push him into being almost obsessed with a desire for the forbidden. But do want him to understand that guns are dangerous and if he later wants to use real ones I will find someone I trust or more likely he'll find someone he trusts to help him learn to use them safely. I don't want to dictate to my children what to do or be. I want to help them develop their potentials and interests even if I don't always understand or approve. But sometimes this is difficult or confusing.

I recently saw a mother and son of about 4 years. He was running around

shooting a stick. In a gentle voice she told him not to play shooting and gave some good reasons. 15 minutes later I was in a different room away from them. The son ran in happily shooting the stick. So telling them not to do it doesn't necessarily stop it.

Child Publishers

Ed Nagel has sent us this announcement:

Home Study Exchange Newsletter—The Hostex News

This is a newsletter of children learning at home, published by children and for children like themselves. The first issue is composed of material by/from/for children who are enrolled at the Santa Fe Community School but who do most of their real learning at home, by themselves, with their parents, friends or neighbors in their local community. In future issues, other children who are learning at home may find this idea a useful tool for them in expanding their reach among peers outside the home without actually “attending” a school in the traditional sense of that word. Children will be “attending” each other, and the ideas exchanged thereby will become an organic “curriculum” of common experience upon/with/through which *Hostex* will “run.”

The editorial staff of the *Hostex*. News is composed entirely of students under the age of 18, who hold full and unabridged decision-making power to print or not to print any material which they may consider important/useful/entertaining in the market place of their readership. The children who collect, edit, type and layout articles for the publication and distribution of the *Hostex* news do have access to adults with the expertise for helping them do all these things (Ed.—I hope that as soon as possible the children learn to do without this help), but the choices will always belong to the children; the work will be that of the children; the credit or blame will belong to them; so will the money.

To do the first issue, students at the Santa Fe Community School have negotiated a loan which they hope to pay back with the money they get from subscriptions (mostly) and advertisements. With such a limited budget, the content and format of the newsletter likewise has been limited at the outset and the first mailing has been distributed on a rather small scale. How the newsletter looks and works and how often it appears in the future will depend upon reader interest and

support .

Only paid subscriptions can receive copies of the *Hostex* news. Upon payment, subscribers receive all copies published during that year (including any back issues) regardless of the date payment is made, so that all subscriptions will expire together. For the rest of 1979 and up through June 30, 1980, the subscription price for *Hostex* News (bimonthly, more or less) is \$10.00. (Individual sample copies can be ordered for \$2 each, which payment can later be applied toward a subscription for that same year.)

The children at SFCS do appreciate that some who want *Hostex* News cannot afford it, so requests for a “free” subscription (or “sample” copy) may be made at any time. Based on postmark dates, a waiting list of such requests will be maintained at *Hostex*, but copies will be sent only if/when funds become available to cover the cost. (Tax deductible contributions to SFCS for this purpose are therefore invited.)

No policy has been set yet on advertisements, so describe or send what you want advertised, and make an offer or include payment. Send checks or money orders to: Treasurer, *Hostex* News, c/o SFCS, P.O. Box 2241, Santa Fe, NM 87501.

Good luck to this new publication. As I say, the sooner the children can make this publication 100% their own, i.e. run it without any assistance from adults whatever, the better. As long as they have to depend on adults to help them, the magazine will not be truly theirs.

And Volunteers

A twelve-year-old writes about being an office volunteer:

In July 1978 my mother was asked to work at the C.E.A. office. At that time we had a three-month-old baby named C. So my mother asked me if I would like to go to the office to mind C while she did her work. But when I went in, it seemed that C slept most of the time except when she was hungry. So I started to do a little work. Mrs. L gave me some little jobs to do. Her daughter R (who is now a very good friend of mine) helped me to get into bigger things. She taught me to make registration packets. Even now I do about 100 a week at home. She taught me to run the folding machine so that we were able to fold the papers for the registration packets and also for the Memo. We enjoyed that a lot. I can even do it better than my mom because she gets the papers stuck sometimes. I also learned what to say when I answered the phone, even though I had a hard time getting “Childbirth Education Association” out in one breath and I sometimes disconnected people instead of putting them on hold.

I can’t forget the literature orders. That was the best. We really had fun doing those. Finding the right papers and counting them out. Writing out bills and addressing the envelopes was lots of fun. R and I both knew what literature was there and what wasn’t, so we could answer questions about what was in stock better than our Moms.

I also had to do the postage meter at the end of the day. I always tried to use Mrs. L’s adding machine to figure out the totals, but sometimes I would have to use my brain; then I didn’t like it so much.

But it wasn’t all work; sometimes R, her brother and would play a game or go to the library. I really looked forward to coming in to the office. But soon the bad part came. I had to go back to school. So as soon as I got my school calendar I sent in a paper with all the days I had off from school so I could come into the office.

Now I am waiting for the summer to come so I can go into the office and help out. I enjoy being a C.E. Volunteer.

Photos

Alma Marks writes from Nova Scotia:

Enclosed are three (Ed. delightful) photos we'd like to share with you. Perhaps other families would enjoy sharing pictures of their children's unschooling experiences. After a fair number of photos were collected and mounted, the book could be used as a pictorial essay. Like the film, it could be rented to make money for GWS. (Ed.—the film makes some money, but very little.)

The kinds of things the children do here but that we haven't captured yet on film are: yoga, carpentry, gardening, cooking, exploring magnifying glasses, binoculars & microscopes, discovering math with concrete materials, dreaming, pondering, older children reading to and otherwise assisting younger children, etc. The list for every family will be different and of course growing with the children and their interests. It's another way we could learn from each other. It could even be published!

I like this idea. Some questions: 1) How many people would be interested in renting such a book, if it existed? What seems like a reasonable rental fee? 2) How many people would like to contribute photos of their own children to such a book? 3) Would one of our volunteers be willing to take full responsibility for getting such a book together, renting it, etc. We are swamped at the office and for the time being could not take this project on, but I'd like to see it happen if others want it to happen. Tell us what you think.

They Don't Know

Since schools have been losing so many unschooling cases, and getting so much bad publicity, one might well wonder why they keep taking parents to court.

There are probably a number of reasons, which vary from school to school. Many of them are terrified (and say so) that if they let one student go, next day they will all go. Some of them, at least, really believe in their quack pseudoscience of “education,” and think that only they can teach. But perhaps the most important reason is that the schools, and in most cases their lawyers, *don't know the law*. They may be able to quote-a-few sentences of the compulsory school attendance laws in their state, but they know nothing about what the courts have ruled about the meaning of these laws.

Not long ago I was speaking to a large meeting of educators from Southeastern Massachusetts. This is mostly affluent country, so we can assume that school people here are about as well informed as anywhere. At one point I asked people to raise their hands if they had even a rough idea of what was meant or referred to in the phrase *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*. I had expected to see perhaps a dozen hands. Not one was raised.

As a matter of fact, it is safe to assume that most judges in Family or Juvenile Courts, where most unschooling cases will first be heard, don't know the law either. This is not a part of the law with which they have had much to do.

What this means is that when we write up home schooling plans, we are going to have to cite and quote from these cases. The more of this legal material we can quote, the less likely that schools will want to take us to court, and the better the chances that, if they do, we will win. We have to remember that under our adversary legal system the task of judges is not to decide what “justice” is, but to decide which of the parties before them, in terms of existing laws, court decisions, etc. has the strongest argument. Judges are not going to do our legal work for us. If we don't cite favorable court cases in our plans, or briefs, judges (who may very well not even have heard of them) are not going to put them in their rulings .

“Good” Teaching

Old Bad Joke #1: “The operation was successful but the patient died.”

O. B. J. #2: “I taught my dog to whistle.” “That’s funny, I never heard him whistle.” “I said I taught him, I didn’t say he learned.”

No Joke At All: The May 1979 issue of *McCall’s*, in the article “Are Teachers Failing Our Children?”, reports that at a recent conference of the New Jersey Educational Association teachers were saying, “I *want* to be evaluated, but by how well I teach not by how my students do.”

Since teachers in New Jersey are probably about like teachers everywhere, we can assume that most educators in this country believe that being a good teacher has nothing whatever to do with whether your students are learning anything.

The *McCall’s* article doesn’t say what these teachers thought “good” teaching means, but it isn’t hard to guess. It means, first and foremost, keeping the students still, silent, and busy. It means planning everything in advance, leaving nothing to chance, or inspiration, or, needless to say, the interests of the learners. As the chairman of one education department wrote recently, “The teacher has to know what he will be teaching tomorrow, next week, next spring.” It means having for everyone of these daily, weekly, monthly etc. lesson plans a precisely stated behavioral objective, saying that the student will be able to do this or that, and a test to show whether the student can do it. Finally, it means laying out all these lesson plans and tests, like the 283 skills of reading invented by the experts of the Chicago schools (*GWS #2*), in some exact order, which someone, somewhere a professor of education, perhaps a textbook publisher, but in any case not a classroom teacher has decided is the best order for learning.

If you do all these things, everything that experts somewhere have decided you should do, then, so the theory goes, you are a “good” teacher. If your students aren’t learning, it means there’s something wrong with them. It’s not your fault and you can’t and shouldn’t be expected to do anything about it. It’s up to the school to label these children defective and turn them over to some kind of specialist who will in turn tryout some other learning plan on them.

This is what most teachers are taught, or anyway learn, to believe.

As I have said, the schools run on a (for them) great rule, that when learning happens, schools and teachers take the credit, and when it doesn't happen, the students get the blame. The same people who say that good teaching has nothing to do with whether people learn anything are now putting out bumper stickers saying, "If you can read, thank a teacher." In *GWS #5* I said that the main reason why schools are incompetent is that they will not take the responsibility for the results of their own work. The *McCall's* piece is just one more proof of it. Because the schools refuse to judge their methods by how much learning they produce, they never learn anything, neither from their failures nor their successes. They are immune to experience.

It is hard to think of any other human work, certainly not one that (in the U.S.) spends close to a hundred and fifty billion dollars a year, in which the workers all say that how well they work has nothing to do with what kinds of results they get. What would the auto industry be like if from the start it had run on the rule that any time a car didn't work right, wouldn't start, wouldn't run, went out of control, it was the driver's fault, never the fault of the people who designed and built it. Suppose this industry had a monopoly on making cars, and that all citizens had to buy a new car every year whether they wanted one or not. What kind of cars would we have? What kind of people would work in that industry? What would happen to those few who kept saying, "Wait a minute, if none of these cars we build will run, maybe there's something wrong with them, not the drivers?" How long would such people last?

We have to remember that when (say) the Chicago schools tell all their teachers to teach children to read by teaching them 283 separate skills in a rigidly prescribed order, it doesn't mean that somewhere in Chicago there were some teachers who had actually done that and had turned out many great readers. The people who made up that list of 283 skills (which started out as 500) were almost certainly not teachers, and the chances are good that many of them had never been teachers. Where did they get such an idea? Out of their heads, or perhaps out of a book, or perhaps out of someone's study of laboratory rats. But not out of anyone's experience of actually teaching children.

Every so often, probably several times every year, a brave, observant, thoughtful, skeptical, imaginative, inventive teacher finds out how to make

learning happen, or rather, and this is the real discovery, how to allow and help it to happen. What happens to these teachers? Sometimes (as Herndon describes in *The Way It Spoiled To Be*) they are fired. Other times (as he describes in *How To Survive In Your Native Land*) they are simply ignored. In his first school, a black inner city junior high school, he had students reading, writing, and talking about what they had read, most of whom had never read, written, or done any schoolwork since they had entered the school. His students were learning while all the other students in the school were rioting, locking teachers out of their rooms, throwing materials and furniture out the window, etc. As he writes;

I met with (the principal) for his official evaluation of my year's work ... he found (it) unsatisfactory on every count; he could not recommend me for rehire in the district. Furthermore he had to say he considered me unfit for the position of junior high school teacher in any school, anywhere, now or in the future, and would so "state on my evaluation paper.

the children were not in their seats on time, they did not begin lessons promptly, many of them sat around doing nothing, there was not an atmosphere conducive to study, no effort was made to inculcate good study habits, there was no evidence of thorough preparation of lessons or goals. I appeared to encourage activities that were opposed to the efforts of the faculty in general, I appeared eager to discuss with the students matters irrelevant or unfit for the classroom, I had no control over their actions, and I steadfastly rejected advice and aid from more experienced people.

I had to talk about results. What about the riots, I wanted to know ... What was the good of the order of these experienced teachers if it ended up in chaos? No one in my class had rioted, I pointed out; no one locked me out, or threw my hat out the window. None of this happened in my classes. So who had the better control, I argued.

He wasn't impressed. He knew there had been riots, he knew that I'd had none. A riot meant that some order had been imposed, some control established, since it was against that control that the children were rebelling.

In the last year or two have been corresponding with a teacher in a Southern state. He teaches in a rural elementary school in a poor county. Like Herndon, he came to teaching after having done a number of other kinds of work (always a good idea). Like Herndon, he is resourceful, inventive, and unorthodox. (After all, in schools where nobody learns anything, good teachers have to be unorthodox.) For about seven years now, the students in his classes have been learning, according to the tests the school believes in, about twice as much as they learn in any other single year in the school. During that time the school principal has not given him one satisfactory evaluation, and has indeed threatened to fire him more than once -and probably would have, except for the trouble this teacher might make. The other teachers all know every class' test scores, and so know how well this man's students learn. But none have ever visited his class, or even talked to him about his methods or asked for any advice. None are his friends. He is a shunned outsider.

This happens to many innovative and successful teachers. Not long ago a mother talked to me about her child, at school in a Boston suburb. She had just had the best year in school she ever had, or that any of this mother's children had ever had. But, the mother said, the child's marvellous teacher was not coming back. "Why not?" I asked "Because none of the other teachers would speak to him."

There may be more good teachers who are frozen out this way than are actually fired. They are not as tough as Herndon; to have few or no friends, and maybe a lot of enemies, among the people they work with, is too hard for them. Most of them don't stay long. Hundreds of them write me, saying that they couldn't stand doing what they were made to do, or not being allowed to do what clearly needed to be done, or what they saw being done all around them.

It is like the natural selection we hear about in biology, only in reverse - the most capable (all but a few) leave, the less capable remain. Fifty or a hundred years of this process have given us—what we have.

I see nothing within the schools that is likely to reverse this process. But if—in time enough people could and did take their children out of bad schools, if good teachers had more and more students coming to their classes by choice, while bad teachers had less students of any kind, the schools might begin to have serious reasons (including financial) for learning to do their job

well. But that day is still probably quite a long way off.

Helping Learners

From a father's letter:

It seems to me that the educational establishment, including all of the reformers who have surfaced over the years, have committed what I call “the Greek mistake”: The ancient Greeks, who did such excellent work in pure mathematics and philosophy, for example, were duds at and probably retarded the growth of experimental science, because of their scorn for observation and deduction. There is the tale, perhaps apocryphal, that the great Aristotle, based on some obscure philosophical induction, claimed that men had more teeth than women. We moderns laugh at this, recognizing that all Aristotle had to do was ask Mrs. Aristotle to open her mouth and take a careful look. But this “Greek mistake” is in principle precisely the one made by the educational establishment: Instead of observing, checking, framing testable hypotheses, listening, and in general drawing the principles of education out of the perceived nature of the subject matter—the kids—we conjure up notions of how we imagine kids *ought* to learn, out of thin air as it were and having no foundation in observable reality. Then we try to make the subject matter conform to the theory, and are puzzled that it doesn't. In short, what the Greeks and the educational establishment never understood is, that if you want to find out if a horse will eat apples, you don't philosophize about it—you offer the horse an apple and see what happens.

My wife and I have employed this approach in helping our own two boys (6 and 4 1/2 years old) to learn. It is difficult to express verbally—indeed, *that's* the point!—the continual revelations we have had. In the first place, we have found that the boys, unlike those who attend schools, are incapable of distinguishing between any “special time for learning” and the rest of life. Have you ever reflected upon the intellectual harm we do children by the fact that we herd them into special places at special times for what we call education?; “O.K. kids, it's 8:45 in the morning, you *will* start learning. O.K. kids, it's 3:15, you can knock off with the learning stuff.” Like some maniac theologians preaching that we can be religious only while attending church, we actually *teach* the kids that “real” learning is what happens only at special times in special buildings under the supervision of special people. Alas, they eventually believe us.

Sometimes, I'm asked whether our unschooling approach is "successful." I can only reply, "Successful by whose standards?" The boys have little notion, for example, of when George Washington lived and what he did—and their interest in the matter is even less than their knowledge but they know more about dinosaurs than I ever imagined there was to be known. Yet where is it carved in stone that a knowledge of dead politicians is more important than a knowledge of dead reptiles? By *my* standards, I might prefer that the boys be more interested in, say, history, for which—now—they care very little, than in, say, astronomy, which they devour, and I must constantly be on guard to resist the temptation to subtly impose upon them my standards of what is "important." So, have we been "successful"—you'll have to ask the boys!

Yet many who are too timid, or prejudiced, or arrogant, to trust kids to learn without being taught, ask, "What about the basics? Suppose a child wants to learn *only* about dinosaurs or planets, and shows no interest in more fundamental matters?" Such a question reveals at least two absurdities in the mind of the questioner: First, what makes him think (1650) that, say, a knowledge of astrology is more fundamental than a knowledge of agronomy, or (1980) that a knowledge of economics is more fundamental than a knowledge of poetry? Secondly, they are concerned with a problem that, for kids who do not have educationist theory shoved down their throats, simply does not exist: It is not possible for an inquisitive child to delve deeply into dinosaurs without wondering about, and learning, how big they were (measurements), how many roamed a certain area (arithmetic), where they lived (geography), what happened to them (history), etc., etc. And, after exhausting daddy's knowledge of dinosaurs which happened pretty quickly—a lot of reading was necessary. In short, it simply isn't possible to learn a lot about dinosaurs or anything else without along the way learning and using knowledge and skills that are intellectually prerequisite. After all, the reason that we call "the basics" by that phrase is that they *are* basic, and to worry that a kid will learn just about anything without learning and using the basics is like being worried that he might decide to build a house starting with the roof first.

It's hard work, of course, for us to adjust ourselves to the kids' interests. They wake up every morning curious but, alas, rarely curious about the particular topics that we might be prepared to talk about or might by our

standards prefer they be curious about—that's when temptation rears its head and must be ruthlessly suppressed. It's a waste of time and quickly degenerates into intellectual bullying to try to sidetrack a kid onto topics you think he should be learning. Of course, going along with the kids' interests may, as it recently did in our family, find you subjected to six straight days of inquiry into space exploration. But, if you will just be patient and observant, the time comes when the kid, because *he* realizes that it's pertinent to learning about his primary interest, will, almost off-handedly (but it sticks), add rocket thrusts, multiply fuel loads, distinguish ellipses from circles, etc. Keep your mouth shut when you are not needed, and be ready to help when you are. The kid will learn.

Perhaps the reason that so many adults—including, I confess, myself—find it hard to refrain from “helping” kids, is that it wounds our egos to see how well they get along without us! How can that dumb kid of mine learn so much without a smart fellow like me to teach him? We try in effect to horn in on the kids' sense of pride of accomplishment and, all too often, particularly in schools, we succeed. The results are psychologically and intellectually catastrophic for the victims.

From The Northwest

Just wanted to let you know that a week ago I and some others were guests on a teen-age talk show (radio) concerned with the topic of un- (and de-) schooling.

My brother (seven years younger, plagued all through school by having to follow in my footsteps) listened to the show, and afterwards had *much* to say (that was a surprise—he usually says very little), mostly about the terrible destruction to his own (already shy and fragile) self-esteem by “teachers” who are “not to be questioned, “who do not share the opinions nor possess the knowledge of some children and so discredit them (rather than learning *from* them); and the crippling effect of spending so much of one’s young life in an unreal *place*, so that at age 18 the temptation (among those who have at least learned to survive within the system) is to *stay in school* rather than risk the “real world.” He points out that most “teachers,” themselves, have never been out of school for any appreciable length of time.

One question asked on the show was—he common one—“In our ever-more-technologized society can we *afford* to let education be non-compulsory?” It is a silly question, of course, but for those who take it seriously, here is one more point to ponder:

My brother is an electronics technician, by trade, and an electronics whiz by vocation. While still a teenager he *taught himself* all the mathematics, language, etc. necessary and built many complicated things an oscilloscope, a computer, etc. He is now making a lot of money (I am not!) as a skilled technician (I am not!) while continuing to develop his own very creative ideas in electronics in his free time, with his own equipment, at home. The point here is this: he excelled in electronics *because IT WASN’T TAUGHT IN SCHOOL*. He wasn’t competing with anyone, he wasn’t being mystified by teachers, he wasn’t wasting his time doing a lot of meaningless busywork that bore no relevance to “real life.” It was not an area that was “touchable” by teachers, or school—it was his and it was real. The profound sadness is that for him (and for so many other kids) school was so overpowering that he emerged from it thinking that his “C” average, his mediocre ratings were his “real” self; his success in electronics didn’t count for much.

The current issue (July '79—Ted Kennedy on cover) of the magazine *Quest* has a story about a young man who designed and built his own airplane. He has no training in aeronautics, engineering, physics, etc., does not even know calculus, and his plane violates a number of supposed “laws” of aircraft design. But it is substantially cheaper than, and out-performs in every way, the best commercially designed and built planes of comparable size. Worth reading.

A Book On Tests

We are adding to our list of books a very interesting, important, and useful new book, *The Complete Guide To Taking Tests*, by Bernard Feder, (Prentice Hall, \$9 + post.) Dr. Feder has a Ph.D. in Education (which may make his arguments even more convincing to some people), and has been a teacher and administrator in the New York City public schools, and an Associate Professor of Education at Hofstra University.

The book itself is at one and the same time the best book I have seen about what is wrong both with testing in general and the tests most widely used in schools, and also, about how to beat those tests. Unschoolers who don't want their children tested, and least of all by standard school tests, will find much in it that may help them avoid this. But it is also the best possible way to prepare children for tests if they can't be avoided. I can't recommend it too highly.

It is also very clearly and often amusingly written. I think that many children from ten on up would enjoy it. I would suggest recommending it to the attention of your legislators—you might send them a few pertinent quotes. And it would be helpful, of course, if as many school people as possible would also read it. A very fine book.

Why She Left

I have delayed getting G's 2nd and 3rd grade experiences on paper, because I had hoped she would write you herself. She asked if it would be printed in the newsletter. I told her you might use an excerpt with her permission for *GWS*. She considered and then said that perhaps someone besides ourselves receives *GWS* in this area. She is afraid the teachers will see what she thinks of them

The second grade changed classes! Our 7 year old was not ready for that. There was the homeroom teacher plus 3 other teachers. None of these teachers had time nor the desire to talk to parents. I was told by other parents that the best thing I could do for G was not to interfere with the second grade teachers.

The writing and spelling teacher felt G's printing was not what it should be and she should have learned to write in the first grade. In fact the first 12 weeks of school the children who had been in Ms. M's first grade room were told what a poor teacher they had had last year. (Pure unadulterated jealousy.) G received F's on her spelling papers. She did not tell us nor did she mention anything about the spankings that she received from this woman or the breaks she was forced to miss to study the words.

I first became aware of the situation when my aunt with whom G was staying during the week told me that I should help G with spelling. That weekend, bit by bit, G told me the ugly story. She had not told her father or myself, because she had been shamed into believing that her parents would be disappointed or ridicule her, or worse yet punish her. It seems to be common practice in this area for parents to punish kids if the kids receive punishment in school. Anyway, I asked to see the spelling book. G said that they did not have enough books to go around and she did not have a book!! After several phone calls I obtained Ms. L's (her teacher) unlisted number. Much to G's apprehension, and amid pleas for me not to talk to Ms. L, I did call her. I talked to her for some time about my concern for G in regards to no book, being punished for something she had little control over, etc. (The four 2nd grade slave drivers felt G was not trying.)

After I hung up, my husband remarked, "You had to stroke her." Ms. L had brought up the subject of us (she & I) playing together while growing up.

Ms. L is a few years younger than I. I had not recognized her or her married name. She was supposedly surprised to learn of G's fears of her and the child's hatred of spelling. Ms. L had a copy of the textbook that G could borrow. Why she had not lent G the book before I phoned her, I don't know. The conversation was quite amiable. G was loaned the spelling book for one weekend and then a couple of weeks later issued one to keep for the school year.

Later G came home upset because Ms. M, the science teacher, had told G in front of the class that if her mother (me) should call her, Ms. M, in regards to G getting a D on a busywork class assignment, she—Ms. M, would hang up on G's mother. Ms. M then explained how she did not have time to talk to anyone's parents on the phone because she had her baby and house to care for. After that heard from other sources how I had "Bawled Out" Ms. L.

The reading teacher decided G could not comprehend what she read. The math teacher was not getting good results from G in math. There was the constant threat of being retained in the 2nd grade. All this time G was in their top group, making A's, B's, and C's on her report card. Her father and I never stressed high grades. The thing that puzzled me was: is the child in the 2nd/ 3rd group making A's equal to the first group's B or what??? At the end of the year the school gave an achievement test and apparently the teachers had decided to keep G in 2nd grade another year. Her testing scores caused them to reconsider. G's total battery score was 4.5, which supposedly means equal to a kid that has been in the fourth grade 5 months. A breakdown of her score went: Reading 4.2, Language 5.2, Mathematics 3.7, Science 4.2, and Social Studies 3.8. However, the damage that was done to that child is beyond belief. She went from an outgoing, eager-to-learn child to one that's shy and reluctant to find out about new things. She is slowly coming out more this spring. Our home school has been in operation since December.

G did have to attend the third grade for three months. She did not go back Aug. 10, 1978 when school first started, but she was forced to return Sept. 10, 1978. She did not get the third grade teacher that she had been assigned the first of the year. This was because too many other parents with political pull had felt Mrs. L was superior to Ms. S. Ms. S would have made a fine commandant for a concentration camp. She spanked G for various things; e.g. the bus that made the run by our farm broke down, hence another driver had to make the run before she could make her regular run. The kids living on our

road were dismissed one hour early in order that transportation could be arranged for them. The next morning Ms. S asked G where her English homework was. The assignment had been made after G's bus ran and she did not know anything about the assignment. Ms. S paddled G and then G told her that she had had to leave before English class. Ms. S said she was sorry, but G should have answered her quicker.

When I talked with Ms. S about this she said that G had a habit of not answering whenever she was asked a question. This is true, and I remarked that a mule had nothing on G, and she might think how one got the best work out of a stubborn plough mule. Ms. S only stared at me and said that she had too many children in her class to give individual attention to each one. This was one of her favorite remarks or excuses. (Ed. note: Many parents tell me this.)

One of G's science test papers from Ms S has this question,"- live on Earth." G had filled in the blank with We. This was marked wrong. "People live on Earth." G told me how a boy answered a question orally, by saying, "moonshine" meaning the light reflected from the moon instead of "moonlight." Ms. S went into a lecture on moonshine being whiskey. This is amusing, but it was not funny to that 8 year old boy who has listened to his grandfather or some other relative talk about moonshine lighting up the path around the ridge while out with the fox hounds.

Enclosed is a story that wrote for G when she was 4 or 5. She drew pictures for the story while in the first grade and we submitted the story with the drawings to a local newspaper. The story was published along with the artwork on Sept. 13, 1978 (two years after submission). G's first grade teacher was very happy because G had done the drawings for her.

G does a lot of reading now. She averages 4 to 7 library books per week (e.g. *Nancy Drew*, *Hardy Boys*, *Charlie Brown's Questions and Answers books*—tons of info in them—and biographies) .

G'S STORY

In a stall in a big log barn on a warm Sunday morning in June, Broomhilda, the goose, heard her eggs breaking. Cheep, peck, cheep. For twenty-eight long days and nights Broomhilda has been sitting on twelve eggs.

She had sat on her eggs while her gander, sister and brothers went off to pick grass and hang round the back door of the farmhouse in hopes of a

handout. Broomhilda sat on the nest while the other geese, Bertha, Samuel, Homer Cecil, and Harvery, Broomhilda's gander, went swimming in the branch that ran past the barn. Broomhilda even sat on her nest the day that a big wind and rainstorm came.

The wind swirled the rain around the barn and rattled the tin on the roof. Hail pounded the roof, lightning flashed, thunder boomed, and the wind raced through treetops. The branch overflowed, and the stream that trickled off the hill back of the barn raged to the branch. The tiny stream came out of its rocky bed and ran through the barn hall. The water ran into the stall where Broomhilda sat on her eggs. The nest became wet and soggy, but still Broomhilda stayed with her eggs

At night the people would put in corn and fresh water for Broomhilda. Harvery would come to sleep in the stall with her. Harvery discouraged small predators from coming around the nest. He did this by pinching with his beak and hitting with his wide strong wings any rat, coon, or skunk that was brave or foolish enough to come shopping for eggs

Bertha and the two remaining ganders would be locked up in the goosehouse to prevent them from appearing as the main attraction for supper in a fox's den.

Now the long days of sitting were over. The goslings were pecking their way out of the eggshells

When G and her Daddy looked in on Broomhilda that Sunday morning they could see bits of yellow fluff peeping out from under Broomhilda's grey feathers

Upon returning from church that afternoon the whole people family paid a visit to the stall to see the new arrivals. Baby O became very excited when she saw the eight fluffy balls. Each ball had a neck and two legs! She wanted to get down from the backpack on her Mother's back. This was not allowed; Aunt Bertha, Uncle Homer Cecil, and Uncle Samuel were in the stall to assist the parents, Broomhilda and Harvery, in guarding the goslings

People, dogs, cats, goats, and pony were permitted to look only. Anyone getting too near the goslings were warned by loud hissings. If the warnings went unheeded the guilty party would receive some hard pinching from the beaks of the ganders

On that quiet June Sunday the farm began the perilous adventures of raising goslings to goosehood.

A Father Writes

I have read the books you have written, and between them and Bob (4), I've found, for me, the best way to teach is by example, and the best way to learn is by doing. (Bob continually tells us "I don't want to know that" when we try to teach him something he doesn't want to learn.) Linda and I are impressed by how quickly he picks things up, but what impresses me the most is his ability to just sit and think. I never knew young children did that until Bob showed me. He also repeats and repeats things until he has them. We put him to bed at 9 p.m., and often at 11 we can hear him talking to himself as he goes over things he wants to get straight. This is how he learned the alphabet and how to count to 129. That's his favorite number and he counts to it over and over and over. Somehow he has picked up the idea that a number means a quantity of objects, and I am amazed he has learned that level of abstraction so quickly and completely.

I've tried to let Bob and David learn what they want to at the rate they set, but sometimes it is hard not to teach. There is one story I enjoy, simply because it was the only time I've been successful at teaching when Bob wasn't interested. When Bob was learning to count, he asked me what comes after 113. I didn't answer his question, but instead I asked him what comes after 13. Well, he got mad because that's not what he wanted. I remained stubborn and he finally said "14 comes after 13, what comes after 113," very indignantly. I immediately said "114." At first he was still disgusted because I didn't answer his question the first time, but then he understood what I had just done. He broke out in a big grin and covered his face. We like to trick each other, and I had just gotten him.

While I was typing this letter, Bob was playing with a meter stick. It is interesting because it has all the centimeters numbered from 1 to 99. Bob has used it quite a lot, and I think it has helped him get the concept of numbers. Especially things like 1 to 10 is the same as 81 to 90 (you wrote about this and how you used rolls of cash register tape to work with this concept in one of your books.) I thought other children might enjoy playing with a meter stick, besides they can measure things with it. (Bob loves to measure anything that stands still.)

Looking At Babies

Caleb Gattegno, who is perhaps best known for his work in math teaching with the Cuisenaire Rods, has written a number of books about education, teaching, children, etc. (Available from Educational Solutions, Inc., 80 Fifth Ave., New York NY 10011.) One of these, *In The Beginning There Were No Words—The Universe of Babies*, I have just ordered. Skimming through it just after it arrived, I found these lovely quotes:

A few observers have told us that the world of childhood has to be entered on tiptoe and not with the heavy tread of laboratory technicians seeking only the confirmation of their visions; has to be entered with every tentacle and sensor alerted and not with a ready-made theory that filters out what cannot be reconciled to it; with love and respect for the person, who is as complete at every age and stage of childhood as he will be at any adult age and stage.

A principle that can serve us well, when we are looking at young children investigating their world, is *the need to know*. Much of what looks like idle play is the methodical examination of an unformulated question. The question becomes clearer to the observer if he stops sticking to a hypothesis of idle play and tries to ask: “What does the child need to know that he can get from this?”

In homes where no spanking exists, or any other abuse by parents of their physical power or their economic and social know-hows, it is clear to children that some things must be done, and they obey as easily as those who are threatened. This perception of one’s interest as a member of a group, and the acceptance of the fact that to stop a game to eat or go out is part of the order of things, is a gift children make in the cause of family peace. To understand it as the outcome of the working of fear and a sense within the child of his own inferiority, is not to do justice to fact.

On N.H. Guidelines

Comments by David Armington on the proposed Home Study Guidelines (For presentation at a public hearing held by the N.H. State Board of Education, June 19, 1979):

As I read the proposed guidelines I am struck by the phrase “manifest educational hardship.” As a parent I must prove my child is suffering “manifest educational hardship” at the hands of the school before I can even ask for a school board’s permission to educate my child at home. Why should I have to prove that the school is *injuring* my child? I don’t have to prove any such thing if I have the money to send him or her to a private school. I simply do it. If education is the process through which we try to discover our maximums, why should I have to prove that the school is failing to look after my child’s mini mums? Surely, the least I can expect from the school is that there will be no hardship inflicted. If I want to educate my child at home, shouldn’t it be enough that I state my own educational values, aims, and objectives, with evidence that I know how to help my child grow in these directions?

I have a good friend, a teacher in Massachusetts, whose first grade child has been judged (by the school) to be a “special needs child” and she’s to be put in a “special needs class,” but the parent completely disagrees with the assessment and is frantically trying to avoid the special treatment. It is fashionable nowadays to talk about “special needs,” and loads of people are making their living by researching them, writing about them, designing programs for children having them or thought to have them, teaching such programs, teaching the teachers of such programs, etc.

If the proposed guidelines seem pertinent and useful in situations where the child is afflicted with an obvious handicap, and dubiously useful in situations of dubious handicap (as with my Massachusetts friend), I find the guidelines quite irrelevant to situations in which parents or guardians want to take over the educational function because the program of the school clearly violates, or is incompatible with, their deeply-held beliefs and values.

It is simply not true that the schools are society’s great equalizer of opportunity in the race of life, for we’re not all trying to run the same race, and some of us don’t even believe in running. It is simply not true that the

schools are, or ever could be, value-free or value-neutral, for even a stance of steadfast neutrality or objectivity communicates a value. It is simply not true that we keep religion out of the schools. Identifiable creeds and churches, yes. Religion, no. For education is essentially religious, because at its center is the individual human soul.

A lot is said and written about Quality Education, and one gets the impression that if our words were only clear enough to express our thoughts, we would all agree on what Quality Education means. But we do not agree, nor will we ever agree so long as our society remains as free and pluralistic as it is today. I have often thought that if you closed your eyes and dropped your finger on a map of the United States, it would hit a community where the differences on questions of education are as great as, or greater than, the differences on questions of religion. Yet in that community, if it's a smallish one, you would find several churches but only one school!

One might be inclined to think that such differences are really only differences of detail, of method, of technique; different routes to objectives we all share. This is not true. I am not talking about alternative methods for teaching reading, or whether to teach old math or new math, or whether to offer sex education, environmental studies, and four years of French. I am talking about different educational objectives, different values and priorities, which can reflect different views about the nature of learning and human potential, and different views about the role of the school and of education in our society.

— A classroom in which children are expected to compete with each other is very different from one in which competitions arise naturally and spontaneously from the cooperative life of the group.

— A classroom which measures children against each other or against outside standards is very different from one in which each child is encouraged to assess himself.

— A classroom in which children learn by doing is very different from one in which they learn by being told.

— A classroom in which the work is fed to children in tiny sequential bites is very different from one in which children tackle problems in full and lifelike complexity.

— A classroom in which the children share significantly in planning what happens to them is very different from one in which things are planned for

them, and both are very different from a classroom where children run the show.

— A classroom that encourages self-discipline is very different from one in which the teacher disciplines. Both are very different from a classroom artfully regulated by rewards. All three are very different from a classroom with no discipline at all.

— A classroom in which the rigors of learning are teacher imposed is very different from a classroom in which rigor arises from personal identification with what is to be learned. Both are very different from a classroom that is limp and without rigor.

What should the guidelines expect of parents who wish to educate their children at home? I think parents should be expected to specify their educational objectives and the values and priorities undergirding them. They should be expected to describe adequately the manner in which the objectives are to be achieved and the kinds of evaluation they consider appropriate. From such descriptions it should be clear that the parents not only envision but can provide an educational environment offering adequate scope for meeting a child's needs—physical, intellectual, social, and emotional. Such descriptions must not be limited by institutional standards and procedures, however, for it is precisely these from which many parents are seeking escape. In this connection I note that the preliminary draft of the guidelines stated that “the application of institutional standards in a non-institutional setting cannot be literally insisted upon,” a statement that does *not* appear in the latest draft. It deserves to reappear, and in more positive form, so that it embraces a broader range of educational aims and approaches.

Bad Scene

A mother writes from Illinois:

I found that I needed to be very well informed as I dealt with the principal and the Assistant County Superintendent. As I told you on the phone, the first meeting with the principal and N's "teacher" was not good. The principal refused to transfer N because S.F.C.S. (Santa Fe Community School) was not on the list of approved schools in Illinois. I was lectured on the inadvisability of home study, including all the classic statements such as "we have certified teachers to do that, what makes you think you can teach him. What are your qualifications? Do you know how much money we've lost due to N's absences already?" (They knew down to the penny.) "Well, it's different and I guess that's the way you like it." "You certainly are sure of yourself; if we were all so sure of ourselves the world would be in sad shape. I guess we don't do well by either of your children." (A snide remark referring to our foster child in third grade who has "problems" resulting in many a conference with her teacher, the social worker, the psychologist, the remedial reading teacher, etc.)

Asked what I would do about teaching N reading I replied that he already reads and now needs the space to do so on his own. I was nearly laughed out of the room and told that I obviously didn't know the fundamentals of reading and could not teach it to N. N's teacher told me with great concern that there is no way that N could pass a test to get into third grade if he did not remain in school (her school of course) for the last few months of this year. (Strangely, there is no such test for children passing from one grade to the next.)

Anyway, I won't carry on about this meeting further except to say that I did expect to meet with resistance but was still amazed to be treated with total lack of respect. The "meeting" ended with the principal backing out of the room and popping back in a time or two to toss an additional insult while the teacher slid quietly into an adjoining room without a word busying herself at some task. I was left in the room to exit through another door by myself but didn't make it out the front door before the principal came around and met me in the hall, lecturing me on the way out.

If I needed more proof that I was doing the right thing to take N out of

such a place (which I didn't) I certainly got it that day.

Onward and *upward*? My next meeting was with the Assistant County Superintendent (hereafter ACS). The ACS was more calculated in his response. He informed me right away that it was impossible to teach N at home, that it was against the law, and that we were violating the truancy law by his absences and would be prosecuted for it. He quoted the statute which says, "Whoever has custody or control of any child between the ages of seven and sixteen years shall cause such child to attend some public school in the district wherein the child resides." I informed him that the statute goes on to exempt "any child attending a private or parochial school where children are taught the branches of education taught to children of corresponding age and grade in the public schools." He then immediately contended that we were not providing N with an equivalent education.

The issue shifted quickly here. I was prepared to explain our program for N but he was not interested in hearing about it. Instead he simply declared that our program was not equivalent because we did not use the textbooks N was using in public school (I answered that I had tried to get the names of the textbooks from the school but they had not co-operated. His comment: "the school doesn't have to co-operate.") and told me that I would be subjected to an (oral) masters degree level exam before he would be convinced that I was qualified to teach N. He referred to all these mystical things that only teachers know, about the components of learning and how the branches interrelate. He stated that the school would have to meet the provisions in the School Board Document #1. (Later we find this is totally untrue, that it is a completely different and more lenient set of rules than Document #1, which is for public schools.) The proper document being "Policies and Guidelines for Registration and Recognition of Nonpublic Elementary and Secondary Schools."

Dr. H, the ACS, did not use my name when talking to me but continually referred to me with a sarcastic "friend."

He stated that I did not have a sufficient program and *must* send N to school the next day or be in violation of truancy. I had indicated several times earlier in the conversation that I would not send N to school but because I found it senseless to respond to his final decree as I left, he seized upon my silence to quote me as admitting to having no program and agreeing to send N to school. He stated this to my husband on the phone. My husband had

called him to further explain the law, being a lawyer, as I had promised to Dr. H that he would. By the end of the conversation my husband felt manipulated into the same type of situation and so ended by stating that he agreed to nothing except to call Dr. H again tomorrow.

In this phone conversation my husband was told that a “bank of six lawyers” in Springfield (the capital) had told Dr. H. that home-schooling was clearly illegal.

Meanwhile my husband had stopped at the public school to get N’s workbooks (which already had been refused to me: “why would I give you his work books; I consider N to be truant”). We also requested to see N’s records and to make a copy of them. We were refused. My husband then requested that a record of this refusal be put into N’s record at this time. The principal refused to make this a matter of record. My husband wrote out a note himself and asked the principal to include it in N’s file. The principal refused. My husband said he would leave it on the principal’s desk. The principal replied that he had never seen the note and it did not exist. My husband then went to the front desk and asked the person there to be aware that the note was left in the principal’s office. The principal ran out of his office to say that this person could not come into his office and the note did not exist. Ho Hum.

This all led to an argument in the hall that I’m sure was heard throughout the school. After this incident and the conversations with Dr. H, we decided that we would be wise to involve a third party. From then on we dealt with the officials through another attorney with valuable experience with school boards as their attorney. Thus we proceeded to prepare for the meeting where we were to present our program.

Fortunately, with your good advice, and the help of a friend who is an ex-teacher, now chicken farmer, still certified in Illinois as a second and third grade teacher, we put together a convincing package to present to the officials. It helped that our attorney had paved the way with some blunt statements to them. By this time *someone* had given them the word to change their attitude and approach and they did their best to co-operate. Dr. H told us as we were leaving that he was sure N would get an excellent education from us but he had trouble getting this out audibly. When my husband did not quite hear all of it and asked him what he had said, he almost died and simply could not repeat it.

We found your advice to keep a telephone log of conversations and to ask many questions and get it clear what each person's interest is to be very valuable and in keeping with my husband's approach from the legal sense. It is exactly the way we proceeded, after bungling the beginnings, that is.

Your experience with those school people certainly confirms what a number of people have said, and what we have by now printed in *GWS*, which is that all dealings with school people should be in writing. If you can't avoid a personal or telephone conversation, it is important to take detailed notes of it as you go along, saying if necessary, "Wait just a second while I write that down," and going to some pains to get the words straight. Then as soon as possible after these conversations you should write a confirming letter, saying more or less, "This is my understanding of the essence of our conversation of today (date given). If this does not agree with your understanding of our conversation, please let me know in writing as soon as possible wherein it differs. If I do not hear from you, I will assume that your understanding of this conversation is substantially the same as my own." This puts the ball in their court; if they say nothing, your version goes down on the record as the official one. In other words, you put something down on the record and require them to put something else on the record if they want to change it.

The Magic Gun

A reader has sent us a clip from Advocate, published by the Illinois Education Association. The story reads, in full:

The Ragan Report, a communications newsletter, recently carried an item which may give some insights to (sic) the burgeoning school discipline problem—which has topped the Gallup Poll’s list of the public’s top concern (sic) in the school s for nine of the last ten years. This is how a young teacher in a one room school house handled this issue at the turn of the century: “I stood on top of my desk and commanded three young men to sit. They cursed me and laughed. I pulled a revolver which was concealed under my coat, cocked the hammer, and stated with some authority for them to sit down or we would bury them in the school yard. They sat down. The school has settled down to business.”

Frankly, I doubt very much that any such thing happened. But how strange it is, and how sad, and how scary, that so many of our fellow-countrymen just love to hear stories like that. The Magic Gun—just point it, and all your problems are solved.

Book Bargains

The latest catalog of Publishers Central Bureau (1 Champion Ave., Avenel NJ 07131) lists some outstanding book bargains, including:

#274817—*The New Columbia Encyclopedia*, 3052 pg., 1 vol. \$29.50 (orig. price \$79.50). A beautifully bound and printed, fascinating book, perfect for browsing.

Five books by the great archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann, discoverer of the buried cities of Troy. Would probably be ideal for older children interested in ancient history and archaeology as quite a few are.

A whole set of children's classics illustrated by Arthur Rackham. These were important books for me (as I suspect for many others) when I was little. Full of magic.

#266555—*Just So Stories*, by Kipling. Facsimile of first edition. Good read aloud stories. \$2.98.

#231697—*Larousse Encyclopedia Of The Animal World*. Over 1000 full color illus. \$19.95 (orig. \$50.00). Well worth having (bet you won't find it in most schools).

#290405—*Guinness Book Of World Records*. Latest Edition, \$3.98. Sure-fire for just about all children.

As I wrote in an earlier GWS, it is well worth while getting on this company's mailinglist.

The New Columbia Encyclopedia can also be bought at that same price from Barnes & Noble, for those of you who may live near one of their stores.

The best dictionary for children I have seen (many others agree) is *The American Heritage School Dictionary*, pub. by Houghton Mifflin (our copy says \$7.95, a very reasonable price). It is very well laid out and printed, with many interesting illustrations. The definitions are clear and useful, unlike those in some dictionaries I have seen, which are more complicated than the words they are defining, or which lead the reader around in circles. A pleasure to use, or (perhaps better yet) just to browse through.

If enough readers were interested, we might even someday carry it here.

A very good section at the beginning tells how the dictionary was made (something I never knew until long after I was grown up). Unfortunately, this is written in a style much too hard for most children. Too bad—it would be

easy to write it in words that most children could understand. If the children were interested in this, as I think many would be, parents might read this part, explaining it as they went along.

An amusing footnote. Since the book is designed for schools, the publishers have printed on the inside of the jacket the kind of sheet that school libraries usually glue into their books spaces for the name of the school, names of pupils signing it out, warning to the students not to write in it, and at the very end, these words, directed at the teachers:

The following terms should be used in recording the condition of the book: NEW, GOOD, FAIR, POOR, BAD.

From the Smithsonian in D.C. I ordered a set of the *McGuffey Eclectic Readers*—the Primer, and Vols. 1-6. I like the Primer and the first two volumes very much, certainly much more than any basal readers I ever saw in a school. The stories are good, or as good as stories written with very few words can be, and the woodcut engravings are charming and beautiful. (What an amazing art that was, now almost lost). There is more sense of the color, light, and shade of the real world in these black-and-white engravings than in the color illustrations in most modern children's books.

However, I don't like and can't recommend the later books. The moralizing of the earlier volumes, which seems perfectly right and natural for little children, becomes ponderous and preachy. I could read the earlier volumes aloud with pleasure, and without feeling that I was reading anything I would not want to say—many of the stories urge children to be kind (to each other and to animals), generous, helpful. But the later stories talk too much about being obedient, going to school, working hard, earning money, being a success. I know too much about what those schools were really for to be able to read those stories with pleasure or comfort.

Perhaps more important, the clear, direct, interesting style of the earlier volumes turns more and more into the elaborate, pompous style that many people then liked. Most of it sounds like bad political oratory. The poetry is no better. Very little truly great or even good American poetry or prose got into those later readers. Too bad.

New Books Here

To the books about children we have been selling, we are going to add more and more books for children. Here are some of our first titles:

The Animal Family, by Randall Jarrell (Dell, \$1.10 + post.) Years ago someone (I forget who) sent me this book. I had known Jarrell only through some of his poetry, most of all his famous (and grim) “Death of A Ball-Turret Gunner.” I started *The Animal Family* not knowing what to expect—the person who sent it wisely did not say that it was a children’s book. Within a few pages, I disappeared into another world. The story begins with a hunter, living by himself in a forest at the edge of the ocean. One evening, while on the beach, he sees a mermaid in the water, watching him. She is a very different kind of creature—Jarrell makes us understand how different—and it takes a long time for the hunter to overcome her shyness. In time she decides to come live with him in his little cabin. There, one by one, the other members of the family join them—a bear, a lynx, and finally, a small boy, washed ashore in a lifeboat after a shipwreck. The bear is a real bear, the lynx a real lynx, not people disguised as animals. Yet they are a real family. It is part of the magic of Jarrell’s tale that he persuades you that five such creatures might someday, somewhere, be able to and want to live together.

I hated to come to the end of the book, which I have read many times since, and always with as deep pleasure. Later I sent it to a niece, about nine, next to youngest in a large family. She read it and loved it—but not till after all the older members “of the family had read it first. I hadn’t said anything about it to them. Obviously they hadn’t been able to keep from taking a look at it, just to see what it was about, and once they started, they had to finish.

The Bat Poet, also by Jarrell (Collier Books, MacMillan; \$1.85 + post.) a very different, but also unique and charming story. A young bat, sleeping on a porch with all the other bats, decides one day to stay awake when daylight comes. He discovers a whole new world, including many other animals. He is so excited by what he sees that he begins to make up poems about it, which he recites to the other animals. Sometimes they like them, sometimes not. The bat is fascinated, as Jarrell surely was and many readers surely will be, by the ways in which poems are different from other kinds of talk, and by the process by which he makes up his poems, or by which they come to him. He

has interesting things to say about this to the other animals, some of whom like to hear it. And the poems themselves (and illustrations by Sendak) are lovely. A nice story, the only one I can think of among all the children's stories I know in which the leading character is himself an artist.

The Education Of Little Tree, by Forrest Carter (Delacorte Press, \$7.00 + post.) This is the story, true or at any rate based on truth, of a five-year old boy (the author) growing up with Cherokee Indian grandparents high in the Tennessee mountains on a tiny farm where they grow corn, which they use to make whisky, their only cash crop. The child quickly becomes a serious, responsible, and useful member of the hard-working family, and we feel how important this sense of being useful is to his growth and happiness. Their life together is an idyll, except for the white people in the valley below, who earlier drove the Indians off their land, and at one point in the story take the child (for a while) away from his grandparents.

The book makes a number of points, without being too preachy: how courteously and respectfully his grandparents treat the little boy, as a worthy and responsible equal, and how much this kind of treatment makes him want to be worthy of it; how much wiser, less gullible, less easily fooled and misled, these illiterate Indians are than most of the richer and literate whites of the valley; how superior their Indian civilization, philosophy, morality, and way of life was to the white, Christian, commercial world which drove them out.

The book is not unbiased about this. It is very heavily (though believably) slanted on the Indian side. The few Indians we meet are very good people; of the whites we meet, *only* a few are good people, the rest foolish, dishonest, bigoted, and cruel. Those who may be strongly offended by this way of looking at things might do better to avoid the book. All others should enjoy it—a very moving and instructive story.

Rootabaga Stories, by Carl Sandburg (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2 vols., \$1.75/\$1.50 + post.) I had seen this title for years, in lists of Sandburg's works, but had never seen them, assumed they were long out of print. A couple of summers ago, I was visiting a friend in Santa Fe and his seven year old son. Came bedtime and the father pulled out an old worn copy of *Rootabaga Stories* and read a couple of them aloud. The boy was entranced and so was I. After he went to bed I read all the rest of the stories, thinking, "Isn't it a shame such a fine book is out of print " Found out later to my great

pleasure that they were still in print, and in paperback, and decided to sell them from here.

Hard to say what they are about—they are not *about* much of anything. They are short fantasy tales, set right in the middle of the American Great Plains. Certain people and places appear now and then in the stories, but there are no plots to speak of, and not much happens. The stories are mostly a kind of word-magic, very hypnotic for sleepy children about to go to bed. Here is a little sample, from the story, “How Six Umbrellas Took Off Their Hats to Show Respect to the One Big Umbrella.”

Then (the umbrellas) all got up, took off their straw hats, walked up to the stranger and laid those straw hats at his feet. They wanted to show him they had respect for him. Then they all walked out, first the umbrella that feeds the fishes fresh buns every morning, then the umbrella that fixes the clocks free of charge, then the umbrella that peels the potatoes with a pencil and makes pink ink with the peelings, then the umbrella that eats the rats with pepper and salt and a clean napkin, then the umbrella that washes the dishes with a washer, then the umbrella that covers the chimney with a dishpan before it rains, then the umbrella that runs to the corner to get corners for the handkerchiefs. They all laid their straw hats at the feet of the stranger because he came without knocking or telling anybody beforehand and because he said he is the umbrella that holds up the sky, that big umbrella the rain goes through first of all, the first and the last umbrella.

Very soothing, charming, nonsensical, lovely stories. Fun to read aloud. (But then, come to think of it, I can’t imagine my recommending a book that I wouldn’t want to read aloud.) Wonderful illustrations, too.

Also, *Gnomes* (see GWS #3) is now available here in paperback \$8.95 + post.

Maps

One year when I was teaching fifth grade I saw for the first time a relief map of the United States, moulded out of plastic so that the mountains were actually raised up off the surface. It was so much more exciting to look at, and said so much more about the country, that I bought one for my class (out of my own pocket, though the school later repaid me)

The children liked it, called it “the bumpity map,” would go over from time to time and stare at it, feel mountains with their fingers, run their fingers down valleys. It told me, in a vivid and immediate way, why New York became a great seaport. The whole Eastern Seaboard is cut off from the interior by the Appalachian Mountains, except at the gap where the Hudson River comes down, and New York stands at the ocean end of that gap. If it had not had a great natural harbor people would in time have built one, because that is the right spot for it.

Also realized why the New York Central Railroad used to advertise itself as The Water Level Route, and what a great advantage that was. While the Pennsy huffed its way up the hills, the NYC sailed along the edge of the Hudson.

You can get one of these maps of the U.S., 22” x 35”, from Hubbard, P.O. Box 104, Northbrook IL 60062, for \$12.95. They also make much more detailed raised maps of smaller areas, also for \$12.95. There are 300 of these. Each map (about 22” x 34”) covers an area of about 110 x 70 miles. The series covers the entire Western third of the U.S., the Appalachian country in the Eastern states, and also Hawaii. If you live in any part of this area, you and your children may find it fascinating to look at the raised map of your area, particularly if you are in very mountainous country. If you ski, or hike in high country in the summer, you can see and feel on the map the actual slopes you ski or walk on. Very exciting. Send for their brochure.

Our Pentagon Paper

We have received in the mail a copy of a memorandum, dated Mar. 12, 1979, sent to Davis Campbell, Deputy Superintendent for Programs in the California State Department of Education. It says, in part:

Subject: PRIVATE SCHOOLS: A BRIEF SUMMARY OF
CONDITIONS, CURRENT LEGISLATION, AND OPERATIONS.

There are approximately 3040 private schools for kindergarten through twelfth grade with an approximate number of enrollees equalling 451,320.

Any person, regardless of health history, criminal background, or educational attainment can have his or her own private school merely by filing a two page form, the Private School Affidavit.

This form, when submitted to the California State Department of Education, “authorizes” the exemption of students from compulsory attendance in a public school, the conferring of diplomas, and the hiring of administrators and teachers for whom there are no minimum qualifications.

However, private school students, because of existing legislation do not enjoy protection equal to that of students in public schools. There are no checks and balances built into the system to provide recourse on complaints through the offices of a principal, superintendent, and an elected board.

These limited examples of “regulations” show that they are dysfunctional on many levels: 1) they fail to accomplish what must have been originally intended, 2) they falsely imply to the general public that state over-sight and remedies are available as needed, 3) they deny child welfare, consumer protection, and right of franchise to parents and private school children, 4) they lend themselves to unscrupulous advertisements such as “fully approved or accredited by the Department of Education” without consequences to the school.

I recommend that legislation be proposed which comprehensively

parallels the consumer protection afforded in private pre-schools and in private post-secondary schools.

As an alternative to this, would recommend that legislation be developed which would strike from the California Education Code all the existing private school “regulations” in that they are totally dysfunctional, and maintain a private-school-serving facade for the State of California oversight (sic) while in reality they serve to disenfranchise the 450,000 California children in these schools.

When we consider that the parents of a boy who was graduated from the schools of San Francisco with the reading scores of a fifth-grader were denied recourse or damages of any kind, and that these same schools defended themselves by saying that since no one agreed on what was the best or proper way to teach, they could not be judged negligent for not having taught that way (GWS #8 “The Schools Confess”), and when I think of what people have written me just in the past few months about educational malpractice in California public schools, this State Education Department memo is as outrageous as it is grotesque.

One might think that as the number of problems which the schools cannot solve continues to rise, they might grow a bit more modest. Not a bit of it. The more they fail, the more grandiose and sweeping become their claims.

The time to nip this proposed legislation in the bud is now, before it even gets into the legislature. I hope that GWS readers in California will bring this memo to the attention of the governor, legislators, newspaper editors, and any others who might have an interest in it. I would suggest that along with it they quote what we had to say about that San Francisco case, and also what Judge Meigs in Kentucky had to say about the educational “regulatory scheme” of that state.

In addition, some of the parents who have tried long and hard, and with no success whatever, to use some of that “consumer protection” and “recourse” to prevent their children from being mentally and physically abused by local schools might tell some of their personal experiences to a larger public.

Given public feeling against taxes, government expense, etc. we should be able to stop t his latest effort by educational bureaucrats to expand their turf.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durke

Associate Editor—Donna Richoux

Growing Without Schooling 11

October 1979

As you can see, as far as type goes, this issue is a bit of a hybrid. Since *GWS* #3, we have been using an IBM Memory Typewriter to type up the magazine. Recently we bought a new machine, an Olivetti, which does all the things the IBM did, plus a few others, does them faster, and lets us store as much material as we want, which is very important for the unschooling book I am working on. Since some of the material in this issue was stored in the IBM, we have used it for those stories, rather than retype them. All the material in the new typefaces has been done on the Olivetti.

Until now, *GWS* has been typed in a typeface called Letter Gothic, Elite in size, which means there are 12 characters per inch. Since none of the available Olivetti Elite-sized typefaces seemed to me as legible (don't laugh !) as the Letter Gothic, we are doing the main body of the text in a Pica-sized typeface 10 characters per inch. This loses us a few words per page, which I regret. If you find the new type easier to read, it's worth it.

For the Directory, we are still using an Elite-sized typeface, since people won't really be reading the entire Directory, just looking up a few names in it. Also, by the time *GWS* #12 comes out, the complete Directory will take up quite a lot of room.

There are now seven communities in Massachusetts in which parents are teaching their children at home, with the knowledge and support of the schools. In two of these the parents needed a court decision to do this. In the other five, the schools took a more helpful position from the start. In two of these, one of which we write more about later, the unschooled children are able to use the schools for special activities. Let's hope that many more schools follow these good examples.

No further news in the Van Daam case in Providence, R.I. The whole matter was more or less set aside during the summer.

We have now made a new version of the basic *GWS* flyer. If weight permits, we will enclose it with this issue; if not, with #12.

Coming Lectures

Sept 24, 1979: Western Maryland College, Westminster MD; afternoon workshop, 8 p.m. lecture; contact Joan Nixon, (301)848-7000 ext. 265.

Oct 17: Ithaca College, Ithaca NY; 7:30 p.m. lecture in Ford Hall; contact Jeff Bradley, Speakers Chairperson.

Oct 22: Lake Park High School Conference, District 108, 600 South Medinah Rd, Roselle IL; 9 a.m. Opening address, interaction sessions; contact David D. Victor, conf. dir.

Oct 25: Vermont Conf. of Social Concerns, at Lake Morey Inn; contact Veronica Celani, Dept of Social Welfare, State Ofc. Bldg, Montpelier 05602, (802) 241-2800.

Nov 14: Eastern Montana College, Billings; aft workshop, 8 p.m. lecture.

Nov 29: Texas Tech Univ, Lubbock; 8:15 p.m. at U.C. Theater

Apr 14, 1980: Huntingdon College, Huntingdon IN; 8 p.m. Apr 17: University of Wisconsin at Whitewater; 8 p.m. lecture at Lake Geneva WI

Apr 19: Conference on Literature and the Urban Experience, Rutgers U, Newark NJ; contact Michael C. Jaye, conf. dir.

Apr 26: Children Studies Symposium, Hobart & William Smith Colleges, Geneva NY; contact Marilyn Kallet .

Since one of the chief ways we get the money we need to produce GWS is from my lecture fees, one of the ways in which some GWS readers might help the work along is by helping me get fee-paying lectures. If any of you are connected with groups and institutions that hire speakers (colleges, conferences, etc.) and that might be interested in hearing about unschooling, you might raise this possibility with them.

When I am already scheduled to speak at a meeting, any other group in the same area (or on the way to or from it) that wants me to speak either just before or just after that meeting can have my service without having to pay all those travel expenses. The lecture fee itself may also be smaller, since it may be based on how long the new meeting delays my return to Boston.

Anything any of you may be able to do about this will be a great help.

Some of the above lectures may not be open to the public: check with the contact listed. Of course, if you can come, it will be nice to see any of you at the above meetings.

Please Renew Early

If the label on your copy of this issue has, after your name, the numerals 01 12 (or, in the case of a group sub, 02 12, 03 12, etc.), it means that your subscription, like that of many readers, ends with Issue #12.

If so, we will be very grateful if you will renew right away, rather than wait until you have received #12. If you do renew before we send issue #12 to our mailing house (probably around the middle of Nov. '79), we will extend your sub an extra issue.

By renewing early you will save us a lot of work, time and money. To those people who have not renewed by the end of January, we will send a renewal letter. A month or two later we will probably send another reminder. Then we may ask volunteers around the country to follow up with another letter or perhaps even phone calls. You can save us this trouble by renewing promptly, or, if you don't want to renew, by telling us so.

Please help us in this way. And remember—if you don't want to receive GWS, but would like to help the work along, you can always send us a contribution. We'll be glad to list you as a non-subscribing member.

For whatever you do, thanks in advance.

From A Working Mother

A mother writes from Canada:

J stayed home from school the next day—he didn’t need any coaxing. He has been out of school ever since and I have felt better and better about the move as time goes on. It seemed he had been asking me forever to be able to stay home. After a few days he missed some of his friends but still didn’t want to go back. We managed to see some of them on weekends, and that seemed to satisfy him.

I go to work on weekdays and he is left home in the apartment (reminds me of Ann McConnell in *GWS*). This worried me at first, but he said it was fine, and he has become quite self-reliant. A great weight has lifted from our relationship. I was no longer pushing him to school against his will, and he started to trust me again as he did in his pre-school days—I had almost forgotten. I had more time for him too, now that I no longer was spending time at the school. One day he talked of his mom “rescuing” him from school. I felt like a heroine.

One of the best times we had in the euphoric first two months out of school, was a marathon session in the biochemistry lab where I work. I had a 48-hour experiment going which had to be checked in the middle of the night. J went in with me the first night and we had trouble with one of the machines, a fraction collector which moves test tubes along under the end of a length of fine tubing which slowly spits out the stuff to be collected. We stayed there until 5 a.m. and J occupied himself almost the whole time with a stop-watch checking the rate of drips from the tubing, the rate of movement of the tubes, and the rate of a monitoring pen on another machine—all work that was necessary for getting the job done—and he reveled in it .

We left the building just as the last stars were leaving the sky. Sheep and cattle were grazing quietly on nearby university pastures. Only the birds provided sound. J was amazed that he had really passed through all the dark hours without sleeping. I thought of all the kids who could not have the kind of exhilaration he had just had because of their confinement to hours dictated to them by schools.

We slept all that morning and went back to the lab for checks during the afternoon and again at night and the following day. J wanted to stay with it

right to the end and did. He learned all sorts of things in that short span of time about units of volume and time, about multiplying and dividing, about fractions, about light absorption, magnets, solutions and probably other things. The same boy had been completely turned off by school math and was regarded by some as “slow” and “lazy.”

Success Story—Cape Cod

From the Cape Cod Times, June 22, 1979:

An aquarium sits on the kitchen counter and colored squares of construction paper line the refrigerator door. A bowl of turtles is on a coffee table in the living room, and a quail cage sits on the fireplace. This is the Mahoney home in Centerville—and it is also the schoolhouse for Elaine Mahoney's daughters, Kendra, 11, and Kimberlee, 9, who are being taught by their mother at home instead of attending school.

The experiment was initiated by Mrs. Mahoney, 31, last September after months of research and study.

"I think, so far, that this is the best way for my children," Mrs. Mahoney says. "There are so many different ways of learning, and it doesn't have to be confined to the four walls of a school, five days a week for nine months. Education is not something that should be done to you, but something that you do."

Mrs. Mahoney's criticisms of the Barnstable schools, however, are not an attack on the administration or teaching staff. Instead, she is more concerned with the structure of public education itself.

"The Barnstable system is the closest to the kind of schools I'd like my children to attend," she says. "The school committee and staff have been very receptive to my children's needs and to my ideas. But, I'm looking for a special way of educating my children, by assuring their independence, fulfilling their individual needs, teaching them through experience and pacing their work accordingly. The school tries to match learning and individual development but this is impossible in a classroom of 20 students who all make demands on one teacher."

Consequently Mrs. Mahoney, who is divorced, approached William Geick, Assistant Superintendent of the Barnstable Schools last spring with her proposal.

“Mrs. Mahoney came to me not as a parent angry at the school system, but as a parent with a different philosophical approach, based not only on her opinion but on sound recommendation,” Geick says. To his knowledge, Mrs. Mahoney is the only parent on the Cape who has suggested and carried through with a plan for home education.

“The duty of the school is to act in the best interest of the child,” Geick says. “In that respect, Mrs. Mahoney’s program seemed sound, and her criticisms of her children’s previous educational experience were valid ones.”

Although the children were never individually consulted by school officials, before approval of the plan Geick said that they felt confident that Mrs. Mahoney knew her children’s needs better than anyone.

“All we can do is guide their education, and act on good faith. In Mrs. Mahoney’s case, this has had a very positive result.”

Geick and Mrs. Mahoney then presented her proposal to the five-member school committee, whose reactions were mixed in the beginning.

“I wasn’t very receptive to the plan until I met Elaine,” said the head of the committee. “She impressed me as a serious, conscientious woman who was able to give this time to her children. It’s quite a responsibility and we felt she could handle it.”

A major concern of the committee was not only the quality of education the children would be receiving at home, but also the social disadvantage of their not attending school with their peers.

“Children must learn to live in large groups and interact. In that sense, we didn’t want to see the children hurt by a home education plan,” (the chairperson) said.

However, through a written contract between the Barnstable schools and Mrs. Mahoney, a flexible plan for home education was agreed upon and is reviewed annually for renewal. For academic guidelines, Mrs. Mahoney is required to rely on a certified teacher. Mrs. Mahoney

is also relying upon the Calvert School instruction booklets, a prescribed home teaching program, as a backbone for teaching the basics. She says the children are drilled at least three hours a day in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

“Since I only have a high school education, I’m learning with my daughter,” she says. “If I feel inadequate in a subject matter, I go to outside resources, particularly in the community.” When her daughters expressed an interest in electronics, Mrs. Mahoney took them to a sound studio.

The school committee has made it possible for the Mahoney children to attend special programs offered in Cape schools in order to round out their education and provide opportunities for them to socialize with their peers. In the past year Kendra and Kim have attended school workshops in solar energy, wood carving, beekeeping, jazz, and arts and crafts. Both are members of the 4H Club and the YWCA and Kim is currently the only girl on a little league baseball team.

“I think the girls are interacting as much as ever with kids their own ages,” their mother says. “In fact, even more, because they have met many new people, from classmates to community members who have opened their doors to us.”

“Elaine has sought out more resources to teach her daughters in nine months than most teachers do in four years,” a special education teacher J says. “I’m amazed at the number of things she’s thought of. When the children express an interest in an area, she picks right up on it, whether it be marine life at a beach, or physical fitness. They go, and do, and see, something that public schools just can’t do when on a strict class schedule.”

When the school committee reviewed the Mahoney’s progress this past month, they were unanimously pleased with their achievements. They were particularly impressed with a scrap book the girls had made illustrating a year of activities. Although the girls were not graded, they will be required to take the Iowa Basic Skills Tests.

“Learning goes on every hour of the day,” Mrs. Mahoney says, “so

how can you grade or test that accumulated knowledge?”

She indicates the reactions of parents in the community were mixed. “Some were very supportive and others angry or fearful because my way of educating is threatening an established institution.”

Kim notes that her friends called her “a lucky duck” when they learned she’s been staying home all year to learn.

“When they find out the things we do and places we go, they want to go too.”

And the future? Mrs. Mahoney plans to continue teaching again next year. In fact, the girls will still be “in school” this summer on a lighter schedule so they don’t have to review in the fall.

“I’d like to go on doing this for as long as we can.” But after next year, Kendra will be of junior high age, so an entirely different set of circumstances may enter into their decision.

“I might want to go back to school then,” Kendra says, although she adds she sees her friends all the time. “It’ll be my choice.”

So far, no other parent in the Barnstable school system has approached the administration with an alternative education plan. “We regard it as a valid premise, although what follows is no snap decision,” Geick says. “But, we are pleased with the Mahoney family.” Mrs. Mahoney only has words of praise for the school committee. “I respect them because they care. Because of that, anything is possible. I’d like to see more parents and children attempt this system and I encourage other parents to come to me for suggestions.”

Unschooling Survey

I'd like to ask readers to help us make an informal (and confidential) survey of unschoolers. Please let me know if you are teaching one or more of your children at home, and if so, which of the following statements describe your situation. (Feel free to answer simply with numbers and letters, though if you want to add more details that will be fine. Don't feel you have to answer all questions—if you're not sure of an answer, just skip it.)

1. Our local school system (please name) knows about, and a) supports, or b) at least tolerates and allows, our home teaching plan.

2. Our local schools would be willing to be listed in *GWS* as allowing or supporting our home teaching.

3. Our local schools, as far as we know, do not know that we are teaching children at home.

4. Our local schools support or tolerate our home teaching plan, but only after a court decision in our favor. (Please give name of court and judge, the title of the case, i.e. *People v. Jones*, and date of ruling.)

5. We are able to teach our children at home because we have registered our own home as a private school. (Please give name.)

6. We are able to teach our children at home because we have registered them with a school a) in our town b) in our state c) out of state, which supports our home teaching program. (Please name school.)

7. This school would be willing to be listed in *GWS* as supporting our home teaching.

8. We have some arrangement not listed above (please specify).

9. Our local schools are supporting and assisting our home teaching program a) by helping us get needed materials b) by giving us other assistance which we find helpful (please specify) c) by allowing our child(ren) to go to the school to use special facilities or to take part in special activities.

10. Our local schools are impeding our home teaching program by a) making us conform to their curriculum b) making us prepare an elaborate curriculum for their approval c) making us teach subjects we would prefer not to teach d) making us give the children tests we would prefer not to give them (please specify).

11. Our local schools send people to our home to inspect/oversee our program (please say about how often).

12. On the whole, these inspectors seem to be a) friendly, helpful, etc. b) the opposite c) indifferent.

13. In order to get the local schools to approve our program, we submitted a formal proposal to them (please indicate roughly how long).

14. In our home teaching proposal we included some references to court rulings in this field.

15. In preparing our plan, we had the aid of a lawyer. (Please give name and address.)

16. Our lawyer would be willing to be a) referred to other unschoolers looking for legal help b) listed in GWS as being willing to do this.

17. The decision to allow us to carry out our program was, as far as we know, made by a) the superintendent of schools b) the school board c) other (please specify, if you know).

18. In getting approval for our plan, we had to, or chose to deal with authorities at the state level. (Please specify.)

19. In getting approval, we used the assistance, advice, support, etc. of one or more outside organizations. (Please specify.)

20. In teaching our children at home, we make some use of formal curriculum materials, such as Calvert, Home Study Institute, etc. (Please specify).

21. In order to get these materials, we had to send a letter of approval from some school (please name).

22. In using such materials, we feel a) they are really helpful b) we would rather not use them, but are using them as part of our arrangement with the local schools, or for some other similar reason, i.e. to protect ourselves in case of trouble.

23. Our homeschooling has received some mention in the local media. (Please specify.)

24. On the whole, we feel that the local media have been a) favorable b) unfavorable.

25. As far as we know a) quite a number of people in our community know about our homeschooling b) few if any people know about it.

26. As far as we know, the people who know about our homeschooling seem to be a) favorable, supportive, etc. b) indifferent c) unfavorable, hostile,

etc.

27. As a result of media attention to our program, or for whatever reason, other people in our community have asked us how they might unschool their children. (About how many?)

This is probably enough questions for now. If you think of an important question that we did not ask, please suggest it.

Thanks very much for whatever information you can send. As I said, anything you say will be confidential, unless you tell us otherwise. But this information will help us to have a slightly better idea of how many people are teaching children at home. And it will be a great help to future unschoolers.

An Unschooled Special Child

A mother who has unschooled her teen-aged daughter (born with Downs Syndrome) writes about this experience:

As for unschooling L, I had long wanted to do this with my older children, and everything I read in GWS and have experienced with her makes me quite sad to have missed the opportunity to have allowed them the same thing. Of course the time was not right—in the world or in me—so it probably would not have worked anyway. But I saw in them all the things GWS describes, and did try to help them along in an extracurricular way. They had some tutoring, took time off on occasion on regular school days (as when one went to Stevens Inst. to fool around with computers), and I had the strength of mind to tell the school secretary, who asked “And is this going to be a regular thing?” that it just might be. I was always strong-minded but not often enough strong-spoken, unfortunately, when it came to dealing with these insufferable school systems. Only when it was as obviously desperate as it clearly was to save L from their awful effects was I able to do what I knew was the only way to proceed.

Anyway, L only once had any special ed. involvement, at a nursery school run by the local association for retarded children, and it was bad to useless. From there on she went to regular schools—private nursery school, private kindergarten, a public school which was running an experimental open primary, and a Catholic private academy. All this was expensive and time-consuming. Six of those years I drove her back and forth—16 miles each way (x 4 trips a day). The local public school system only once honored my demands for reimbursement of tuition, after the county special ed. people managed to point out that one of L’s teachers had a learning disabilities certification and therefore the class could be defined as a special program. They did say they’d provide transportation to the public school, but I preferred to drive her myself, since I wanted to keep her out of special ed. situations, which I feel *increase* the degree of handicap by providing handicapped models of behavior. And the transportation, of course, was in the special ed. vans. Besides, I wanted hot-off-the-classroom readings of her moods and responses, not her reactions 45 minutes after leaving school.

In planning to unschool, I went through the usual mental discussions about

how much time I should allocate, how to re-create a parallel school system for one child, and so forth. Of course I quickly realized the futility of that idea just on the basis of money. To provide even one week of tutoring according to the time allotments of schools (4-6 hours a day) rapidly used up all the money I was paying for a year of private schools. No wonder people feel the schools are a good buy just in terms of the *cheapness* of the babysitting.

From the beginning, L and I have planned what she'd do. I collected clippings from all over for a year, then sorted out the ones I could afford, and presented those to her for her consideration. Choices like cooking, horseback, trips to New York and elsewhere, tutoring. We did have to keep changing things when, for instance, a teacher who was going to give her cooking lessons (an overnight deal) got divorced and went to work in New York.

But we kept consulting and revising, and ended up with the present schedule of swimming, ballet, drawing and painting, and needlepoint. There were other considerations besides the learning ones involved too. I felt it was not safe for her not to swim well, and her ear operations had made her fearful of going whole hog on her own. So she has private lessons in that. And I read about a ballet dancer who had taken ballet initially to overcome flat feet, so we began this mainly for that reason. Too, the more I went into it, the more I decided that what L needed was a reprieve from the morass of schoolwork that, in spite of the good-as-possible situations I'd been able to find, was not at all as helpful or satisfying as I felt might be possible somewhere, somehow. So I decided not to do anything at all academic for a while. Just say the heck with it.

So we went to the beach in the lovely October and even November weather that had been denied us as prisoners of school, played kickball in the back field, and proceeded with the courses.

On one trip to the shore, paying tolls, it was again clear that L still didn't know one coin from another, so that became the first academic venture. And it provided one of my first principles: though the general ideas are the same for L as with regular kids out of school, certain things have to be done differently. While other kids probably need only a bit of assistance and guidance in following what they learn and are interested in, L really has to have regular exposure. Not lengthy but regular— daily, if possible, including weekends.

Every day I put prices on four things and she worked them out with a plastic measuring cup full of change—a permanent collection of coins. I remember trying to get the school people to have her use real money but they seemed to think that was quaint. They just loved their big cardboard coins. Within a month she had it cold. I switched to numbers on paper, and she could do it that way too. (Ed.— and in the schools we have all those “normal” children who after years of school arithmetic still supposedly can’t make change.)

However, a second principle of unschooling with L is this: like freelance writing, unschooling is subject to cancellation at any time, whenever somebody comes to visit, or the neighbor’s car breaks down and she calls you to go pick her up, etc. Now this is probably one of the advantages of unschooling with other kids—that you can live your regular life and still keep learning. But with L, Christmas, and long visits from my mother, who had not been well, meant a far less-than-hoped for routine. I had a hard time concentrating on what I was working on, and L would get tense. Early in our unschooling one of the first things I saw was an increased sense of success—a euphoric “I can do it” feeling, in contrast to the tight lips, lowered head, long hair hiding eyes that had been typical of the earlier work with school stuff. Yet when life got hectic that same posture quickly returned. (Ed.—this is an example of the kind of important sign that parents can learn to notice, but that classroom teachers are usually too busy to notice.)

I worried about the possibility that it was only the one-to-one situation that was doing the job and then answered myself that this was what all kids could use. Yet it did seem somewhat unrealistic to try to manage it when life was so uncooperative. I still haven’t solved this problem. I suspect it’s a problem with others to some degree too, but it’s more difficult when the youngster has some learning barriers.

In fact, it seems to me that this question of scheduling is central. I suspect that it’s only the school requirements that keep some families at it all, and that in doing so, they undo some of the benefits of trying unschooling in the first place.

That is, feeling under pressure to produce for the satisfactions of the schools and their requirements, they may lay a lot of pressure and guilt on the kids.

In our case, though, it just seems as though things don’t stick in her head

unless we keep to some kind of regular routine. But though we require something regular, it doesn't need to be lengthy, and the generally free feeling I have about the whole thing is one of the best things about it. We've been able, at times, to really be flexible about things like going outside on a nice day when the forecast calls for rain later. Or grocery shopping early when the stores aren't busy instead of later when the lines get long. Nevertheless, the problem of interruptions persists. And I'm not sure I can do much about it. Any suggestions?

There are some problems, of course, beside this. One I would really appreciate your thoughts about. After the money, I began fooling around with sentences, which have been a problem for a long time. I keep wondering how important it is at all to have her learn about sentences, except that she is a wild and wonderful letter writer. She's been sending out two or three letters a day, to friends and relatives, and would send them to strangers too if allowed. She has her own address book, and usually includes several riddles that she copies out of one of her books. But the structure, though eminently clear in content, is pretty frustrating in design. The letters are really remarkable in what they say—she's tremendously articulate—but the sentences all run together, and she leaves out “a,” “an,” and other small items.

I've tried to get straight in her mind the difference between a sentence and a question, and found a curious thing. It turns out—and this is something I'm sure a school would never have found out—that to L a sentence and a question are essentially the same thing, you just say them differently. For instance, you could say, “The mail will come today.” Or you could ask, “The mail will come today?” She does this with everything. I think the problem might be solved in some other language. But it makes letter writing a problem even if it works out in conversation. The usual way of distinguishing sentences from questions, by raising your voice at the end, doesn't work in writing. She does that when speaking, but in writing uses exactly the same form. As I say, who cares, as long as she communicates. But I would like to make it easier on her letter-readers, and make it more likely that they would reply.

I feel I have done nowhere near enough in this letter to indicate how enthusiastic I am about the whole unschooling enterprise, in spite of the difficulties I've indicated. L's typing goes well, her needlepoint is terrific (and her instructor is out of her mind with joy and amazement), in ballet she

is just barely less competent than the older girls in the class (20–40), and in art, according to her teacher, she is really gifted. As for the calligraphy (Ed.—italic writing), she really likes it when she does it, but doesn't often choose to do it. The early stages can be quite frustrating, and L has very high expectations for herself.

I do want to write a chronicle of L's experiences and mine—both the vitamin developments and the unschooling. But it really overwhelms me when I think of all the small threads that I've watched along the way, and when I read my scribbled notes. Incidentally, I keep forgetting to include one of the first courses. This was a gardening course, run by Morristown's Frelinghuysen Arboretum. The kids each had a 10 x 15 plot, seeds and plants, and help in planting and cultivating. It started on Saturdays from 9–12 in April '78, then switched in June to 9–1:30 two mornings a week, through Aug., with evenings open for harvesting crops as required through Sept. Besides the gardening, they made candles, dried herbs and flowers, cooked zucchini bread and squash fritters, collected bugs, and other stuff—all very skillfully, not just cutely. The teachers were great. It's running again this year, but with slightly shorter hours and lower fees, in order to try to reach more kids. So L will take it again—she generally profits more from a twice-around plan, to give her a chance to really get into things that she got introduced to the first time.

For the past year she's been taking a variety of vitamins, thyroid, etc. She has lost 15 pounds. Weight is often a problem with children with mongolism, but in her case this turned out to be largely a result of a gluten allergy, hitherto unsuspected. She has also grown 5/8", her general appearance has improved greatly, and her intellectual functioning is enhanced. Her art teacher says of her, "This is not the same child I met last fall."

Earlier this year we had so many letters from people asking about *Growing Without Schooling*, and about teaching children at home, that we could not answer them all. In the magazine I asked readers if some of them, who could type and also had a cassette tape recorder, would help with this. Many offered to do so, among them L's mother. She asked if it would be OK, for the letters she was doing, if L addressed (in handwriting) the envelope. I said, fine. I sent them a tape of letters, which came back soon afterwards, the

letters typed, the envelopes neatly addressed. Then I sent them a big stack of letters from all over the country, that we had already answered, but that now needed to be broken down by states so that we could send them to people in the various states for a closer follow-up. Along with these I sent a tape of instructions. About this, L's mother wrote:

L was thrilled with the whole project, and most impressed with being addressed by name on the tape. She took to the sorting and filing with gusto. I hadn't mentioned that this was another part of our "program," again one where I had tried to convince the schools to do something "real." They kept trying to get her to alphabetize on paper, and I wanted them to give her index cards, recipes, etc. or folders. No use. So when we started our planning this year, I had her make up a bunch of file folders, for each course or planned activity, and she puts receipts, brochures and stuff in them. Also we keep her papers for figuring out money, arithmetic problems, sentences, etc. Also, since I need some shape for my days and am a chronic list maker, we'd make up daily schedules (especially so she could go about her work without having to check with me every minute, something she really enjoys the independence, I mean). These schedules, if more than routine, also go into the folders.

So she was already used to that. She made up the folders (with my help in listing the states and assorted abbreviations). The first round, I went through the letters and underlined the state. The second time around I just screened them to be sure there was an address and that it was legible, but didn't note them—she figured them out herself. Anyway, L loves the job, and can't wait to get started, at night even, after supper. All this seems ideal for L's purposes—some work experience, plus the exposure to the filing, alphabetizing, state names and abbreviations, etc. all without any formal "instruction," just doing it—the perfect way, but hard to find, especially for her.

(Ed.—In a later letter, she reports that L now has a paying part-time job.)

Typing Help Available

The experience of many people who have tried, some successfully, some unsuccessfully, to take their children out of school and teach them at home, has shown very clearly that your chances of being able to do this are much better if you prepare for the school a very detailed statement about why you want to do it, how you plan to go about doing it, and what the various court decisions are that uphold your right to do it.

Three things to say about this document. First, it cannot be too long. The more you can put in about why and how you want to teach your own children, the more educational authorities you can quote, the more court decisions you can cite, the better. Your plan is a thinly disguised legal brief. In it you are speaking, not just to the school superintendent and school board, but beyond them to an invisible judge, should the schools be unwise enough to try to take you to court. You may not say anything about going to court in your plan—indeed it is wiser not to, but instead to talk as if you assumed that the schools were going to be reasonable and cooperative (as indeed some have been). But if your plan is complete enough, and shows enough knowledge of the law, the school people, if tempted to oppose you, are going to ask themselves, “What’s going to happen if we have to argue against this in front of a judge?” You want them to feel that if they push matters that far; they are going to lose.

Secondly, you should send copies of your plan to as many school people as possible, certainly to all members of the school board, to the superintendent and leading members of his administrative staff, and perhaps others as well. On every copy you send put a list of all the people who will receive it. Most of them will feel that they have to read it, and then discuss it with all the others. Your task is to make them feel, not only that you are serious, responsible, and knowing, but also that it is going to cost them much time and trouble if they try to oppose you. These people are busy, they already have to go to many more meetings than they like, and you want their hearts to sink a little bit at the prospect of still more meetings.

Thirdly, your plan should be typed, neatly and accurately, in good business form, on good 8 ½ x 11 paper, preferably a business letterhead if you have one. This will impress the school people, and beyond them, that

invisible and (you hope) avoidable judge. Appearances may not be everything, but in this world they count. Make (on paper) the best appearance you can.

The problem is, of course, that many people who may want to take their children out of school can't type, or type well, or quickly, or may not have access to a good typewriter (and it should be reasonably good). That is what this memo is about. Many people, all over the country, have very kindly offered to help, and have already helped *GWS* with some of its typing work. They will surely be glad to help you. So if you need people to help type up your home education plan, and any other letters you may have to write, let us know, and we will put you in touch with skilled and willing typists.

Writing a “Curriculum”

From a letter to a parent:

As far as curriculum goes, I think the most important thing is to put something down on paper that the schools will accept, without being so specific that it ties your own hands. It's not necessary to tell the school people what you will be doing, far less to convince them that it is right. Since practically everything in the school curriculum falls within the boundaries of ordinary daily life, things which young people are interested in simply because these things are part of the world, I think you could very well fill out some kind of paper saying you'll be studying English, mathematics, history, science, etc. After all, nobody can look at a magazine or a daily paper without running into these things. I wouldn't say that you will be teaching a particular subject between 9 and 10 a.m. every Thursday, or anything as specific as that. But I wouldn't hesitate to say that anyone of these subjects will be “covered” for as many hours a week as happens in school.

The “Social Life”

I find more and more, and others do too, that when we talk to people about unschooling one of the first responses we get is the question, “What about the social life?”

As *GWS* readers know, I reply to this by saying that the social life of most of the schools and classrooms I have ever seen or heard about is so mean-spirited, status-oriented, competitive, and snobbish, that I would be glad to keep a child out of it in any way I could.

What I find more and more remarkable is how people—by now they must number into the hundreds—respond to this reply of mine. I cannot remember even *one* person who has said to me, “You’re wrong about the social life at school, it is kindly, generous, supporting, democratic, friendly, loving, etc., and the children love it and benefit from it, etc.” No, without exception, when I condemn the social life of school, people then say, “But that’s what the world is like, that’s what the children are going to meet in Real Life.”

A news story on my desk quotes one superintendent as saying, “I would be particularly worried about the social adjustment of the child. He just wouldn’t know what it’s like to be working in groups.” (As if there were no groups anywhere in the world except in schools.)

Another said, “We can’t keep our kids in the closet all their lives. Sure, there are some things in the schools that are not perfect—but that’s what life is about. What we have to teach children at home is how to cope with the bad things, not lock the kid up to protect him.”

A recent issue of *EVAN-G* (End Violence Against the Next Generation—see *GWS* #1) reports that a school in Fort Lauderdale FL recently paddled 100 children for running in the playground during recess. About this, the vice-principal (and paddler), William Smith, said, “We cannot guarantee their safety if they continue to run.” He later announced that the paddling had had “a positive effect” because there were few violations of the no-run rule and no accidents.

But it couldn’t have worked too well, for a few weeks later the school removed all basketballs, jump ropes, and tetherballs from the playground as well.

A parent in a fairly rich Boston suburb called me only a few days ago to

report that her children had recently told her that they were forbidden to run or play games during recess probably for the same reason.

So much for keeping kids “locked in closets,” etc. As a matter of fact, this may not be a bad time to report what one other parent wrote me a few months ago. Her child, a third or fourth grader, who lives quite close to the school, had been late coming home. The mother started to walk to school to see if she could find her. On the way she met the child’s teacher. When the teacher saw the mother, a startled expression came over her face, and she quickly turned and went back to the school -to let the child out of the closet into which she had locked her some time before, which she had completely forgotten.

Naturally, the mother made quite a fuss about this, and naturally, nothing was done about it.

To return to my main point, a very large number of people, including many or most school people, seem to accept and support the idea that school is a place where children have a lot of bad experiences to get them ready for the bad experiences they will later have in Real Life.

Well, if people who feel that way about life want to have that kind of training for their children, I suppose it is their right. But people who don’t feel that life is basically boring, meaningless, and cruel should not be compelled to watch their children being brainwashed, programmed, and bullied into that belief.

One other point. I suspect that most of the people who worry about their children “fitting in” are people who have never felt that they themselves really “fitted in,” but felt instead more like the losers and outcasts of whom our schools are so full.

Success Story—Indiana

Let me tell you what happened to our son after we removed him from a local public school's first grade last November. He stopped wetting his bed, he stopped suffering from daily stomach upsets and headaches and he has not had a cold for six months, although he averaged one cold a month while attending school. He has gained five pounds and has grown almost two inches. And he is happy!

My husband and I had become increasingly concerned about the lowered academic standards in the public schools and the increasing availability of drugs—even in the primary grades. We had also watched our older children lose their innate intellectual curiosity by fourth grade, sometimes never regaining this priceless enthusiasm.

We moved to Evansville three years ago. P attended kindergarten “77-78, in a class of 42 youngsters. He stuck it out because every morning he and five other kindergartners attended a reading class for half an hour. During this time he was absent from the noise and general chaos of a large class which he so disliked. I began to look into other schools at this time.

(Reading GWS), added to our 25 year interest in *Summerhill*, convinced us that not only was it possible to raise a child without formal schooling, but it is the most probable way to insure that child's lasting interest in all that surrounds him. I decided not to register P for first grade, reasoning that the public school would probably assume that we had put him in private school and vice versa. My husband, however, was uneasy ... he did not relish the idea of being hauled into court. (His attitude changed during the following weeks.) We decided to let P attend first grade. Maybe he would like it, etc. etc.

After the second week of school we knew that we would have to take him out. There were thirty children in his class. Each Monday morning the paddle, used freely in this southern Indiana City (Ed.—and all over the state) was removed from the teacher's desk drawer and prominently displayed. In some of the other classrooms in this school the paddle was hung on a nail next to the blackboard. P was so terrified of the possibility of his being paddled and humiliated in front of his friends that he could think of little else. He never would have been paddled, of course, being as frightened as he was

of doing something to initiate the wrath of his teachers. (Ed.—in such schools a small child does not necessarily have to “do something” in order to be paddled.) Nevertheless, he refused to be convinced that he had nothing to worry about and in four weeks he had dropped from the top reading group to the lowest.

Some other incidents: 1) he was backed up against the wall of the bathroom by a larger first grader who asked yet another first grade boy, “Want to see me beat up this kid?” P kicked and escaped. 2) On the playground at lunch time P threw his arms around a boy from the other first grade class whom he had known the year before kindergarten and whom he had not seen all summer. Two fourth grade boys saw this display of affection and called P “gay” thereafter, taunting him at school and on the school bus. 3) P fell on the playground, hit head and wandered back into the classroom to tell his teacher—who told him *never* to come back into the building until the bell rang. When P told her about his head she told him to report it to the playground supervisor. P did not know there was such a person on that crowded macadam square!

The children were not allowed to converse in the lunchroom and the “hostess” wielding the inevitable paddle reminded them what would happen to them if they did. P would come home from school exhausted, irritable, crying and carrying his lunch—untouched. (This lunchroom situation has been going on for four years despite formal protests from various parents.)

We contacted a young interested and sympathetic lawyer who after some research found out that Indiana requires school attendance except in cases where the child is so physically or mentally handicapped that he/she would be getting in the public schools. Our attorney also discovered that “equivalency” has not yet been established in Indiana.

On his advice we had P tested by a child psychologist to assure “the authorities” that he had no emotional or mental disorders. Next we secured a first grade curriculum from a correspondence school and had it evaluated by the Dept. of education at a local university.

Four weeks after we began our campaign we flew with our lawyer to Indianapolis to meet with the superintendent of Indiana public schools. He was stone-faced and unsympathetic and told us that if we took our son out of school we would be prosecuted. Later on during the interview he *did* tell us of a couple of Indiana who had removed their children from schools (for

religious reasons) and, after a court hearing and some investigation into their homeschooling, had been permitted to teach them at home. My husband told them that we had hired an attorney and had gone to great lengths and considerable expense to remove our son from school as discreetly as possible. He felt that if this whole thing hit the newspapers the Evansville-Vanderburg School Corp, would be the ones to suffer – not us. I guess that the superintendent must have agreed, inwardly, for he directed us to the state Attendance Officer. She was sympathetic but not hopeful. She suggested that we meet with the local Attendance Officer and tell him of our plans, hoping that he would wait a couple of weeks before handing us a citation.

Two weeks later we had interviews with the attendance officer and the superintendent of the elementary schools. We found out later from our lawyer that the officials in Indianapolis had called the local officials advising them to let us take P out of school. An emergency meeting was called and it was decided to let us go ahead with our plans without prosecuting. This did not mean that they were happy about it! The school superintendent was alternately distraught and angry. He wound up, however, begging me to let P try any school in the city – they would forego the usual zoning restrictions for him. But it was too late for that. P *hated* any mention of school. The fact that neither my husband nor I are teachers and have never even taken an education course was never mentioned. (We do both have master's degrees.) So, we were free to take him out of school provided I sent a monthly attendance report to the local officer.

The first couple of months of homeschooling were rocky. P, relieved to be out of the formal school situation, went along with a fairly rigid home schedule for two weeks. Then it was nothing but rebellion. I think the only thing that made him go along with any reading, math, science, etc. was the gear that he might have to return to school. I over-organized his days and weekends with activities including children his own age, so afraid was I that he would end up some sort of weird recluse.

Along about mid-Feb, I re-read *Summerhill*, *And The Children Played*, and your book *How Children Learn*. I re-read some of the GWS issues and gradually have come to my senses. Some mornings we don't. We visit museums, libraries, farms, and parks. We go to the movies. We meet my husband for lunch and go horseback riding. At home P builds villages with his Lincoln Logs, plays in his tree house, skateboards, rides his bike, plays

with his dogs, jumps on the trampoline, paints pictures and (sometimes) practices his violin. Last winter we sledded every day. Late in the afternoon our backyard is the gathering place for youngsters of all ages. During a recent trip to Florida, P was as much at ease with adults as with the vacationing youngsters in the hotel. So, I let up on the forced sociability along with the unreasonable academic demands. The books are there when he wants to look at them and now that I am no longer pressuring him, he wants to learn.

I just wanted to tell you about our own very special experience with unschooling. And we want to thank you for publishing GWS. Without it we would probably not have had the courage to do what we did.

(From a later letter:)

Many people have asked me if I used a curriculum with P and I did – this past year, from the Hope Study Institute in Washington, D.C. I was not planning to use a definite curriculum this year but I have changed my mind, simply because I think it is a good idea to have some text school authorities start snooping!

I wanted to tell you of our experience with P and a compass. A few weeks ago, he bought a small camper's compass with money he had earned doing chores. We took a walk around the neighborhood with the compass noting how our direction changed although the needle always pointed North. But this was not enough. P wanted me to explain the numbers along the edges of the compass and wanted to know exactly how they were used. I referred him to his father and they spent hours working out hypothetical "problems" on paper. During this time P asked me to read to him our encyclopedia about compasses. There we learned that the first compass (1000 A.D.) was merely a magnetic piece of iron stuck into a cork floating in water. P proceeded to unearth two nails from our basement both of which had some magnetic qualities, He stuck one of them in a cork so that it was evenly balanced, filled a bowl with water and lo and behold! – A homemade compass that actually works!

Later my husband drew an intricate compass course with P followed with very little help, at the end of which he found a dollar bill "prize" in our mailbox. My husband tells me that he didn't know that much about reading a compass until he was in the Army. (He never was a Boy Scout) I am hoping that eventually we will have several unschoolers in our area. It will then be easier to exchange ideas and, perhaps, to organize a day each week when the

children can be together.

The Violin At Two

As some may know, in the Suzuki method of violin instructions, at least as first conceived and practiced, the parents of a child, while it is still a baby, begin to play for it, and many times, recordings of the easy violin pieces which it will itself learn to play at the age of three. Kathy Johnson and I have (in letters) talked often about Suzuki. Recently she wrote:

You asked me last December to let you know how my home adaptation of Suzuki violin with my two year old daughter is working. I hadn't actually brought home the 1/16 size violin then, but in self-defense had to get her one to keep her from having tantrums (ED. – i.e., feeling angry about being left out) when my Dad and I played. Her being well into the “No” stage now is living proof of why they don't organize a class of young Suzuki violinists until age three.

But I feel you *can* do more at an early age than merely playing the record. With no big fanfare, one day when a tantrum started during our duet, I simply suggested she play her own violin – that little one over there in the corner. She gave me a look as if to say, “Oh yes, but of course!” And before the duet was over, had figured out how to open the case, get the violin out, and saw bow upside down over the strings a few times. She was delighted.

In the past four months, whenever we saw such a gross mistake on her part, either my dad or I (whoever was closer) would *very briefly* reach down and show her a better way to play as we went along. Of course, she had to learn some rules: not to carry her instrument around the house, especially on non-carpeted surfaces, not to handle the bow hair (or it won't make any sound on the strings), etc. We were amazed how fast she learned to respect her instrument. She even keeps the bow rosined!

She hasn't mastered the technique of playing just one string at a time yet, but she has darn good position, and a wonderful time developing those long full bows.

We were amazed when out-of-town relatives came to visit and our *shy* little daughter brought out her violin to squawk on the strings in front of a roomful of adults. We were all proud—but not as proud as she was! I think the important thing my dad and I learned very quickly was to recognize that moment when she needed help, capitalize on it briefly, then leave her alone to

experiment. Praise is used, but in not much greater amounts than Dad and I praise each other. We play for enjoyment. I think she does, too. She won't stand for a "lesson." Help that is a few seconds too long or in the wrong tone of voice brings loud "No-No's" followed by her putting her violin away and being angry. At this age, there's a fine line between happiness and tears. When she wants, if she wants, we'll see an expert.

Auto Expert At Seven

John McPhee, in his book about Alaska, *Coming Into the Country*, tells a number of stories about people teaching their children at home, or learning things outside of school. One story is about Stanley Gelvin, who at age seven bought for ten dollars an old broken down Chevy that had not run for years, sent away for parts, and, reading out of a book on auto mechanics, rebuilt the engine and made it run. His parents ran a truck stop, and Stanley would regularly advise the drivers about the state of their machines. He warned one driver that his differential was in bad shape. The driver told him not to worry, it always sounded funny. Twenty miles up the road, the differential completely broke down.

And A Computer Expert

From a teacher in Vancouver:

I saw an interesting thing this past week. I was down at a little storefront place called the Community Computer Institute (a small business which rents time on computers—the little personal ones—for very good rates; they also have self-teaching programs which you can use to have the computer teach you how to use the computer). While I was there an older man and a young boy, about 11, came in and were looking around. The kid was fascinated and the man was a little perplexed and amazed, “they’re finally here ... my, my ...” However, the kid began to show the man some games on one of the simpler computers and within a few minutes both were engrossed in a major *Star Trek*-like game. After the game the kid explained some rudimentary principles of programming to the man, who by this time was very interested.

So was I, because here was a classic example of a teaching/learning situation between two people without regard for age, roles or formal structure. I felt very good watching this whole episode and wondered what kind of things we could invent to facilitate this kind of thing happening throughout the city. I tried to explain this to some of the teachers I work with and they just ignored me. “That’s not real learning and it just gets in the way of teaching them math skills.” Here was an 11 year old kid who had taught himself more about computers than I know by hanging around this place before it officially opened (so they let him use the computers for free) and by reading simple articles about programming. And they tell me that it’s not real learning!

Calvert Ad

A reader sent us a copy of an ad in a recent issue of the Western Airlines magazine.

CALVERT SCHOOL

Kindergarten through 8th grade. Educate your child at home with approved home study courses, or use as enrichment. Home is the classroom, you are the teacher with the help of step-by-step instructions. Start anytime, transfer to other schools. Used by over 300,000 students. Nonprofit. Write for catalogue. Admits students of any race, color, national or ethnic origin. Box WW5-9, Tuscany Rd., Baltimore MD 21210.

This is very interesting. I have done a great deal of flying in the last ten or fifteen years, and (being a print-"o-holic, read anything within reach) I always read the airline magazine in the seat pocket. But I have never yet seen a Calvert ad.

If you know these magazines, you know they are aimed at rich, successful, prominent, etc. people. Ads for expensive resorts, expensive products, and the like. Obviously, Calvert thinks that these folks may now be open to the idea of teaching their children at home.

Another interesting point. The "Box WW5-9" business has nothing to do with a real box. It is a code, so that when someone writes in reply to the ad, Calvert will know which ad s/he saw, and so, know which ads are the most effective. Standard practice in the advertising business. What it tells us in this case is that Calvert has placed, or is getting ready to place, ads in a number of publications.

This can only be good news for unschoolers, for many reasons. With those ads, Calvert is spreading the idea, and to many people who may not for a long time hear of GWS as Calvert gets bigger, they may grow less nervous about not sending their materials except to people who have the approval of the local schools. Finally, the bigger Calvert gets, the more interested they will be in having legislatures make homeschooling explicitly legal, or at least, in preventing legislatures from making it specifically illegal, which in time the school lobbies may try to get them to do.

In short, whether they know (or like) it or not—but I think they must know it—Calvert is an ally of unschoolers. The stronger they get, the better off we are.

And note that figure of 300,000 students. I would surely like to know how many of these are in the U.S., and of these how many are full-time homeschoolers. I have been saying, and have been widely quoted as saying, that the number of families teaching their children at home was somewhere between 1000 and 10,000, probably closer to the latter. But perhaps my guess is far too low. Next time I am asked, I will quote the Calvert figure, and let people interpret it how they will.

Meanwhile, if any readers find these or similar ads, for Calvert or anyone

else, please let us know.

A Good Idea

A reader writes:

I am working at a Family Health Center, where many families and their children come for medical help. I put a note on the bulletin board about *Growing Without Schooling*, and am receiving a lot of requests for more subscriptions.

Ruling in VA

The following excerpts from a recent Virginia court may be useful to unschooling parents in a number of states.

Virginia: In The Juvenile And Domestic Relations District Court of The City of Norfolk Commonwealth of Virginia v. Theo Giesy No. A 08203-A Commonwealth of Virginia v. Daniel Giesy No. A 08202-1 April 4, 1979 Johnny E. Morrison, Assistant Commonwealth Attorney, for plaintiff. Thomas B. Shuttleworth for defendants.

The statute at bar is a part of the Compulsory Attendance Law (Sections 22-275 .122-275.23). It is not a part of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Law (Sections 16.1-226-16.1-330). Confrontation with it reveals that, under the present circumstances of Virginia Law, it is a fragile statute, vulnerable to assault upon its integrity. Its infirmity is occasioned by legislative changes in the Juvenile law.

The Virginia Juvenile Law has been modified to accord with concepts imposed by Congress in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (Ti 42, USCA Sect. 5602). Although Congress is without jurisdiction generally in the field of juvenile law it imposes its will upon states by withholding federal funds from states which do not conform their law to the provisions of such Act. Virginia, in its revised Juvenile Law, effective 1 July 1977 has conformed.

The changes effected by the 1977 revision which bear on the case at bar relate to status offenses.

A status offense is an offense which would not be an offense if committed by an adult. The essential status offenses relate to incorrigibles (children beyond parental control), runaways and truants.

It is with truancy that we deal. Truancy is failure to participate in schooling.

Incident to the revision of the law truancy has been “decriminalized” (as have other status offenses).

A cogent factor in the philosophical rationale which impelled the forces which influenced the General Assembly to “decriminalize” status offenses was the concept that to punish juveniles for offenses for which adults could not be punished deprived juveniles of due process guarantees in the sense of obvious, fundamental fairness—of due process of law and of the equal protection of the law, both rights being guaranteed by Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States .

It appears that the Court must now recognize such rationale to be implicit in the present Virginia law affecting truancy. The former Virginia law recognized juveniles and adults as constituting two separate classes of citizens. As to status offenses, including truancy, the differentiation between such classes no longer exists. Children and adults are of the same class. The distinction between them has been wiped out.

Constructions of the Fourteenth Amendment make much of distinctions between classes. The law is tolerant toward permitting different penalties for the same offense if the perpetrators are of different classes. But it forbids different penalties for the same offense by perpetrators of the same class. They are entitled to equal protection of the law.

In Juvenile Law a delinquent offense is defined as one which could be punished as a crime if committed by an adult. Truancy was formerly identified a delinquent offense and was punishable like other delinquent offences. But, according to the new rationale, since an adult cannot commit truancy, and so cannot be punished for it, neither can a child. They are now of the same class and enjoy identical rights.

Co-existent with such law at that time (and still extant) was the law—the statute at bar—making it a criminal offense for parents not to require their children to attend school.

With the major re-enactment of the Juvenile Law in 1977 the Court can no longer make a child attend school in a truancy case. But the criminal statute affecting parents not being a part of the Juvenile Law, was left unchanged.

Synchrony no longer subsists between the Juvenile Law and the Compulsory Attendance Law.

The theory of the statute affecting parents is that parents who refrain from exercising their authority to make their children attend school are contributing to the delinquency of their children; that they are, in effect, conniving with their children in the commission of a delinquent and criminal offense.

The salient issue is whether one who aids or abets another of the same class in the commission of an act which is not in itself either criminal or delinquent is guilty of a crime.

Otherwise stated, if a child's constitutional rights be deemed violated if he can be punished for an offense for which an adult cannot be punished, are an adult's constitutional rights equally violated if he can be punished for aiding and abetting the same offense for with the child, now a member of the same class, cannot be punished.

Due process and equal protection of the law work both ways.

However, the Court refrains from declaring this statute unconstitutional.

The statute involved in this case (Sect. 22-275.6) directs the defendants, as parents, as to each child, to "cause the child to attend school or receive instruction as required by this article."

Section 22-275.1 of the same Article spells out the options available to the parents (1) "to send their children to a public school," or (2) "to a private, denominational or parochial school," or (3) to have such children "taught by a tutor or teacher of qualifications prescribed by the State Board of Education and approved by the division superintendent in a home."

The parents in this case ... have elected course (2), a private school, and maintain that they are in bona fide compliance therewith.

The defendant parents, in compliance with course of action (2) have established their own private school. It is denominated "The Brook

School,” after Mrs. Giesy’s maiden name. It has a faculty of essentially one teacher, Mrs. Geisy. It has a student body of four, the four children of the family.

The Commonwealth maintains that this is no true school, but a mere subterfuge of a school, in violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law and is established as a device to circumvent that law, and that the defendants are, by virtue thereof, criminally responsible.

With respect for the Commonwealth’s position, examination of the Commonwealth’s own laws on the subject is in order. They are embraced with Title 22, entitled Education, of the Virginia Code.

As to course of action (2), private schools, those for primary and secondary education contemplated by the case at bar, the statutory law of Virginia provided only a wall of silence.

The legislative wall of silence is not deemed to be accident or oversight, but rather an eloquent expression of formal state policy.

As in the case of the silence of Congress, failure of the General Assembly to exercise the power of regulation is deemed to be an expression of its will that the subject should remain free from restrictions. See 16 Am. Jur. 2d, Const. Law Sect. 209.

As to private schools, the law provides no guidance—no definition, no delineation of institutional parameters, no prescription as to faculty, students, curriculum or accreditation—nothing whatsoever.

What constitutes a private school may be determined by academicians or citizens, but the state refrains from participating in such determination.

The mission of the Court is to construe the will of the legislature. Where the legislature provides no law to construe, the Court refrains from construction. The Court does not make law.

So the Court is without legal ability and is without legal authority to say that the Brook School constitutes a private school or to say that it does not constitute a private school.

It may or may not, and reasonable minds may differ.

The issue before the Court is narrow—whether by placing their children in the Brook School the defendants are in violation of Section 22-275.6 and guilty of a crime.

There is no proof that they are guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and we therefore dismiss the case.

James G. Martin, IV Judge

Parents School

Barney McCaffrey, who was the music teacher in the First Street School (see The Lives of Children), writes from Ontario:

Thought I might tell you something of our school, the Community School of Killaloe. It's a cooperative, alternative school that combines the legal (and social) authority of "school" with being thought at home.

We've been going since 1970. Ontario law states that with 5 school age children (minimum), you can have a school as long as you run it on some school day during the year during school hours. If you don't ask for any money from the government you don't need any qualified teachers and you don't have to follow the state curriculum—you can choose to be an uninspected, non-accredited school. This is the route we have chosen. On one of the three forms you must fill out every year the province asks if you have been inspected by local fire, health and municipal authorities. As we use our homes and are located in a rural area, we see very little of any of these people as authorities, but know most of them personally.

At present we are 5 families and 11 children, ages 4 to 13, with several more families on a waiting list. The parents are the teachers and we go 3 days a week all year round, using a different home each of the 3 days. Parents whose homes are not used teach at one of the other homes. In some families both parents teach at the same time, in others one parent at a time. Homes and parents vary according to seasons and conditions (which parent is working, etc.) Children stay at each other's homes, one night at various homes but not ours.

On the second night my wife and I have all the children stay at our place as we find certain subjects (music, Spanish, photographic development, astronomy, etc.) can best be taught at night. The social instruction that they give each other before, during and after bedding down and waking up—especially with the wide range in ages—is probably worth more than all our adult instruction. As much as possible we try to let them do much of this by themselves in our summer kitchen—a separate building—and we're now constructing, mostly with the help of the kids, a larger solar heated building out of old barn logs, which can be used year round. 2 of our families live on the edge of town and 3 on farms, and the exchange of knowledge between the

two lifestyles is another big plus of the kids staying over, not to mention that the parents get one free night a week and transportation costs are cut down (at present there are 20 miles between our farthest away families.)

Getting to and from school is and has often been quite an adventurous, educational experience, involving pushing out snow and mud stuck cars, caravans of ponies and buggies, and/or bicycles and walkers, keeping in touch by CB radio from stretches of 3 to 6 miles (without an adult at times), strong winds blowing small children over the snow, etc. At one time we tried renting a central farmhouse and hiring one of our parents as a regular teacher—at the grand salary of \$25 a week. The kids used to carry a log of wood each, up and down at least $\frac{3}{4}$ a mile of unploughed driveway to heat “their” school building. (With our present system, school costs – excluding transportation and food—run about \$100 a year.)

Each day goes differently—depending on location and personalities of parents involved. One couple is responsible for reading and science, one mother for history, another for arithmetic. When the mom who teaches history got a job, her husband took over and taught journalism—his specialty—and the kids put out 4 issues of a newspaper.

Generally each family or group of parents is responsible for their day—subjects, routine, etc., and we avoid hassles by sticking to that pretty much. There is, of course, communication between all as to what is happening. Last year we realized that once a week with arithmetic just wasn’t enough, so now it is taught almost every day. Quite often, after the regular subjects (or sometimes in place of them), special subjects are carried out—a Tai Chi demonstration from a visitor, or a series of lessons in French, or archery, or meditation, or eurythmie, or pony vaulting, or wood working from a visiting volunteer. Or we may have a day of maple sugaring, or swimming, or fixing a vehicle, or splitting and stacking wood, or a group music session, or preparing a float for a community parade—we’ve won a few prizes with the latter. One of our most ambitious and successful ventures along this line was a 20 mile round trip with 10 children, 5 ponies and a horse, with a buggy and sulky (and 1 adult), to a horseshow. We camped over 2 nights, drove and rode in the parade, entered gymkhana events—a great relaxed learning experience. We’ve found ponies to be great confidence builder. Several times a year we also have school trips—our biggest last year—5 days 600 mile round trip, financed largely by a carnival run mostly by the kids.

Our farm, and 1 other of our families, has no electricity. Our particular day begins around 5 in the afternoon, when the children are brought to us—in winter this involves a ½ mile walk. In summer the kids eat and play outdoors until 7 or 8, then an hour or so of lessons and practice, and off to bed. In winter, there is less outdoor play and more individualized lessons—usually music. In the morning there's breakfast sometimes prepared by the children themselves, then all help with the chores, washing dishes, feeding animals, etc. Around 10 earlier in summer and later in winter—we begin our “academics.” Right now this includes calligraphy (italic writing which sometimes includes making your own quill pen or ink—most of the kids write 3 handwriting styles), arithmetic, touch typing, music (individualized lessons on keyboard, guitar, violin, trumpet, etc.). Meditation (vipasisana or insight meditation) and Swedish massage. Of course not everyone covers all these in one day but we keep track so that over a month everyone covers everything at least once. Massage depends very much on temperature considerations, so it is not practiced as regularly as the other subjects.

Before lunch we have a half hour to an hour of organized physical activity. In very cold weather, because of lack of space we forgo it – in spring and fall we use our summer kitchen and in the summer we go out into the fields. When possible, all exercises are carried out in the nude. A ¼ mile run is followed by the sun salute and other yoga exercises. Then comes the acrobatics, including backbends, headstands, handsprings, cartwheels, etc. In the summer kitchen a trapeze provides hours of fun and limbering exercise. When there is time and desire, we end with an Aikido session (a completely self-defensive, mind power martial art.) On hot days a dip in the beaver pond before lunch, and/or an ESP session (reading cards or symbols.) The afternoons are for what the kids want to do. Sometimes it's to play, or make a raft, or do arts and crafts, or walk through the fields (sometimes studying beavers or wild plants along the way.) Last year a lot of time was spent riding horses and ponies to practice for the horseshow. Right now it's building that new school house, which sometimes takes a bit of animation and organization, and sometimes doesn't happen. School day ends around 4 or 5, when parents come for the kids, or they are driven home.

We've had an interchange of about a dozen children over the years with the public school. Some of the kids coming from it were better than ours of equal age in reading and arithmetic. Some were worse. All but one were

comparatively stiff or weaker in body. In other areas except television programming the general knowledge of our kids seemed greater, especially, of course, in music, but that may be our prejudice. Again it may be our prejudice, but our children seem to have a natural confidence about them—not overconfidence or brashness, but a good estimation of their own abilities. In part this probably comes from not having marks—the children compete only with themselves can you do it?—can you do it better? It is well understood that each one has certain abilities and talents—everybody has something unique and “best”, and they are encouraged to communicate this to the others. One day we had a 5 year old, good at music, giving a piano lesson to a 12 year old. My oldest boy, who because of minimal brain damage, has some learning problems, has a tremendous natural self-confidence for a boy of 13—it’s amazing how he shines in some of the straightest situations. A lot of it comes from a good ability to work with his hands and body—to carry a job through completely—developed in his farm work, and from not being put down in school or distracted with the general “let’s play hate school” games of the so-called “slow learners.” This fall, at 14 (legal age for early school leave) he’s off to try other schools, to work and apprentice himself with selected friends. I don’t think we’ll worry about him too much. (Incidentally it’s amusing to see that the occupations kids (Ed. note: I guess this means the same as “vocational.”) I taught at the local high school years ago are now the ones with the new houses and cars, living in the area. Only a few of the very sharpest academic contemporaries have managed to set up a local profession—many of them have had to take jobs in the city or the far north.) A girl who had been in our school 2 years, went to first grade at public school, was given 3rd year work, and at the start of her 2nd year, and asked to come back to our school (“I learned all that stuff last year”). She’s been with us since—a 10 year old now with few signs of boredom.

Growing in Canada

Our Canadian friend (GWS #6, 7) writes:

, When Lisey was 2-3 she liked to carry a purse with money in it, though she never spent a cent. (That was before she found out about the candy bar rack at the store. Rats.)

A few months ago that purse turned up again and she found a \$1 bill in it. The next day we were writing to her Great Gramma, sending a card of some sort (birthday perhaps) and Lisey ran to get the \$1 and insisted on enclosing it—since she knew full well that was one thing important that people do with paper money—enclose it in cards as a present. Lisey's comment was, "I need to owe Great Gramma it." (I think this means, "I ought to give it to her because she always sends me money in cards.")

I know she has picked up the phrase from our constantly "owing" each other money. I borrow from the kids, they borrow from each other. I owe the cleaning lady. We owe such and such a company, etc. The adults acting according to prior agreements amongst themselves—that she of course wants to be part of (since she still has little desire to have money to spend on herself).

About adults and their mysterious (to kids) world. When I drove to the city to see the CBS show, it was the first time for 1 ½ years that I had taken the car to the city. I was surprised to find that almost all the gas stations were now self-serve. I don't like pumping gas and decided to teach Heidi & Michael (11 and 8). To their utter delight. They of course fought over it despite it being a freezing cold windy day. Driving home, Michael said, "You know, you have to be 16 to drive a car. Well, I thought you had to be 16 to fill it up with gas, too." But then, how would he ever have thought otherwise, never having seen a kid pumping gas. (I haven't, have you? Ed.—No.)

A boring, time-consuming chore to me. But to them, a handle on the Big, Mysterious Adult World. For the time being, anyway.

Trying Out School

A mother writes from Canada:

Once L turned five last summer, most adults she encountered in the community seemed to say to her a variation of this: “Oh, you’re five now. Aren’t you lucky? You can go to school in the fall!”

We (her parents) didn’t want her to go and said so. But we told her that it was her decision. We also advised her that we would never force her to go to school. Enchanted with the idea of riding the school bus, L happily decided to go.

She quit, the first time, the second day of school because the teacher (one to 32 children) took a book from her, presumably to do a mimeographed pre-reading exercise or other activity the teacher had chosen. (I found out later that L disliked pre-reading work. After leaving school permanently, she still went to visit her class, teacher and principal from time to time. On one visit, a gift of some mimeographed pre-reading material was given to her by the teacher. On examining it at home, L asked me what she was supposed to do with it. I explained and she immediately asked, “Do I have to do it!?” I answered, trying to restrain my glee, “You never have to do these again.” I suspect she understands all too well the ludicrousness of pre-reading when you’ve been reading for a year.)

We gently convinced L to return since she had only a glimpse of what she was quitting. Quite frankly, we wanted her to know her enemy well. This may have been taking a chance with some children, as many “adjust “ and end up staying. I suspect it’s because they realize that they have no choice. We knew because of her independent nature that she’d soon be home. A few days later, she quit for the second time. We asked for a conference with the teacher and principal. The teacher had by that time a chance to observe L read. Despite her experience in a long career, where surely she had met up with five year olds who could read, she blurted out, “What am I going to do with you? You’ll have to go to the first grade!” L bounced back, “Don’t forget, I’m only five years old.” We were horrified as first grade was described as even more restrictive than this “primary” (kindergarten elsewhere) grade which had no pretensions of even the open classroom approach. We were against first grade and the reading teacher and others

observed correctly that temperamentally, she would have a difficult time “adjusting.”

Since L’s main complaint was the lack of reading opportunity for her and not enough by the teacher, the school offered her the option to attend a reading class of “slow” first graders to give her more reading and then “inspiration.” She bit the bait and returned to school.

This is the point where L’s story becomes most interesting. After a time at school (late November or early December) I noticed that she was reading less at home and not only that, she exhibited nervous behavior and other signs of anxiety when she was reading. Could this be the same child who the previous summer had sat reading for long stretches of time, totally absorbed and happy?

One day L came home from school with a book from the library. She was thrilled. I was never advised that Thursday was “library” day and the book must be returned the following Thursday. The day came and the book remained at home. L and several other children were punished by not being allowed to go to the library. They also were told to write a page of fives. The children did not write the page of work and for that were kept inside during recess. Those children never escaped the fluorescent lights all day. We were beside ourselves and advised the teacher and principal that L was never to be treated in that manner again.

Shortly before the Christmas holidays L left school for good. Three months later she did some sight reading which we recorded just for the fun of it. As we listened to it replay, I observed with surprise that she was actually enjoying herself again and showed no signs of anxiety. We’re so very happy that she had the sense to get out when she did. Also, since we had just moved to the area, she had no close friends in her class who she would miss dreadfully if she quit. I really fear that had she stayed, say a year, permanent damage might have occurred.

Now L often has read several books before the rest of us wake up in the morning. She also reads off and on throughout the day—everything from Spiderman and Tintin to the wonderful picture books we get from the library.

On the last visit to school, the teacher asked if L was reading at home. I answered, “Yes,” and she seemed surprised and explained that L had refused to read any words off the board for her!

I should say that the entire time L attended school, we attempted to

support the school and refrained from badmouthing it in front of her. We wanted to support her and the environment she had chosen. The choice of attending or not attending then, was hers.

Once I was home, we were able to spend more time together. I found her asking me what certain words or phrases meant. She would glean them from stories on tapes or records or from family conversation. If I knew a half decent definition I would tell her; if not, we would both look it up in the dictionary. I didn't think much about the process happening in her mind until one day she asked me what "entire village" meant. I knew she had listened to the story, "Martze" (delightfully read by Mitch Miller of all people) on record three hours before. I told her it meant "all the people in the village" and she said her usual thank you and went about her business. Three hours before, she had heard that phrase! She had spent those three hours in a manner which, on the surface, wouldn't have appeared particularly "productive" to a great many teachers. (She had been painting, playing with sand and other relaxed activities.) A coincidence happened that day which tickled L's father and myself. I asked him a question to which he answered by using the simple word, "partially." I immediately asked for a definition of *that* word.

Since we're able to have a one-to-one relationship often enough when she asks me to define something, I'm able to spend the time asking quite natural questions if I need a clue, such as, "In what context is that word?" She picked up on the word "context" right away because it was in context and so L learns even more words through relaxed conversation which is not available to children in a 32 to 1 ratio. (Ed. note: It could be. See comment at end.)

L is now asking where words come from. For instance, why "tree" is called "tree." Aside from tracing its language base in the dictionary, I'm at a loss! Is there a book, I wonder, which could shed more light on this?

A neighbor child who is several years older than L comes to play after school sometimes. She's pleasant and co-operative but when she plays "school" with our children, she is "teacher" and changes into a nagging, demanding tyrant. It got so bad that L was refusing to play the game. I finally had to point out to this child that she was reflecting her teacher's behavior and that L left school to avoid that kind of human contact. This same child could read when she entered school two years ago. She is now having "problems" in reading. One day, this same child started lecturing L about school. Wasn't she coming back? And if she didn't, she wouldn't learn

anything. L flashed back with, “That’s why I left school. I wasn’t learning anything.” She still maintains that is her primary reason for leaving. The other thing she couldn’t tolerate was the violence among the children.

But I have to say something about the business of relaxed conversation not being available in classes of 32 children. It isn’t true. Or rather, probably it is true, in almost all classes, but it doesn’t have to be true. Once teachers learn that they don’t have to spend all their time deciding what the children are to do, and then telling them to do it, and then explaining to them how to do it, and then making or trying to make them do it, and then testing them (one way or another) to make sure they have done it—once they give all that nonsense up, as I, and Jim Herndon (and probably some others) learned to give it up, they find they have plenty of time for as much relaxed conversation as the children need or want. As Jim Herndon writes in *How to Survive in Your Native Land* (avail. here):

And while teachers are complaining they haven’t any *time* you see that you have all the time in the world, time to spend with Lucy and Sally telling them they got glue on their heads and threatening them about what you’re going to do if they get on the hood of your car again until they are satisfied, time with Eileen and Rosa, who have discovered that if they get caught a couple times smoking in the bathroom their mothers will react most satisfactorily, time to talk with Howard, who has discovered simultaneously a real woods out in back of the drive-in and The Byrds and is trying to make sense out of both (the woods have foxes and a skunk and a red-tailed hawk flying overhead and some kind of marvelous purple moss which the Museum of Science doesn’t know about and who would have thought that right here in this prototype (his word) of suburban developments there would be a real woods, and here too that is just what The Byrds are singing about)—every day there are going to be kids who want to spend some time talking to you, as adult, as teacher, as whatever you are, wanting to relate their adventures and troubles and excitements and miseries and aspirations and confusions or hoping perhaps to get some clear idea of the world they live in through you. You have time to protect some kids and get mad at others, you have time to answer

over and over again questions about what kind of cigarettes you smoke and when did you start to smoke, are you married, how many kids do you have, would you let your kids smoke, let them grow long hair, do you think Robert is really smart? What would you do if your kids cut school, got an F, smoked in the bathroom, what kind of car, what was the war like, did you get in any fights, can you dance, did you like girls when you were thirteen, don't you think the PE teacher is unfair about giving out checks. Mrs. So-and-so said this yesterday, do you agree with that?. Time to live there in your classroom like a human being instead of playing some idiot role which everyone knows is an idiot role, time to see that teaching (if that is your job in America) is connected with your life and with you as a human being, citizen, person, that you don't have to become something different like a Martian or an idiot for eight hours a day.

Games

Susan Price, mother in “Capable Children” (GWS43), writes:

Here is how we play SORRY now. Whoever sets up the game makes it so that each person gets out (onto the board) the first time around. (You need a 2 or a 1 to get out.) A 4 card used to mean you had to go backwards; now we say you can go either frontwards or backwards. They have had the idea about winning more. I guess you were right about school knocking the (everybody wins) spirit out of them.

We sometimes say, if we feel like it, that you don't have to have the exact number to get your man in home but can use a larger card and let someone else use the remaining numbers. The other night we were playing and F was going to get her last one in a little bit ahead of me. She needed only 2 spaces to get home with. She drew an 11 and I suggested that she let me use it so that we could get home at the same time. So she agreed, and as she kept not getting twos, kept giving them to me until I was close to home, and then she got a 7 and used it to get home with (sevens are the only card you can legally split up). She gave me the remaining 5, and on my next card I was able to get home. She thought it was neat that we had both won at the same time.

I sent away for some games the other day, to see if I could find some to recommend in GWS. Didn't find any I was wild about. Some were ingenious, but all were competitive, I-win-you lose, and if you want that kind of game, chess is hard to beat. But I thought, and thought again reading this mother's letter, isn't it too bad there aren't some games in which the players can cooperate to reach a real goal.

Then I suddenly remembered something that I had completely forgotten. When my sister and I were little, we used to visit my mother's mother in Maine in the summer, very happy times for us. She loved crossword puzzles, and it was part of the ritual of Sunday that she would do the big crossword in the Sunday *Herald Tribune*. She was good at them, and almost always finished the puzzle, or came very close. Somehow, beginning when my sister and I were about 10, and without anyone ever doing much thinking about it, it became a part of our family custom that when Granny was doing the puzzle

my sister and I would sit beside her, one on each side, and help. Of course, at first we weren't much help, but as we learned the rules of the game, and grew used to the kinds of clues the paper gave and the kinds of words it liked to use, we became really helpful, and doing the puzzle became a very exciting kind of cooperation. What a triumph it was for all of us when one of us could find one of those huge words, sometimes two words joined together, that went the whole length or width of the puzzle.

There was no feeling at all of who was finding the most words. We were all interested in finishing the puzzle, and as quickly as possible. It was a true team effort, and all the more exciting because doing the puzzle was not something Granny had cooked up to amuse and/or educate us.

There are books of easier puzzles for children, and it might be fun for a family to work together on them. But I think it might be a good idea for the adults to start this by themselves, and let the children join in if and when they want. And of course it wouldn't work for people who really didn't like doing such puzzles. Funny, I haven't thought about doing those puzzles with Granny since the time we did them, perhaps because it was such a natural and organic part of our life together.

It now occurs to me that another good cooperative game might be the Word Game I wrote about in *GWS #9*. And still another would be doing jigsaw puzzles, which many children like.

Granny and Jane and I did use to play some competitive games. Our favorite was Mah Jongg, a game something like Gin Rummy, but played with (instead of cards) beautiful little rectangular pieces, of bamboo, with faces of ivory carved into lovely figures. These figures were like the four suits in cards. As I remember, they were Dragons, Bamboos, Characters, and Circles. Players drew from a pool of pieces, face down in the middle of the table, and tried to get three or four consecutive pieces (2,3,4,5 etc.) of the same kind.

Granny had an old and authentic Chinese set, and the feel and sound of the pieces, and the smell of the box, were lovely. She was fun to play with, serious without being mean. She liked to win, but enjoyed the game much more than the winning. (Strange for me to think that this very regal woman was younger than I am now.)

Talked about these games with Peg Durkee. She said that a non-competitive game that she and her family always loved to play was *Clue*. Do any readers know it?

Problem Solved

Last night, as I write this, I solved a mathematical problem that I have been working on, off and on (more off than on), for about twenty-five years.

In the “50s, when I was teaching at the Colorado Rocky Mountain School, I read a paper book called, I think, *The World of Number*. At one point the author was talking about factorial numbers. (I will say what these are a bit later.) He gave two theorems about factorials, saying that although the proof of these theorems did not involve anything more than simple algebra, probably only people with quite a bit of mathematical talent would be able to work them out. Thus challenged, I began to work on the first theorem (I have long since forgotten the second). I spent hours on it, and got nowhere. I decided that I was going to work it out, no matter how long it took.

I never read any further in the book, because I feared that I might see the proof somewhere, and so would never be able to find it for myself. I worked on the problem again a few days later. Again, nothing. And I have continued to work on it since. Sometimes I have forgotten it for a year or more; then something has reminded me of it and I have tried again, always without success.

Once, a few years ago, thought I had a proof—but realized after a while that I had done some circular reasoning, and that my proof was no good.

About two days ago something put it in my mind, and I began to work on it again. I tried a new, or almost new, approach. It looked interesting, but after a while it had not led me anywhere. The work had made me sleepy, so I lay down for a short nap. I woke thinking of the problem, seeing some of the symbols in my mind. Still half asleep, I tried a couple of steps. They led to something I couldn’t remember having done before. I considered it for a second, then sat up, wide awake, saying, “It can’t be that easy.” I grabbed some paper, wrote out the steps I had done in my half-awake mind. They were OK I hadn’t made any mistakes. Would my proof work for all cases? Yes, it would. I could hardly believe it—it was so easy, only five steps. I realized that I had been close to it all those years. How could I have missed it? Anyway, now I had it.

A fine feeling.

Factorials. Quite a long time ago, mathematicians became interested in

this family of numbers:

1

1 x 2

1 x 2 x 3

1 x 2 x 3 x 4

1 x 2 x 3 x 4 x 5, etc.

Someone invented a name and a symbol for them, called 1 x 2 “2 factorial,” 1 x 2 x 3 “three factorial,” etc. and wrote them like this 2!, 3!, etc.

When people think about numbers and their properties, the kinds of things we can or can’t do with them, one of the elementary properties they look into is what can these numbers be divided by.

One of the things they soon saw about factorials was that

4! could *not* be divided by 5

5! *could* be divided by 6

6! could *not* be divided by 7

7! *could* be divided by 8

8! *could* be divided by 9

9! *could* be divided by 10

10! could *not* be div. by 11

11! div. by 12 Yes

12! div. by 13 No

13! div. by 14 Yes

It became obvious that a factorial could not be divided by the next higher number if that next number was what they call “prime,” which means that it can only be divided evenly by itself and 1. (The prime numbers are 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29, 31, 37, 41, 43, 47, 53, 59, etc. Some mathematicians are very interested in prime numbers, and are still trying to find a formula for *all* the prime numbers.)

With a little more looking around they saw this pattern.

4! + 1 is div. by 5

6! + 1 is div. by 7

10! + 1 is div. by 11

12! + 1 is div. by 13 and so on.

When mathematicians find something like this, that seems to be true for many numbers, they begin to ask themselves whether it is true for all

numbers, and whether they can prove that it is. If and when they can, they have what they call a Theorem. This particular theorem about factorials, the one I saw in the book, was written like this:

Where N is any prime number,

$(N-1)! + 1$ is div. by N

By modern standards, this is very primitive math. I don't know when this particular theorem was proved, or by whom—it may go back to the classical Greeks, who were fascinated with numbers. In any case, finding the proof was an exciting adventure for me.

New Age Articles

The current (Sept. “79) issue of *New Age* (32 Station St., Brookline Village MA 02146—monthly, \$12/yr.) contains a number of articles that GWS readers may find very interesting.

First is *Deschooling: The Legal and Emotional Challenges*, by Michael Harris, a very well-informed and sympathetic article, perhaps the best unschooling article I have seen in print. We will probably add it to our list of reprints.

There is also an article on *Superlearning*, a kind of semi-hypnotic approach to memorizing which makes use of music and other stress-relaxing methods. This is hard to describe in a few words, and it may or may not work as well as the article claims. But it is something I think we all ought to know more about.

Also a very interesting and promising article about learning to draw; a good article about the Heartwood home-building school, one of three such schools we wrote about in *GWS* #9; and other good things. Worth looking up.

Calvert Books Wanted

I am wondering if “D” doesn’t want to sell me any of his Calvert books, if you could connect me somehow to some people who would—or Home Study Institute books. I don’t have to say in a letter to the school board that they are doing a home correspondence course—just say that they are using *materials* from The Calvert Institute (established 18, used by many children of missionaries, etc., etc.) Maybe I would buy the whole 1st and 2nd grade year of books from someone—just to have around for my kids to see what kind of stuff other kids are doing in school and to show my mother.

New Books Available Here

We are adding two more books to the list we sell here. The first is *Good Work* (\$9 + post.), the latest and last book of E. F. Schumacher, who died two years ago. It is largely made up of lectures that he gave while on a tour of the U.S. not long before his death. Like *Small is Beautiful*, it is not primarily about children or education, but like that earlier book, it puts schooling into the context of the kind of world many of us would like to see, and so doing helps us to answer the argument (or our own fears) that unschooling is unrealistic, has no connection with the world as it is, and cannot help children learn to live and work in that world. Beyond that, it is a wonderful book for people of any age who have not yet found work that seems really worth doing and don't know how to look for it. In that sense it seems ideal for any young people in their teens who are not sure what they want to do next, or even that there is anything really worth doing.

The book is full of wonderful quotes, of which these two may have special meaning for GWS readers:

Recently I was seated in a restaurant, next to a family of three, a father and mother and a very bright little boy, I would think between eight and ten years of age. They studied the menu and the boy said, "Oh, I want liver and bacon." The waitress was there; the father studied the menu, the mother studied the menu, and then the father ordered three steaks. The waitress said, "Two steaks, one liver and bacon," and went off. The boy looked at his mother and said, "Mummy, she thinks I'm real!"

I then also found that in all human traditions there has been a very great antagonism against all this counting business. I don't know how many of you still know your Bible, but you can find it in two places, in Chronicles and Kings. The first chap who arranged the census was King David, and when he arranged the census the Lord was utterly furious. He gave him a choice of three penance punishments. And David said, Yes, yes, I know I have sinned. He immediately understood that there was something wrong in having a census which treats.

people

as if they were units, whereas they are not. Each is a universe.

The other book we will be selling here is *Kids Day in and Day Out*, subtitled “A Parents’ Manual—A compendium of ideas, recommendations, insights, inspirations, facts and suggestions, problems and solutions for living with kids every single day.” The editor, and contributor of many of the nicest bits, is Elisabeth Scharlatt. (Price \$7.25 + post.)

The book is almost entirely made up of short excerpts, sometimes from books, mostly from letters written to the editor. The tone is informal, conversational, down-to-earth. Most of the writers, like the people who write to *GWS*, are writing about their own children or children they know, and whom they like and enjoy. Most of the time they are writing about things that they have really done and that have worked.

The book is huge—500 big pages—and a good buy. Sections include: Child-Rearing, or, some thoughts about living with children rather more calmly; The Body; Children and Sex (Ed.—the approach of these two chapters is that there is nothing inherently wrong, immoral, disgusting, dirty, etc. about the body or any of its natural functions, so any who might find this offensive could skip these chapters, cut them out, etc.); Fears Kids Have; Handicapped Kids; Schools and Learning; Babysitting and Day Care; Food and Nutrition; Kid’s Rooms and Environments; Clothing; Money; Science; Pets and Other Animals; Plants; Books and Reading; Music; Television; Making Things; Going Places With Your Kids; Sports; Outdoor Play; Games, Puzzles and Magic; Toys and Dolls; Gifts; Parties and Special Occasions.

The people who contribute ideas do not always agree with each other, and I don’t always agree with them. But there are very few things in the book I strongly dislike, one of them an article about teaching kids to swim by throwing them in the water, etc. One article says that weightlifting does not improve coordination. From my own experience, both with myself and with students I have coached, I know that this is totally untrue; weight training, properly done, can enormously improve coordination.

Only one of the contributions to the Schools and Learning section is about

unschooling, a good letter from Art Harris, but many of the contributors sound like potential unschoolers.

Scattered here and there are some lovely photos of kids. All in all, a very entertaining and useful book.

Corrections: *The Complete Guide to Taking Tests* will be sold here only in paperback, for \$4.50. *Gnomes* is also paperback for \$8 .95—error on booklist.

Finally, a change in the postage rate for all book orders: the cost will now be 25¢ per book, with a minimum charge of 60¢.

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Growing Without Schooling 12

December 1979

Sorry #11 was so late in getting out. We sent it to our printer on Sept. 21. About mid-October we called to find out what had happened to it. They told us we would have it in a couple days. Nothing came. Next time we called, we were told they had lost not only the photos of our copy, but the original copy as well. So Donna and Peggy had to spend three hectic days laying out the whole issue again.

Thanks to Louise Andriesbyn and other unschoolers there, I spent three very busy days in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in early November lecturing and doing TV interviews, one for a CBC program on homeschooling. Meetings were packed, audiences friendly, interviewers perceptive. By the way, an Ontario court has just ruled in favor of an unschooling family, one of the first Canadian rulings I have heard of. Details in the next issue.

Some readers may wonder what happened to that program on unschooling that ABC's 20/20 filmed late in the spring. The answer is that they decided not to show it. Some higher-up decided that it would be more sensational and exciting to do an entire program on the Singer family instead. (Whether they have done it, I don't know.)

More articles about homeschooling: *McCall's* (Sept. '79), *Wall Street Journal* (Sept. 13), *Boston Magazine* (Oct.), *Chicago Tribune* (Nov. 7). The last two, in particular, were long, thorough, and friendly. The list of magazines, newspapers, radio and TV stations that have interviewed us, in person or on the phone, now runs to three pages.

Mother Earth News (Hendersonville NC) which now reaches more than 3 million people, wants me to write an article on homeschooling, which I will do as soon as I finish my book (same subject) for Delacorte. We may want some photos of homeschooling children to go with it. More about this in later issues.

John Merrow interviewed me here in the office for his National Public Radio program *Options in Education*. When I hear the cassette of it, I will report; others might want to order the cassette.

The subscription count for #11 was over 2600. A group in New Zealand has taken out a 40x subscription. And a group in Maine has bumped their sub to 48x.

Good news, of different kinds, from California, Wisconsin, Kentucky, and North Carolina (details in this issue).

A Holiday Greeting

To all our readers, we send with our very best wishes this poem by William Blake:

The Divine Image

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

All pray in their distress;

And to these virtues of delight

Return their thankfulness.

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

Is God, our father dear,

And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love

Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart.

Pity a human face,

And Love, the human form divine,

And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine,
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

And all must love the human form,
In heathen, turk or jew;
Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell
There God is dwelling too.

Coming Lectures

Jan 28, 1980: Phi Delta Kappa, Central Mass. Chapter; 7:30 p.m., Assumption College, Worcester MA. Free, open to public. Contact Manuel Zax, (617) 755-3960.

Feb 13: Unity Church—Unitarian, 732 Holly Av, St. Paul MN 55104; aft. meetings, 7:30pm lecture. Contact Margaret Hasse, Wider Ministry Program.

Mar 29: NCTE Conference on English Education, 12:30 p.m. luncheon, Omaha, Neb. Contact Robert Harvey, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Rd, Urbana IL 61801; (217)328-3870.

Apr 14: Huntingdon College, Huntingdon IN; 8 p.m. Contact Dal Hammel, Artist-Lecture Committee.

Apr 17: Dept. of Special Ed, U of Wisc at Whitewater; 8 p.m. at Playboy Resort, Lake Geneva WI. Open to public. Contact Garry Libster (414)472-1660.

Apr 19: Confer. on Literature and the Urban Experience, Rutgers U, Newark NJ; contact Michael C. Jaye, conf. dir.

Apr 26: Children Studies Symposium, Hobart & William Smith Colleges, Geneva NY; contact Marilyn Kallet.

Some of the above lectures may not be open to the public; check with the contact listed. Of course, if you can come, it will be nice to see you.

Local Groups

Organization of unschoolers at the local level continues to grow. In two states and Canada, small groups of unschoolers have started their own newsletters.

In Ohio, the group OCEAN (Ohio Coalition for Educational Alternatives Now), 66 Jefferson Ave, Columbus 43215, has started publishing the newsletter *Children at Home*. Cost of the newsletter is \$5/yr.

The West Virginia newsletter is *Alternatives in Education*, Rt 3, Box-171A, Spencer 27276. Cost is \$2/yr.

Both newsletters are about five pages long. They contain announcements, news on legal developments, letters from parents sharing ideas and experiences, children's art and writing, etc. The Ohio group organized a state-wide meeting; the WV paper lists a whole page of names and addresses of members.

Wendy Priesnitz of The Canadian Alliance of Home Schoolers, Box 640, Jarvis, Ont. NOA 1JO, writes:

Already we have helped a number of families with advice and received much media attention for the side of loving nurturing of children as opposed to the processing procedure of many school systems. Membership costs \$3 per family and includes a small periodical newsletter, as well as access to the resources that we have compiled. Specific requests for information from non-members must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

And, families in Manitoba can join the Manitoba Association for Schooling At Home. Write Mary Catherine Figuel, 824 Barry Ave, Winnipeg R2C 1M1.

We are delighted to hear about these groups, and would like our readers to let us know of any other local or regional groups forming.

Good News From Wisc.

From Michael Ketterhagen, administrator of the New Learning Network, 3569 W. 34th St, Greenfield WI 53221:

We have started a school specifically to allow parents to educate their children at home. Initially, it was for our son, Joshua, who would have been in first grade. Brigid and Larry Horbinski encouraged us to go through the necessary Wisconsin state law procedures to become a bona fide private school. We are now listed in the 1979-80 Directory of private schools in the state of Wisconsin.

Presently, we have 10 families involved in the “school”, the New Learning Network, and 12 little people enrolled. They range in age from 6 to 12. Recently, because of the growing unrest in the Milwaukee Public High Schools, I have had a number of requests from high school age people. It’s really exciting and we’re learning so much.

Our students are from six different school districts in Wisconsin and the parents meet regularly, on the last Tuesday of the month. At our parent meetings we give each other the support and encouragement that we need.

These folks also recommend a helpful public official: Mildred Anderson, Private School Liaison, Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, 1425 E. Washington, Madison.

Writing First

Ann Kauble, 1706 W. Huntsville, Springdale, AR 72764, writes:

I would like to tell GWS my story: it might help others who, for one reason or another cannot or do not wish to take their kids out of school. Our girls, ages 11 and 7, are “working independently above grade level” and have “very poor attendance records.” In other words, school is a place where the body has to be sometimes, but you learn what you are interested in learning and not necessarily when the school says it’s time to learn it. This has worked for us because our girls have wanted to learn the basics before the school has been ready to teach them, and I discovered that anyone, even me, can “teach”, i.e. simply tell my kids what they want to know, or, if I don’t know the answer I can learn along with them.

I will explain our 7 year old’s experience so far. When she was 3, she wanted to learn her letters, so I taught her how to write her upper case manuscript letters properly (I like Zaner Bloser method of penmanship instruction.) I taught upper case only, because it is so easy to learn with all letters touching headline and baseline, and no worry about when to capitalize. Then we started learning phonics. Eventually she learned all the phonemes and sound-symbols as they are taught in the Kottmeyer *Basic Goals in Spelling* series, only she did them in upper case. We sounded out and she wrote short words like KAT.

Then on one historic day when she was five and a half, she discovered on her own that she could sound and write any word she could think of. This came about when she was *so mad* at me she left the dinner table and was gone to her room with door closed for about an hour. Then she silently presented me with a paper that said, “I HAT U MOM. I a.m. GOOIN TO ET MI VENCHTUBULZ BUT I a.m. NOT GUIN TU ET MI FICH. IF YU DONT FED ME I a.m. GOEN TO ET ALSO (all the) CUCEZ.” (Ed. note: There are appropriate marks over the long vowels that we cannot reproduce here.) It wasn’t even perfect sound-spelling, but it communicated! (She ate her fish next day in a sandwich and liked it, and no cookies.) My older girl made the same spontaneous discovery that she could write her thoughts when she was 5 and a half.

Anyway, Gena, my youngest, was now free to express herself in writing.

She was *sound-spelling*, and she knew this was sound spelling, and that later she would spend years learning how to *real-spell*. Much of her early writing was practical: IOU's, lists, maps, instructions for us to follow, reminders for herself or us, mad notes to people she wasn't speaking to, money accounts, etc. Some was poetry. My favorite was: "A SONG UV LOVE. AZ TH MIWZIK PAST BI A HIWMIN SED U R TU BE A SLAV." I saved a lot of it.

I never really taught her to read, but my older girl and I took turns reading to the three of us at night. At this time Gena was learning to recognize lower case letters because I had started teaching her lower case manuscript. Also, I had ordered all the *Basic Goals* workbooks and teacher's manuals from McGraw-Hill, and Gena first joined in on our nightly reading by reading the *Read and Spell* boxes in the 2nd grade level *Basic Goals* speller. She was very happy to read just individual words, and these were groups of words with one spelling option (or two spelling options) for one particular sound. Following this same principle, we did lots of "*word families*": example—the ALL family—ball tall hall, etc.

When she was six, she announced one night that she was going to read us a book—a 37 page Disney edition of *Peter Pan*. I know that what made her long to read that book was that the illustrations were so exciting and mystifying, and nobody seemed to get around to reading it to her. It took her a week to read it out loud to us, and from then on she was reading on her own. She continued reading the *Read and Spell* boxes and doing word families, but she was doing this for the purpose of word recognition more than for learning real-spelling. At this point she had two different skills going on at the same time: writing her thoughts in upper-case sound-spelling and learning to recognize printed words in lower case while she also learned to write her lower case manuscript.

I asked her not to use lower case when she wrote her own thoughts until she had more skill in lower case penmanship, in order to avoid tHis SOrt oF tHing. I think many kids may be afraid to write because real-spelling and lower case penmanship are so formidable. But Gena was able to keep up her confidence by relying on sound-spelling when she wrote her thoughts. She would copy perfectly spelled words in lower case for penmanship practice, but when she had something to say in writing—back to sound spelling. This seemed perfectly natural to me. When she had mastered using upper and

lower case letters together, she started formally learning real-spelling by working in the 2nd grade level of the *Basic Goals* workbook. It was easy because she already knew the sound-symbols and phonemes used in this series. If she has formally learned how to real-spell a word, I mention that she got it wrong here and help her get correct spelling, but she is still free to sound-spell any other word she wishes to use.

Unschoolled Children

From a letter by a mother of four:

Another myth brought up on the show is the “kids drive me crazy having them around all day” retort. It just ain’t necessarily so! I have four, ages three to ten, and most of the time we enjoy each other and get along very well. We have our off days but that in no way overshadows the good times. In my “experiment” of never sending any of mine to school, I have had the opportunity to compare my experiences with women sharing my philosophy of childrearing who send theirs to school. I notice a syndrome which causes them to feel sorry for me for being stuck all year with *four*. It comes from their having three or four at home all day during three months’ summer vacation with “nothing to do” (that is, nothing scheduled by some authority) and bickering constantly (because they don’t know one another as well as they know their cronies at school). These mothers think that is what I put up with daily, but mine who have had the responsibility for most of their own time, who interact constantly with family with little interruption, I find behave quite differently.

Another myth is that socialization is retarded with children at home. I have not found that true, but quite the opposite. They may be somewhat shyer and naive about cruelty but they seem to be extremely sensitive to the needs of others and possess advanced conversational skills. Interaction with peers is limited but when it happens they handle it beautifully. My mother (who was a supervisor with the state board of education) used this argument exclusively as the reason I should send mine to school. As you said, the social life kids get in schools is, to me, a good reason to keep them *out* of schools, not the other way around.

Still another myth is the time it takes to teach a child some skill. Observing how my babies learn motor skills taught me a valuable lesson and gave me my favorite educational concept ... *readiness*. In a nutshell, when they’re ready, they’ll do it with minimum effort. Sounds too simple but it works every time with everything from toilet training to riding a bike, mathematics, reading, etc. The time spent in teaching a child who is ready is minimal—no rote, no busywork. Just minutes for most things.

People tell me that I am protecting my children from the cold, cruel world,

and think children should have to take bad treatment in schools in order to cope with the real world. By that logic we should be putting the child's head in a vise every day to prepare them for the headaches they will suffer as adults.

Each child of mine is unique. Night time is often the only quiet, uninterrupted time for us, so lots of "learning" and interacting go on in the middle of the night. Our "school" is open twenty-four hours a day (even on snow days), seven days a week. The teachers love the students and often the roles of teachers and students are exchanged—I am the children's best student as I have probably learned the most from them about love, psychology, and subjects they show an interest in and share with me. Another difference in the way we feel about our home-educated children from parents who struggle with theirs in traditional ways is that we *like* our kids—as well as love them. I find in my dealing with families that there is, just as Ashley Montagu said, "a disdain for the state of childhood" in America. Children are tolerated, but rarely liked for just what they are. The rewards of my motherhood I am getting now, not looking forward to the future when they are grown.

NJ Center

Ann Bodine sent us a notice she is putting in the N.J. Unschooners:

I am organizing an Activity Center—*School Without Walls* to provide companionship for unschooled children and some free time for their parents. Although the Activity Center will not be in full, twice-weekly operation until the next school year (1980-81), the Center will offer four Gym Days (active free play in a gymnasium) during Feb. 1980 and two Nature Education Days at the Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center in spring 1980. Participants' evaluation of these activities will determine the 1980-81 program.

The Activity Center will employ no teaching staff and parents will participate on a rotational

time for their parents, the Center will enable our children to participate in some activities which are only open to school groups and to receive certain services which are only offered to schools.

For further information contact me at 201-464-0149. Address: 83 Knollwood Dr., New Providence, NJ 07974.

Research

Stephen Arons, a professor of legal studies, is doing research on conflict between parents and school authorities over value socialization in schooling. Examples might include struggles over home education, selection or censorship of books, secularism and religion in schooling, etc. Arons is trying to discover the strains which such conflicts place on the family, and the political and institutional interests which the school authorities are seeking to protect during such conflicts. Means of resolving these disputes without resort to the courts are of special interest. Professor Arons will protect the privacy and anonymity of any willing to meet with him to describe their own struggle. Please contact him at 20 Madison St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Home Study School

Pat Montgomery, director of Clonlara, 1289 Jewett St, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104, wrote us this summer:

Clonlara does have home-study students. I have received four calls since last spring and out of the four, three have enrolled as home-study students. Please continue to keep our name as one of the schools offering home-study and keep publicizing it. We currently have eight bona fide home-studiers.

Helpful

From a father in a town near Boston:

We spoke on the phone nearly a year ago about a home-grown education for our then 4 year old daughter. Now 5, she is enjoying her “kindergarten” year more at home than her friends seem to be at school. We are in a very amiable process with the superintendent of schools to secure authorization to continue the home-learning up through the grades.

We hoped it would be amiable, and came on that way, not criticizing the schools, just earnest about the obvious student-teacher ratio advantage any interested parents can offer at home ... he had received from the Massachusetts Association of Secondary Superintendents *a copy and summary of Judge Greaney’s decision on the Perchemlides case*. It has been sent out to all Mass. Superintendents. And it made him amiable.

He proceeded to use that document as the guidelines for our arrangements with the school district. What an enormous service the Perchemlides have done for us! And probably for all would-be Mass. Homeschoolers.

News From IL

From Ginny Poppen, Valley Cooperative School, RR 2, Box 518, Dundee, IL 60118:

Last spring we had an adventure with the local authorities that you might be interested in. After almost ten years of a fairly placid existence as a free school we were written up by a reporter for one of those newspapers people use to line their garbage pails with, investigated by the truant officer, and called in for a hearing with the county superintendent of schools. We got legal advice from the Alternative Schools Network in Chicago and the Northwestern University Legal Clinic and asked to postpone the hearing until we felt ready. We prepared a set of documents including our philosophy, history, curriculum, credentials, and current schedule, and went into the hearing five strong, two women and three men. The officials were expecting two mothers and were impressed with our organization and the way we talked about education. (I'm guessing that; they didn't exactly say they were impressed.) They told the newspaper reporter, for his follow-up article, that we were doing a good job of educating our children. If you think anything in that experience would be helpful to other readers of the newsletter, let me know. We have copies of the newspaper articles and our documents which we'd be glad to share.

Letter To Schools

Shawn and David Kendrick, of Rehoboth, Mass., recently wrote a letter to their local Superintendent of Schools saying why they were teaching their children at home. It seems a model of what letters should be. We are quoting large parts of it here. If you would like a copy of the complete letter, please send us \$1.

The purpose of this letter is to respond to the issues you raised at our meeting on August 23, 1979, and to inform you of changes in the learning plan which our daughters will follow and the reasons for those changes.

We have always felt and continue to feel that, as the people closest to our children, with the greatest opportunity to know and observe them, and with the most compelling motivations of love and concern for their mental health and emotional wellbeing, we have the ultimate duty and responsibility to provide them with the best possible environment in which they are free to learn and live as God and nature intended them to. We firmly believe that that environment is a loving home in which the natural authority of the parents does not exclude the child's rights as a person. Through close, meaningful interaction we are able to observe and know our children well, and to supply them with the emotional support necessary to the development of a positive self-image. In such a setting we can best present our own spiritual and moral beliefs while simultaneously satisfying the State's interest in an educated citizenry.

An additional advantage of the home environment is the small child-to-adult ratio which allows the individual differences and needs of our children to be recognized and provided for with greater proficiency. Our study plan is based on each child's interests and abilities because we feel that true learning, the kind which lasts a lifetime, is self-discovered and cannot be communicated directly to another. Such learning is frequently inhibited by the fear of failure, by ridicule and humiliation, by overstimulation, by the tension which accompanies competition, and by pressures to achieve beyond one's present ability. In order to encourage true learning, therefore, we have provided a calm, positive atmosphere, learning materials, and access to friends, mentors and community resources. We have chosen to avoid the above-mentioned pressures which often prevent learning or make it a

negative experience.

As a result, we have modified our use of the Calvert School correspondence course. Although we will continue to include the Calvert instruction in our plan, we will no longer adhere rigidly to the timeframe of the lessons. We have found from last years' experience that such adherence interferes with an individualized program which allows the child "saturation learning", i.e., to study a subject thoroughly before going on to another area of interest. Our daughter Anna, for example, will often complete several days' reading or math assignments in one sitting because we allow her enthusiasm for the subject to take precedence over notions that one must study only what is allotted for in that period. Similarly, because of a high interest, she read the first-grade health book over the past summer and is now reading the second-grade book. The idea that one learns more over the nine-month school year than at any other time is foreign to our children, since their school year is year-round. Not having been encouraged to believe that one must go for certain months of the year to a place called school in order to learn things, they view the world around them and every day of their lives as the place and time in which they are free to learn. To respond to their broad interests, we have arranged for our children to meet regularly with Mr. Jack Friedel, a certified teacher and natural scientist, and are including other subjects, such as photography, film animation, and zoology, in our study plan. Whereas our daily activities will not follow a set pattern, over a period of days or weeks all of the various subjects will be studied and discussed.

We have found that our children learn most readily and with retention when they have a need to know something and an opportunity to assimilate in experience what they have learned through their own initiative. One example was our daughter Celia's difficulty learning to write cursively. Despite daily attempts, little progress was made. We discontinued the writing lessons for a period of time until Celia asked us to help her learn cursive writing again. This time, with her own initiative as the key factor, her progress was rapid. As another example, Celia did not seem to recall the various ways of telling time when working in her arithmetic workbook. Her interest in the exercises was minimal. On her birthday, however, she received a watch as a present, and the next day was able to recite the time accurately and with no difficulty at all. Similarly, a page of arithmetic problems holds little appeal to Celia, yet when working out a purchase, budgeting her allowance, keeping track of a

game score, or measuring an object to construct, her interest is high. Celia especially looks forward to selling berries next summer that she is helping to grow in our garden and handling the cash flow herself. The practical application of arithmetic in her life stimulates her toward achievement.

It is the close and continuing relationship we have with our children which enables us to observe their growth in skills and comprehension without the use of standardized, routine testing. Although quantitative testing may be the most practical method of charting students' progress in school where a high teacher-student ratio exists, it is not necessary in our own situation.

A tremendous amount of confusion shadows the issues of competency and accountability, all pointing to the difficulties of measuring a child's needs and development in a system of mass education. New standardized tests are being devised to determine at a late stage in a child's school years what his classroom teachers would be able to ascertain at every grade level if more individualized attention were possible. Testing itself is not necessarily an accurate indicator of a person's knowledge or capabilities. The tensions and pressure of the testing process itself are enough to obscure facts from memory. The language of tests is often ambiguous, so that more than one answer would seem logical to someone who has not acquired "test consciousness" or does not have the cultural bias which would point out the best answer. Tests are designed to cover a certain area of knowledge, but one is not given credit for knowledge outside of that area. Even the state of one's health and mental outlook on the days of testing can make test scores vary widely.

It is the objectives of testing, however, with which we primarily disagree. Because of the administrative difficulties of mass education and its underlying assumption that children must be taught something in order to learn it, it is deemed necessary that by a certain age a certain body of knowledge must have been accumulated. This premise denies the individual differences between people, the fact that many children are not ready to learn certain things by a certain age, and that children have the capacity to learn independently. The fact that a child does not know a particular math skill or history date by age 7 or 8 does not mean that he or she will never know it. Conversely, that a child does know that skill or date at age 7 or 8 does not mean that he or she will retain that knowledge into adulthood. Indeed, when a child is especially motivated to learn something, the material that would

normally take years to cover repetitiously in public or private schools can be assimilated in a matter of days or hours.

A natural approach to children's learning does not force facts and skills on them before they are ready, but allows their own interests and talents to lead them into areas of knowledge and provides them with assistance and resources when they are asked for. Having been read to frequently, our daughter Celia began to recognize words when she was three years old. I decided to enlarge this ability and sat down with her intending to teach her how to recognize other similar words. This first and only "reading lesson" lasted five minutes; Celia closed the book and said that was enough. She simply was not ready to be taught, and yet, before she was five, she learned to read on her own. The first book she read unassisted at age four was *Curious George* by H. A. Rey, a book on the first or second grade level. At that young age she was able to read as fluently as most adults. Still there are words to figure out and questions to ask which we are more than willing to answer. We provided her with reading materials, the time to read aloud to us, verbal language games, and the answers to her questions. By not compelling her to read, but rather supplying the opportunity to do so, her ability grew at a tremendous rate. Given this approach to learning and instruction, we feel that the only legitimate form of evaluation is qualitative and descriptive rather than quantitative.

Our concern to lead as natural a life as possible is a factor in our decisions regarding our children's education. Our lifestyle is based on a vegetarian diet, and a philosophic outlook and spiritual beliefs which rely on faith, intuition, common sense, and traditional ways of life, such as natural childbirth, more than on analytical science and technology. The idea of grouping large numbers of children all the same age with one adult figure in a room for six hours a day, nine months a year, is certainly not based on any natural or traditional way of learning or living. Schooling as we know it today is a social experiment founded not on proven psychological, sociological, or scientific grounds, but rather on politics and economic need. When the Massachusetts Compulsory Attendance Act was first passed in 1852, attendance was required for a minimum of 12 weeks per year, only 6 of which had to be consecutive, and for a duration of just 6 years. Attendance was not required of a child being "otherwise furnished with the means of education for a like period of time", or a child who had "already acquired

those branches of learning which are taught in common schools.” What the legislators first intended by compulsory education is completely different than what is intended now. Even Thomas Jefferson, who emphasized that education was essential to the welfare and liberty of the people, was reluctant to directly force instruction of children “in opposition to the will of the parent.”

We have not felt right about sending our children out of our home to be influenced in their formative years by people whom we do not know personally and whose morals, values, and political and religious beliefs may differ from ours. Once a child starts school, the home becomes school centered, not family centered. The hour before school getting ready, the six hours of school, the hour or two of unwinding afterwards and the hour or more of homework later in the evening leave little time for parents and children to communicate and involve themselves jointly in activities not directly related to school. We do not feel that this amount of routine and regulation is essential to education *per se*, but rather is the outcome of attempting to teach large numbers of people with few teachers. The necessity for control and discipline outweighs the energy devoted to discovering and meeting each child’s needs.

In our own county just recently, a Somerset couple appeared in the Bristol County Juvenile Court to answer to charges of failure to comply with the compulsory attendance law after they had withdrawn their two children from the Somerset schools. The attending judge agreed with the couple’s claim to a Constitutional right to educate their children at home. On the grounds of the Fourth and Fifth Amendments, the couple asserted that the results of the evaluation which they were best qualified to make on their children’s progress could not be made available to the School Committee without their permission. The judge again agreed with the couple’s position, and the issue was settled with the understanding that the couple would evaluate their children’s performance, but that the results would not be sent to the School Committee.

Interested by their arguments, we began to read material relating to our situation and have found reassurance in both Federal and State court rulings that our decision to educate our children at home is a Constitutionally-protected right and that our actions are within the law. In a 1923 decision the United States Supreme Court stated

Corresponding to the right of control, it is the natural duty of the parent to give his children education suitable to their station in life.

In 1925, the Supreme Court held:

The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the creature of the State; those that nurture him and direct his destiny, have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for added obligations.

In 1944, the Supreme Court said:

It is cardinal with us that the custody, care and nurture of the child reside first in the parents.

This decision also recognized “the private realm of family life which the state cannot enter.” In 1965, the Supreme Court stated that “the right to educate one’s children as one chooses is made applicable to the States by the First and Fourteenth Amendments.” In 1972, the Supreme Court noted

The history and culture of Western civilization reflect a strong tradition of parental concern for the nurture and upbringing of their children. This primary role of the parents in the upbringing of their children is now established beyond debate as an enduring American tradition.

The State courts, relying on the position of the Federal Supreme Court, have reaffirmed the rights of parents. An 1893 Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling provides for “instruction ... by the parents themselves, provided it is given in good faith, and is sufficient in extent.” In 1904, an Indiana court stated:

One of the most important natural duties of the parent is his obligation to educate his child, and this duty he owes not to the child, only, but to the commonwealth.

In 1976, the Ohio Supreme Court wrote:

It has long been recognized that the right of a parent to guide the

education including the religious education, of his or her children is indeed a “fundamental right” guaranteed by the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

And in a recent Massachusetts Superior Court case it was written:

Without doubt, then, the Massachusetts compulsory attendance statute might well be constitutionally infirm, if it did not exempt students whose parents prefer alternative forms of education.

This same decision held:

Under our system the parents must be allowed to decide whether public school education, including its socialization aspects, is desirable or undesirable for their children.

Whereas the United States courts recognize that the State has a “wide range of power for limiting parental freedom and authority in things affecting the child’s welfare,” they also caution against unrestrained police power in matters pertaining to constitutionally guaranteed rights. In 1923, the United States Supreme Court stated:

Determination by the legislature of what constitutes proper exercise of police power is not final or conclusive, but is subject to supervision by the courts.

This same ruling said:

That the state may do much, go very far, indeed, in order to improve the quality of its citizens, physically, mentally, and morally, is clear; but the individual has certain fundamental rights which must be respected.

In 1948, a New York court found that:

freedom of choice as to the education of children, and the teaching of subjects not immoral or clearly inimical to the existence of society may not be denied under the police power.

A U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1972 reads:

a State’s interest in universal education, however highly we rank it, is

not totally free from a balancing process when it impinges on fundamental rights and interests ...

This decision also says:

however strong the State's interest in universal compulsory education, it is by no means absolute to the exclusion or subordination of all other interests.

Many other courts have ruled that it is the goal of education, not the means of obtaining it, that is the crucial factor. In 1893, a Massachusetts court ruled regarding the compulsory attendance law:

The great object of these provisions of the statutes has been that all the children shall be educated, not that they shall be educated in any particular way.

In 1904, the Indiana court stated:

The result to be obtained, and not the means or manner of attaining it, was the goal which the lawmakers were attempting to reach.

This was reaffirmed by the Illinois Supreme Court in 1950:

The object is that all children shall be educated, not that they shall be educated in any particular manner or place.

The recent Massachusetts Superior Court ruling held that the State: may not use regulations or standards as a means of discouraging alternatives which are not identical to the public schools.

This decision also said:

There are certain ways in which individualized home instruction can never be the "equivalent" of any in-school education, public or private. At home, there are no other students, no classrooms, no pre-existing schedules. The parents stand in a very different relationship to their children than do teachers to a class full of other people's children. In view of these differences, to require congruent "equivalency" is self-defeating because it might foreclose the use of teaching methods less formalized, but in the home setting more

effective than those used in the classroom. For example, certain step-by-step programs of graded instruction, involving the use of standardized texts and tests periodically administered, might be unnecessary when the parent-teacher enjoys a constant communication with the child, and so is able to monitor his or her comprehension and progress on an individualized level impossible in a school setting. In any event, whatever the merits of any particular program, institutional standards in a non-institutional setting cannot be literally insisted upon. That is, one may assume, why the legislature chose to impose the equivalency standard only on other than public *schools*.

The situation as the courts see it, then, is that both parents and the State have an interest in the education of children, that the State must be cautious in its use of the police power, and that it is the goal of education more than the means of obtaining it which is crucial. It is not only our own rights as parents, but also those of our children which we feel obligated to uphold.

In this matter, you as the Superintendent of Schools, the School Committee, and we as the parents of our children all have the same goal in mind, that is, that our children be educated. We hope that we have made it clear to you in this letter that our children are being educated, that the manner in which they are being educated is of their own choice, as well as ours, that the Massachusetts Supreme Court respects that children need not be educated “in any particular way”, and that the U.S. Supreme Court recognizes that parents have “the right to educate one’s children as one chooses.”

We have made a detailed presentation of the facts and our beliefs to assure you that our actions are sincere and within the law, and that in cooperating with our plans to educate our children, you are satisfying the State’s objectives and interests. We do not wish to go to court; the courts are overburdened already. Yet we do believe that our position would be upheld.

In view of this statement, we do not feel that it is necessary for you to meet with our children. We thank you for your concern and again assure you that our deepest commitment is to our children’s welfare.

(Ed.—there follows a complete list of the cases cited.)

KY Ruling

News story from Frankfort, Kentucky:

The Kentucky Supreme Court ruled Tuesday (10/9/79) that the state cannot force private schools to meet the accreditation standards regarding courses, teachers and textbooks that it sets for public schools.

But the high court left open the possibility that the state can monitor the schools' performance through a standardized achievement testing program.

In effect, the ruling shifts the burden of proof from the schools, which previously had been required to show they were worthy of accreditation, to the state, which now can take action against the schools only if it demonstrates they are inadequate.

The decision, written by Justice Robert Lukowsky, hardly touched the federal constitution around which many of the oral arguments centered.

It *focused on the state constitution*, specifically Section 5 which never has been tested in Kentucky courts and which says in part:

“... Nor shall any man be compelled to send his child to any school to which he may be conscientiously opposed.”

The justices said the question was to what extent the state can control a school outside the free public system.

They concluded that the state constitution does not permit the state to prescribe standards for teachers and textbooks in private and parochial schools.

They said the state must approve operation of such schools unless it shows they really are not schools as contemplated by the authors of the state constitution . . .

Former Gov. Bert T. Combs, who defended the state board during the

lengthy court proceedings, said he'll recommend the state board seek a rehearing in the case. But Combs said he doesn't know whether the board has the right to appeal to federal courts because *yesterday's decision was based on the Kentucky Constitution, not federal law.*

Yesterday's opinion delved into the debates of the 1899 constitutional convention. It relied on the "Beckner Amendment," which the court said represents the position "that while the state has an interest in the education of its citizens which could be furthered through compulsory education, the rights of conscience of those who desired education of their children in private and parochial schools should be protected."

Hence, the court said, that does not "hamper future legislatures in constructing a system of free public schools and requiring attendance at them by all save those who hold conscientious objection to them.

"It is beyond quibble that the delegates (to the constitutional convention) meant to leave to the legislature the question of compulsory education.

". . . it becomes necessary to identify the limits of this state power where the boundary between the state's interest in quality education and the individual's conscientious objection to public education is indistinct," the opinion said.

The moral of this story is that homeschoolers and would-be homeschoolers should read not only the compulsory school statutes in their states, but also their State Constitutions, to see what these may have to say about rights of parents, religious freedoms, etc. There is at least some possibility that the clauses governing these matters in the State Constitution may be more explicit and more favorable than anything in the Federal Constitution. In any case, we should as far as possible try to get decisions based upon such clauses, for the state will probably not appeal these decisions in the federal courts, where I believe our chances are much worse.

News From NC

Recently the North Carolina State Supreme Court ruled that the state had no power to regulate private schools. I have not seen details of the case, and do not know whether this was the case under present legislation, or whether they were taking the rather broader position that any legislation on private schools was in violation of the state constitution. This decision is, naturally, of great interest to unschoolers in NC.

Someone on the State Board of Education, perhaps the Chairman, perhaps the Attorney, at the same time said that this did not cover people teaching their own children at home. But, as the courts already ruled in Virginia in the Giesy case (*GWS #11*), if the law says the state cannot regulate private schools, by the same token the state cannot say that a school registered in the home is not a private school.

Here is another unschooling news story, from the *Charlottesville (NC) Observer*, Oct. 25, 1979:

Statesville—Joe Clendenin, charged with violating the state's compulsory school attendance law, will not be tried in criminal court.

“The whole question is whether Clendenin is operating a legal school or not”, (the Assistant District Attorney) said, “and that's not a question to be decided in criminal court.”

Clendenin, who lives near Statesville, has refused to send his three children to Iredell County public schools. He has told state officials he is opening a private religious school.

During its last session, the General Assembly amended the private education law and relaxed state control over private school textbooks, teacher certification and curricula.

The amendment also cleared the way for parents to operate schools at home under religious charters.

Calvin Criner, coordinator of the state's Office of Nonpublic Instruction, said Clendenin said in an Oct. 11 letter he was setting up the “Maranatha School” and would use the Iowa State Achievement

Test to chart students' progress.

“That’s all that’s required (under the new law) in setting up a private religious school”, Criner said. “Nobody has to ask permission, they just tell us they intend to do it.”

A Troubled Unschooler

The following excerpts are from letters written by one GWS reader to another:

May 23: I am sending for GWS now because I am trying to change the schooling for my eldest, Phoebe, who is in first grade. Reading through GWS 1–8 I am reassured by much that read, but there are still several issues to settle. The biggest is whether I want to take care of my own children full time; whether it will be mutually beneficial. I would like to think yes, but there are times when a week of vacation seems too long. Perhaps that's because we aren't used to always being together. My preferred course of action would be to send her for the music–art part of the day and keep her home the rest of the time. A half day away would be fine: she still would have the energy when home to direct her own activities.

We have two other children. Jennie is 3½ and so has one year before she would enroll in kindergarten. Nathaniel is 8 months, and it was because he was born that I was glad to send Phoebe off last fall. He is older now, my perspective seems different. I am slowly thinking of withdrawing Phoebe next year and trying a year at home. If it doesn't work out, I'll let her go back the next year when she and Jennie would go off together. With no alternative school close, this is a very hard decision for me to make.

I should add that I took Phoebe out of public kindergarten last year in Pennsylvania when the teacher wouldn't let her read, and put her into an alternative that was very exciting growth for mother and daughter. I guess I hesitate now because I have no such “school” to offer.

School vs. no school seems to come down to the issue of having faith in the inherent nature of growing. My faith grows; our family nurtures and helps strong people start.

July 11: We went to the principal and second grade teacher and asked to be able to do home-study with Phoebe in the morning and have her attend school in the afternoon when they do a lot of non-academic stuff—gym and art and music. Today the principal finally returned our call and said that we could do this. We will be meeting with the superintendent of schools, etc., setting up a Calvert program and having a certified teacher check her every two weeks or so and review what she's doing. We're free! I am really hopeful

that this will meet our needs—to be more in touch with her growth, make sure she is getting the emotional as well as the academic, and free her to read to her interests and do piano and bake with me (this is how we work on fractions.) And half a day is something I can easily live with.

Sept. 14: We have begun our fall schedule of keeping Phoebe at home half the day. I am very happy to have her here but I struggle with record-keeping to help us justify what we're doing, and confrontations with the principal over testing and so forth. I am somewhat timid by nature and all of this is difficult for me. We are operating on guidelines from the state office of education which allow homestudy with a correspondence course with "progress" monitored by a certified teacher each month, with written reports to a superintendent each quarter. Our superintendent is most cooperative; Phoebe's principal is still trying to control what is no longer hers to control. She wants to test Phoebe three times a year for reading level and has said she expects to see "more than a year's growth" from Phoebe because she is bright. We have been told that we are a test case in Maine in that we want half-and-half split time, and hence are being "watched closely." What a nuisance!

The time we have Phoebe now is great—she has time to read and breathe and do her own things. I find I struggle with allowing her mistakes in her work—I know that to deal with her long term I must relax—but I still wonder if she will learn to spell without spelling tests, although she does most other things well. How lovely it is to have her again, even though school has started.

I feel our adventure is well begun. Phoebe is happy and relaxed. And learning. All else is superfluous.

Oct. 16: The reason we sought half-time was because I felt Phoebe was expending too much energy in school and needed more freedom each day; I missed her presence five days a week; and she wasn't being challenged or stimulated enough academically. But, I felt there was some benefit to her being there. I needed a break from all three kids all day, and I think there are many benefits from regular contact with the kids and feeling part of the group. As we get into this plan I have misgivings about trying to mix home and school, and wonder whether we will end up pulling her completely out.

Since September I have had both happiness and sadness over this whole thing. The sadness reflects my uncertainty over what to do (the

correspondence course is woefully inadequate) and difficulty standing up to the principal. The happiness is that the routine of Phoebe working with me is getting established and she plods through a little piece of language arts daily and has lots of free time which she occupies very productively. I love watching her creative juices flow. I didn't see enough of that last year: I got only a crab home in the afternoon from school and to bed early in preparation for the next day. (I was amazed that the whole summer passed this year and Phoebe never said she was bored, or asked me what she could do.)

I feel that what we are doing is right. Whether it wouldn't be much better to have her completely free, I can't tell yet. I will hopefully let that be her choice by next year. As it is, she hates school right now. Sheds a few tears some mornings before she goes in. I feel that this may reflect her picking up things from me that she may have overheard in a phone conversation or some such. I used to be very discreet, and not speak of my philosophical differences in front of her at all. At any rate, I am going to bat for the teacher a little, and selling Phoebe on it. I encourage her to talk to her teacher about what goes wrong for her and I think the teacher listens. I'll need more time about that to be sure. Ultimately, if Phoebe still wants out, OK.

Doing half time in school is almost untenable in a lot of ways. Who would believe in freedom and only half-carry it out? I feel guilty making Phoebe go. (If she resists too much longer I'll have to opt for total home study.)

In ways I don't really want to unschool at all, I just wish there was a freer school available to us. I would like to participate and be respected for my abilities there and have Phoebe and the other kids pace *themselves*. A community. Growth for kids and parents both.

So. A complex picture. Phoebe does "reading" and language arts and art with me and goes to school at 10:45 to join in lunch and recess before the afternoon classes begin. Afternoons feature math, gym, music, and odds and ends. Phoebe is telling the teacher the math is boring and the teacher promises more stuff.

We are under a spotlight to a certain extent. We have been told how people are watching to see how this turns out—new in the state o'Maine, etc. That probably makes me a little reluctant to let her out of her half day right now, without a good trial.

The correspondence course doesn't measure what she does and how she is growing, but neither do those tests the principal so loves. But then again, the

school is hard put to prove that she benefits from the repetition she gets in school (they claim that they individualize within the classroom and they do only some) or that our way of dealing with her has in any way failed to help her develop her potential.

I am rereading *The Lives of Children* and enjoying it. I think I never read it through before. There is much food for thought and much stimulus for me. I am just beginning to be comfortable in a formal teaching relationship—though the same rules apply as in the informal one we've been doing for years—I try to quit when I meet resistance. Often it is me, not Phoebe, who flies off the handle. I am learning to expect less. This little 7 year-old body doesn't know punctuation because she's never been told about it or given it much thought. Much, much joy in dealing with her. Jennie, who is 4, *demanding a place at the study table* and struggles to read. How nice it is to see the girls together learning.

More On “Equivalent”

A mother from Georgia told me that when she asked her local school district what they did about children who were too sick to go to school, they said that they would send tutors to the child’s home—two days a week, an hour and a half a day.

The disciplinary vice-principal of a high school in a Chicago suburb told me that his district had a very strict policy on drugs—students using drugs in school were without exception expelled for the rest of the term. When I asked if they could keep up with their schoolwork, he said, “Oh, yes, they can attend evening classes.” I asked how many classes they had to attend. His answer—two nights a week, two hours each night. That has proved to be enough.

I urge as many readers as possible to find out what schools do about sick children, etc., in their districts and/or states. When you find out, please let us know. This information can be very useful, either in actual court cases or for people trying to persuade their local schools to support homeschooling.

Minimizing School

More from Ann Kauble:

Gena was six years old and still not in school, because Arkansas law says children must begin compulsory school attendance on their 7th birthday. I researched state law and local school policies to find out how I could *minimize school attendance*.

I did several things before Gena's 7th birthday:

(1) I taught her study methods that would enable her to work in workbooks without much instruction or supervision. Examples: circling important clue words in instructions; crossing off answers already used when all answers are provided in mixed-up fashion; doing what she *knows* first so she can find right answers to what she doesn't know through a simple process of elimination, etc.

(2) I went to the school and discussed the whole situation with the person I thought would be most helpful and understanding; in this case, the instructional supervisor, who is still the person who makes it all possible for me.

(3) I had the instructional supervisor inventory Gena's reading ability, and I saved the inventory results for future documentation.

(4) I decided which teacher would be right and saw to it that Gena got that teacher. Schools will generally (Ed.—well, sometimes) let the parent choose if they do so before school actually starts.

I picked a teacher who isn't like the usual "model good teacher." She's my idea of the perfect teacher. She's disorganized, which means she isn't hung up on her own structure or routine—the kids can move around a little more in her class. She does not demand "high levels of achievement", which means the kids in her class don't get so nervous and aren't as likely to compete viciously with each other. She doesn't usually get "the smart kids" put in her class. She could talk really gruff, which bothered some parents who were used to sticky-sweet-voiced teachers, but it never bothered the kids, because they knew she was all bark and no bite (she almost never spanked), and she just plain loves kids and treated them like real people. Her class had a calm spirit, and Gena loved her!

Gena started out in an advanced reading group, but before long I asked

that she be allowed to work independently in reading because, since I taught her to read by Kottmeyer encoding methods, the decoding methods taught in the reading series couldn't help her learn what she already knew, and could only confuse, at best. (I think it helps to know some education-related terms.) (I did not formally teach her to read, but I think the school is more receptive if I say "I'm teaching," because they are *trusting in my competence*, even though I have absolutely no "academic qualifications.") Gena says, "The *speller* teaches you how to read!"

Permission granted to work independently; and goodbye reading groups—hopefully forever. She just does the workbooks with my assistance and the instructional supervisor tests her out of that level when I say she's ready. I asked for a copy of the reader, but she is not required to read from it or answer any "comprehension" questions. She reads what she wants to read, in or out of school, and we usually discuss her current book.

As for spelling, she just took *her own workbook* to school and continued on in it. As for math, she has casually learned much math and is far beyond grade level (Dataman helped) (Ed.—a small calculator), so the instructional supervisor will test her out of any level when I say she's ready. It should be the same for language. She will probably do science and social studies projects in her class, working on grade level. I save all work she does. Gena got tired of watching *Electric Co.* at school, so she asked her teacher if she could go someplace quiet and read a book while the class watched TV. Permission granted. She was engrossed in the "*Little House*" series by Laura Ingalls Wilder—a wonderfully easy-to-read series (Ed.—we'll be adding it to our list).

As I mentioned earlier, I researched state attendance laws and local attendance policy. Any school district should have a book of school board policies: parents should know this! Gena was absent a lot last year, and will probably be absent more in the future. Her birthday is in January, so she started in the second semester. (Too bad her birthday isn't in June!) State law allows 25 days' absences, and local policy says a student who leaves school after 10:30 will be counted $\frac{1}{2}$ day absent, so theoretically that's 50 days she's allowed to leave at 10:30, although I didn't use that many.

State law only considered two types of absences: parentally caused absence and truancy, which is when the parent thinks the child is in school and he is not. State law gives the parent complete control over deciding

whether the child is truant or not, inasmuch as they require a written statement from the parent saying that the absence is the fault of the child before they will prosecute for truancy. This is important to know because the local school district has lots of policy concerning “acceptable reasons for being absent” and “counseling for more judicious use of absences” and giving the impression that the school can declare the child truant, but it is all a lot of baloney for psychological effect. When I write a note to the school, I just say “Gena was absent on (date),” which shows it is a parentally-caused absence and not a truancy. Actually, I communicate a lot more than that with the teacher, but that’s all I say in the note. This has been a long digression, but it may help others understand about absence.

Once Gena had established that she was working above grade level in all subjects, I started taking her out every day at 1:30, because students who leave after 1:30 aren’t counted absent at all. Even if she ever became in violation of the 150 days compulsory attendance requirement, and was referred to the Prosecuting Attorney’s office (truants—so declared by the parents—would be prosecuted in juvenile court and parents causing more than 25 days’ absences would be prosecuted in probate court), there is some question in my mind as to whether or not the prosecuting attorney would *choose* to prosecute under the circumstances. Prosecuting attorneys like to win cases, and the fact that I can so well *document* the fact that Gena is working above level, and she is, after all, enrolled in the school and continuing to attend, *might* make the case seem a little pointless and ridiculous.

Anyway, now it is time for Gena to start second grade. My conversation with the instructional supervisor went like this:

Me: Could you test Gena out of the (3rd grade) level workbook in reading, spelling or math groups? Also Gena wants to learn cursive now, so I will be teaching her that for the next couple months. She won’t start working in *her* third grade spelling workbook until she has learned cursive, because she wants to do it in cursive.

Her: Fine!

Me: I think she is ready to test out of the second grade math book, but she has gotten to the point where she will not do all the problems and assignments, because once she knows how to do the work, she rebels against having to do tedious and repetitious work, and I want her to stay interested

and not get turned off!

Her: Yes. Once she knows it, it's just busywork. I'll talk to the teacher. Will you be sending things for Gena to do to school each day?

Me: Yes, but she'll be doing music, science and social studies with the class.

Her: Okay. I'll talk to you about testing next week.

This is *not* a liberal school district; the superintendent has extremely tight control. This school district has one of the toughest attendance policies in the state, and they expel and suspend more students for poor attendance in secondary (secondary is not compulsory by law) than any other district of comparable size. They even have a policy, which I believe is illegal, which says they will *expel* K-8th graders for truancy. So we are getting by in spite of a very tough attendance policy here. I go to school board meetings so I can get a *real* education regarding what I would be up against if it ever comes to a confrontation.

I "m afraid I've given the impression that Gena spends most of her time drudging in workbooks. Actually, she does a week's worth of work in the time the teacher allots for a day's worth, so many days she doesn't work in the workbooks at all. She might read a book, or just play, or be absent. She really likes and needs the spelling and penmanship workbooks *I have provided* and she takes to school (they will provide *consistent* lessons through the eighth grade, whereas the school may adopt a different series in a few years.). She completed one reading workbook in a week this summer. We don't take the reading workbook skills seriously—just "do the page." In reading and math, she is just doing enough to learn the skills taught in the book, to be tested, so she will spend a lot less time doing assignments than most kids.

The important thing to the school is that her progress is tested and documented, and the important thing to me is that she still wants to learn.

So that is our story. It is not an unschooling story. But I wonder what would happen if the schools had to deal with a lot of students who were "working independently above grade level and had very poor attendance records"?

Years ago I did take one of my boys out of school for the last part of his third grade year. He was in a bad situation and developing signs of severe nervous tension. The doctor said there was nothing physically wrong with

him. I asked him if he thought I should try to get permission from the school to take him out. He said, "The trouble is, we ask permission too much these days. If you are convinced it is the right thing to do, then just do it." I did. The principal called after a while, and I told him Steve wouldn't be back. His teacher wrote a nasty evaluation of his "immaturity and irresponsibility", which is still in his school file. This happened in another state, and the next year he changed schools and repeated third grade and did better. I know that both my boys were harmed by public school, but I have now learned not to expect the schools to teach my children, and to be sure they are happy in class.

I took my older girl out of school for a couple of weeks when a substitute had them doing things like writing "I will obey" 400 times a day! I finally managed to get rid of the substitute and get Linda back in school. (I pointed out to the administration that this lady was not a *certified* teacher, and they are supposed to hire only certified teachers for *extended periods*.) I don't think they are being harmed now. I would get them out somehow if I ever think they are being harmed.

There is one more thing I would like to share regarding school and home study. Gena knows that she will always wind up getting 100% on the work she does, but not always on the first try. The first try tells you what you know and what you need to study. It does *not ever* tell you how smart or dumb you are, and it does *not ever* have anything to do with anybody else, even though the school makes you think you should compare how you did with how someone else did. There is no point at all in grading a paper if you don't correct the mistakes afterward and wind up with 100%! This year I am putting a note in my kid's file that says I do not want them to ever be punished for academic failure, as I do not think the state corporal punishment law (alas! there is one) allows it.

World of “Weepuls”

A mother writes:

But at the same time we are, deep inside, ready to “un-school.” I am absolutely convinced of its rightness. My problem is my children, especially the older one (10). After five years of schooling he has made it palatable and even enjoyable by creating a world within a world there with a couple of his friends. The school work is no problem; he goes so that he can get together easily with 2 or 3 other boys for playing baseball or whatever. Also, their world contains its own society of “weepuls”—scores of ping pong ball sized fuzzy creatures of different colors with big feet and tiny antennas. For almost a year they had their city covering our 20 x 12’ sun porch (forced to be dismantled because we are re-modeling). I haven’t read *Gnomes*, but doubt if it could be a more complete study than these kids have with weepuls: the case of characters, layers of their society, their soccer and football fields, spaceports and ships, disco, museum, school, movie theater, transportation system, all made in detailed miniature with great care and skill; their diet of only bananas and banana juice, their death by contact with water, and so on. When J went on a scout trip to the snow, the weepul King Eeker went with him on skis made out of tongue depressors. The weepuls go to school and hide in the desks until break time when they come out and make school their place and the boys can do what they want with and through them. Homework and boredom are put up with for the chance to meet A and K and play with weepuls. One wonders about our art forms and rituals helping us accept and overcome boredom and mediocrity without getting at their sources. I wish my son would actively dislike, fight school, and refuse to do the work. That would make it easier. But he has created a strong and attractive world within the world of school from which I cannot pull him.

He wants letter grades now because he was the only one who didn’t get them last report, and since his are high, why should he let the others think they are no good and he has to have them covered up with checks instead. He will take the standardized (but not even required this year) tests that I have been fighting about all year because he doesn’t mind. I cannot fight this amorphous enemy. As you said in the last chapter of *Instead Of Education*, I try to provide as much life outside of school, but *School Takes So Much Time*

From Kids. We had to return *Huckleberry Finn* to the library because we didn't have time to finish it because of school.

Cops ‘N Robbers

This letter was written to the mother in “Books and Guns,” GWS #10:

The thoughts you shared concerning “playing guns” brought to mind some old memories.

Nobody ever told me not to play guns. But, when I was a kid, and the gang played cops “n robbers, I had a problem because I couldn’t “die.” Some kid would shoot me, and I would want to fall down and die, but somehow I couldn’t, and I would just stand there and look dazed. And if I shot somebody, he would just ignore me because he knew I hadn’t really killed him.

After I grew up and had kids of my own, and they had taught me *how* to play cops “n robbers, I realized that I had been a very schizoid child, very uptight, totally lacking in spontaneity, frozen out of the *now*—and playing guns is a kid’s way of getting really “with” other kids and into a very fast-moving, action-packed *present*.

My observation (of about 15 years watching such games) is that only very free-spirited kids can play a really good game of cops “n robbers, and that many games of cops “n robbers are ended by a child who *does* have feelings of violence and cruelty and causes an “accident” to happen in which someone is hurt. Usually that child wants to put an end to the game because of jealousy—he *can’t* share in the fun; not because he has been excluded by the others, but because he isn’t capable of playing.

I don’t think “playing guns” usually has anything to do with guns, violence, hostility, or cruelty; it is a game of awareness. Feelings, other than joy, get in the way of awareness, and you can explode your feelings by experiencing the sound of the cap exploding in a cap pistol, for instance.

In playing guns, I believe it goes like this: If I am *aware* of you first, I can shoot you, and you have to die! If I get surprised by you, then I *know* you are more aware than I am because *you* surprised *me*, so I’ve got to die. I just give up all awareness (falling in the process) until I feel a surge inside me that says I’m ready to be born again—*more* alive than before! Sometimes you and I catch each other at exactly the same time, and then we have to battle it out—Bang! Bang! Pow! Pow! I got YOU! NO you didn’t, I got you FIRST!—until we both know that one of us has bested the other. One of us must die

and be born again!

If, instead, one of us gets *mad*—then the game quickly ends.

Oh, I love a good, noisy game of cops ‘n robbers!

I am an old fossil of almost forty who couldn’t play guns now to save my soul, but at least I still remember that I learned something from some kids a long time ago.

I’m trying to *tell* you something that can only be experienced, which tells me that I’m a fool. So, my suggestion is that you find a free-spirited kid (maybe you have one in your home?) and see what you can learn from him.

I believe that it’s best to learn to look at the spirit—the feelings expressed—in what your child does, and see through the material object. After all, a child can express his feelings of cruelty and hostility when he pets the dog, and he can express his joy and delight when he shoots his gun. If your child is a joyful child and he *wants* a gun, I think you can trust in his joy, because the Bible says the things of this world are perishable, but the things of the spirit are everlasting, and I, personally, think kids are born knowing this.

Even if a child uses his toy gunplay to drain off his anger and hostility, without hurting anything or anyone in the process, what’s the harm in it? My husband says he can remember having those feelings when he played guns as a kid (whereas I never saw such feelings expressed when our kids played guns). He said he thought it was a good thing that he had that outlet, as he had a very unhappy home.

Reading Poetry

I am reminded of my six-year-old daughter, who is so intent on expanding her reading ability that she has recently taken to memorizing Emily Dickinson's poems in order to successfully read them. She struggles for sometimes an hour at a time, totally absorbed in "solving" her own "mystery." No longer content to have me read these very challenging poems to her, she allows me to read a poem aloud only after she has mastered it. I suspect this labor of love has little to do with the class room ritual of reading groups.

Learning To Type

Donna Richoux writes:

The remarks in *GWS #8* about typing reminded me of how I taught myself to type when I was around 13. I got a manual from the library that showed which fingers to use and provided step-by-step drill. The manual (and my mother) emphasized the importance of *not* looking at the keyboard. Once I had the basics down, I took my favorite book, *The Lord of the Rings*, which I was deeply immersed in at the time, and just started copying from it, page after page after page. Sometimes I worked on speed, sometimes accuracy.

Also, when I was on the schoolbus, or sitting in class, or otherwise in need of passing the time, would type *mentally*, thinking of sentences and lightly tapping my fingers.

The Boston *Want Advertiser*, a weekly booklet of classified ads, offers many typewriters (both manual and electric) for \$50 or less. Surely in other parts of the country they are available for similar prices. Definitely worth the investment.

Game Ideas

Ann Kauble writes:

We all study lots of things at home. We play a lot of games. Here's a list of games that are good learning experiences. They are more or less listed in order of difficulty, easy to hard.

Chutes and Ladders—for counting 1-100

Alphabet blocks—for learning the alphabet.

Peanut Butter and Jelly—for fractions $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, two $\frac{1}{4}$'s make $\frac{1}{2}$.

Avalanche—how can you get the most marbles to fall?

Chinese checkers and checkers—sequencing

Obsession—for adding 1-12 on the dice

Hangman—I use words from her speller that she knows

Monopoly—decision-making and handling “money”

Clue—logic and deduction

Anagrams and Scrabble—we use the tiles to make up simple word games for beginners

Uncle Wiggly—for reading the instruction cards, which rhyme

Dataman—I can program it, putting in ten math problems of my choice

Mastermind—we have all learned so much from this game. When we play (Gena plays the simple form well), we think out loud, so the kids can learn how we figure it out. Example: “If I have only two right colors, that’s lucky, because now I KNOW the two colors I didn’t use are right colors for sure!” A marvelous game for thinking.

Chess—young kids can learn

The wonderful world of computer games has not yet reached our neck of the woods, I’m sorry to say.

There are so many more. I hope GWS readers share things like this, about books and games and things kids like.

Teaching Chemistry

To a parent, I wrote:

With respect to your question, about how a parent could teach something like chemistry, there seem to be a number of possibilities, all of which people have actually done in one place or another. 1.) The parent finds a textbook(s), materials, etc., and parent and child learn the stuff together. 2) The parent gets the above for the child, and the child learns it alone. 3) The parent finds, or the child finds, someone else, perhaps an individual, perhaps a teacher in some kind of school, or even college, who knows this material, and learns from them.

As for equipment, you say that your high school had a very extensive chem Lab, but I'll bet that very few of the students ever used more than a small part of the materials in the lab. I have known kids who were interested in chemistry and did it in their own basements, who were able to do a great deal of work with, at today's prices, less than \$200 or maybe \$100 worth of equipment. The catalog of the *Edmund Scientific Corp.* is full of such equipment. Same thing is true of physics. As for biology, except perhaps in the heart of the city, it is not difficult to find animals for examination, dissection, etc., if that is what children want to do.

I won't say these are not problems, but people who want to solve them can solve them.

You ask "Would you expect a parent to purchase test tubes, chemicals, instruments, etc., that would perhaps only be used for one or two years, only to have the child become an artist or musician?" Well, why not? People purchase bicycles, sports equipment, musical instruments, without knowing that their children will ever become professional athletes, musicians, etc. None of this equipment (unless broken) loses any of its value—it could probably be sold later for at least a significant part of the purchase price. And, as time goes on, and more people are teaching their children at home, it will be easier to get these materials from other parents who have used them, or to arrange for swaps, etc.

I see no real need for "institutional" education at *any* age. There is a man named Ovshinsky, in Michigan, who stood physics on its ear by inventing a theory by which non-crystalline substances could be used to do things which,

according to orthodox theory, only crystalline materials could do. For a number of years orthodox physicists dismissed Ovshinsky's ideas. But he was able to demonstrate them so clearly in laboratory experiments that they were finally obliged to admit that he was right. *But he never finished high school.* There are probably more cases like this than we know, and there would be a great many more except for compulsory schooling laws. It is a kind of Catch 22 situation to say, first, that all children have to spend all that time in schools, and then to say that all kinds of things can *only* be learned in schools. How do we know? Where have we given people a chance to learn them somewhere else?

A very important function of institutions of so-called higher learning is not so much to teach people things as to *limit* access to certain kinds of learning and work. The function of law schools is much less to train lawyers than to keep down the supply of lawyers. Practically everything that is now only done by people with Ph. D's was, not so very long ago, done by people with no graduate training or in some cases even undergraduate training. Schools do not create much learning. What they mostly do is collect it, hoard it, and sell it at the highest possible prices.

Thank you for writing. I hope you will not doubt your competence to help your child/children learn anything they want to learn, or indeed their competence to learn many things without your help.

Science Resources

National Geographic puts out a children's monthly magazine called *National Geographic World*. We sent for a copy, and I think it is delightful. The photographs are colorful, interesting, and exciting. What is important for children, a great many of the photos show children *doing* things—feeding or petting an animal, working a piece of scientific apparatus, etc. The text is clear and easy to read, but not a bit cute or written-down. I would guess that most children from ages 5-12 (and perhaps even older) would love it. Subs are \$5.85/yr. (for Canada, \$8.06 in Canadian funds). Can't recommend it too highly. Write Nat'l. Geog. Society, P.O. Box 2330, Washington DC 20013.

A magazine I very strongly recommend for older children is *Natural History*. From the few issues I have seen, I judge that it is mostly about the sciences that deal with living creatures (including human), as opposed to sciences like physics, chemistry, etc. It has more text and fewer photos than the *National Geographic*. But there are still many color photos, all beautiful and some astonishing. A recent issue carried an article about wasps, with some close-up photos of queen wasps fighting. How those photos were taken, I can't imagine. The current issue has, among other things, a fascinating article about butterflies and how they get their needed body heat from the sun, and another about a culture in Africa in which people learn (starting when they are very young) to tell very complicated stories on drums. *Natural History* is not a children's magazine, and the text, though clearly written, would probably be too hard for most children under seventh grade. But for children who are interested in nature and science, and who read well, I would think that it would be fascinating. Subs are \$10/yr. (12 issues) in the US, \$12/yr. elsewhere. Write: *Natural History*, Box 6000, Des Moines IA 50340.

Another useful resource is the catalog of the *Edmund Scientific Co.*, 101 E. Gloucester Pike, Barrington NJ 08007; \$1.00. The company sells many kinds of scientific equipment, much or most of it more cheaply than you could get it anywhere else. There is a big section on astronomy—telescopes, lenses, etc.; a large collection of magnets; also microscopes; magnifiers; biofeedback; all kinds of science construction kits; kites; 8 ft. and 16 ft. diameter weather balloons; hot air balloons; lenses; motors; lasers; holography; a machine for making badges and buttons; weather instruments;

and more.

Some of this material is too expensive for most families. But there are many good bargains here, and the catalog is fun to read, just for what it says about what is out there in the world. Well worth the \$1.

A valuable resource for many unschooling families might be the quarterly *Medical Self-care*—\$10/yr., \$25/3yr. (\$11 or \$28, Canada), PO Box 717, Inverness CA 94937. The magazine's sub-title is "Access to Medical Tools," which includes books, information, etc. One chapter in a recent issue reviews and rates various medical reference books. Some of the books listed and recommended in the magazine are for children. But many children would find the magazine itself very interesting and instructive.

We have a few single copies of *Medical Selfcare*, *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, and *Natural History* which we will send free to people who want to see them. Send large S.A.S.E. First come, first served.

Ski Adventure

From a father:

This is a copy of the letter I sent to all the ski resorts in the West. I guess I did just the right amount of work in publicity.

Dear People,

You would be doing the undersigned and his son a great service if you would put the accompanying notice on your bulletin board and make its contents known to anyone of your acquaintance who might be interested. It would benefit you directly in the amount of lift tickets sold and ultimately perhaps in acquiring the services of a teaching professional and member of the ski patrol, as S earnestly desires a career in that field.

To Whom It May Concern:

My son, S, is a 14 year old who wants to be where the snow is more often than the weekends which the Ski Club grants him. He is a responsible, independent person, who wishes to demonstrate to himself and to the world that he can assume the responsibilities of his impending manhood. He is already a skillful skier who can manage himself and assist those around him. He would like the opportunity to do more. To be specific: I would like to place him with one or more adults in a responsible environment during the coming ski season of 1978-79. He can live in our camper, thus taking care of his food and shelter. I will pay you \$100 monthly for any inconvenience and out-of-hand expenses. He is capable of taking care of himself, but the state requires nominal supervision by an adult. Anyone interested please contact the undersigned.

Only one ski area answered. S spent an interesting, difficult, exciting, productive winter there.

Capable

From the “Kids Did It” section of National Geographic World:

DANCE, DANCE, DANCE. Austin Grunde, 15, manages a teen-age disco, called The Zodiac, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Most of the work in running The Zodiac is done by Austin and his friends, who range in age from 14 to 18. Austin has managed the Zodiac *for the past 2½ years*. The disco is open on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights. On Saturday nights, as many as a hundred teenagers crowd inside to dance to recorded sounds.

Exploring Work

From a letter I wrote to a high-school student who had said that she wanted to work in Interior Design:

May I ask you a few questions about Interior Design? How much do you know about it—*as work*? That is, how much do you know about what interior designers *do* on an average working day? Do you know any interior designers? Have you ever worked for one? Have you ever designed any interiors yourself? Do you like to draw pictures of rooms, furniture, floor plans? Do you read magazines about architecture, art, painting, design?

These are not questions for you to answer to me, but to yourself. If you have answers to those questions, then maybe your decision to choose interior design, not as “a career” but as *work*, may be a sound one. If you don’t have answers, there is a danger that you may have picked interior design because it sounded good. “What would you like to be?” “Oh, I’d like to be an interior designer.” “Gee, that sounds exciting.” And so on. That isn’t a bad reason for *first* getting interested in a certain kind of work, but you should know a lot more before you commit yourself to it.

I would strongly urge that *before* you spend money on some kind of school of interior design (how could you tell whether one was any good?), and before you even leave high school, you begin to find out all you can about that subject. There is a magazine called *Interiors*. Have you seen it? Ask at the library about it—if they don’t have it, and they probably won’t, they have an index of periodicals from which you can get the address. Another good one is Architectural Digest. Find the names of some interior designers near you, tell them of your interest, see if you can visit their stores or shops or studios, see if you can find out what people do there, and what you would have to know in order to do it. One thing you would probably have to know is mechanical drawing.

What I’m saying is, *learn all you can on your own* before you spend any money on a school. Don’t spend money on a school until you have found that there are some things you have to know in order to work as an interior designer that you can learn only (or most easily) in schools. The people to ask about that are interior designers. Find out where they learned what they now know.

Another skill to learn, and to learn right away, is typing. It is easy to learn, you don't have to go to school, I taught myself when I was in the Navy and I never learned anything more valuable. One reason for learning it is that you will need it in business, and indeed, when you are looking for any kind of work, you will be much more valuable if you are a skilled typist. (All it takes is practice.) Another reason is that if you write someone a neatly typed, error-free letter in good standard business form—like this letter—you are much more likely to get an answer than if you do it in handwriting. Many adults, I'm sorry to say, don't take young people very seriously. But if you type neatly, and don't say how old you are, they will assume you are an adult and treat you accordingly.

Now mechanical drawing, or engineering drawing, or drafting (not sure which they call it) may be something they teach at your local school, in which case try to take it. If they don't teach it, or won't let you take it, find out what kind of equipment they use and what books, if any, then get some of the equipment and start teaching yourself. I don't know how big a town yours is, but there is probably someone somewhere near there who will help you get started on this.

Go to an art supply store and see what sort of books and materials they have about colors, for you will need to know a lot about that. Write a letter to the Dept. of Architecture at the State University asking for whatever information they can give you about the study of interior design.

As you read about this subject, every time you see something that interests you, write a letter to the author saying so and asking for more information. Some people won't answer your letter, but many will. Much of what I know I learned by writing letters.

Start doing some of these things right away, and let me know what happens. I hope to hear from you again before long. Good luck.

PS—If none of this sounds very interesting or exciting, that's OK, but it is probably a pretty good sign that you don't really want to be an interior designer.

News About Tests

From Newsweek, Oct. 29, 1979:

A Court Ban On IQ Tests—For a decade, the State of California placed pupils in classes for the mentally retarded on the basis of intelligence-test scores, and a disproportionate number of black children were falling into these classes. Contending that the tests were “culturally biased” against blacks, the NAACP filed suit to stop the practice. After a five-month trial, U.S. Judge Robert F. Peckham last week declared the IQ tests unconstitutional as used and ordered them halted.

Peckham found that educators were using “an assumed intellectual inferiority” among black youngsters to avoid solving their educational problems. “We cannot truly define, much less measure, intelligence”, he said. The ruling, which California officials expect to appeal, applies so far only in that state. But Peckham’s decision, based in part on violation of the fourteenth Amendment’s equal-protection clause, is likely to encourage similar lawsuits against intelligence tests in other states.

The summer ‘79 issue of The Testing Digest reports that in July, 1978, the National Educational Association, to which most American teachers belong, endorsed the following resolution:

The National Education Association recognizes that testing of students may be appropriate for such purposes as a) Diagnosing learning needs. b) Prescribing instructional activities. c) Measuring student *progress in the curriculum content utilizing tests prepared or selected by the classroom teacher.* (E. italics)

The Association opposes the use of tests that deny students full access to equal educational opportunities.

The Association opposes the use and will continue to seek the elimination of standardized tests, which are

a.) Damaging to a student’s self-concept and contribute to the self-fulfilling prophecy whereby a student’s achievement tends to fulfill

the negative expectations of others.

b.) Biased against those who are economically disadvantaged or who are culturally and linguistically different.

c.) Used for tracking students.

d.) Invalid, unreliable, out-of-date, and restricted to the measurement of cognitive skills.

e.) Used as a basis for the allocation of federal, state, or local funds.

f.) Used by book publishers and testing companies to promote their financial interests rather than to improve measurement and instruction.

g.) Used by the media as a basis for invidious public comparisons of student achievement test scores.

h.) Used to test performance levels as a criterion for high school graduation.

From the New York Times, Oct. 28, 1979:

Consideration of a Federal truth-in-testing law was put off this week because of opposition by the companies that administer the examinations taken by most students in the country planning to go to college.

The measure's sponsor, Representative Ted Weiss, Democrat-Liberal of Manhattan, said that action by the subcommittee on postsecondary education was delayed, probably until next spring, but he remained confident that it would finally be approved.

The bill's opponents, which include the Education Testing Service, the company that develops the *Scholastic Aptitude Test*, have argued that the measure would substantially increase the costs to students because it would require making the test public after their administration, therefore making it impossible to reuse them.

And Test Info

McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY, lists a number of books designed to help students prepare to take certain standardized examinations. Among their titles are *How To Prepare For The Scholastic Aptitude Test (Sat)*; *How To Prepare For The American College Test (Act)*; *How To Prepare For The Miller Analogies Test* (used by most graduate schools); and others. Worth reading, for any who may be getting ready to take such tests. And younger children might find them interesting to browse through—another slice of the Big World. Some of them might be interested in making up some test questions of their own.

Parents who are trying to avoid having their unschooled children tested by standardized tests, or who hope to avoid this in the future, will be interested in two new anti-testing organizations and their publications. One is *Project De-Test*, 1129 21st St N.W., Washington DC 20036. They publish a quarterly called *The Testing Digest* (\$6/yr., \$2/copy). The summer '79 issue has some extraordinarily important material on the history of standardized testing, the assumptions of the people who first thought of the idea, and the ways in which the tests are designed to support these assumptions. There is far more good material than we have room to quote here, except for (elsewhere in this issue) the NEA statement on standardized testing. Much of it would be very valuable ammunition in homeschooling plans and/or legal briefs.

The other magazine is *The Measuring Cup* (\$15/yr., Box 22723, Savannah GA 31403). Perhaps slightly more than *Project De-Test*, they are concerned about, and opposed to, standardized testing and minimum competency exams as they relate to low-income groups and racial minorities. This difference in point of view of the two papers is slight, and both are very much worth having.

Her Own Decision

While we sensed from the beginning that school was an evil, we also thought that forcing our child to stay out of school would be almost as bad as forcing her into school. Our daughter is almost six, so she (and we) are approaching the dreaded time when she is supposed to start school. The approaching deadline has up until very recently brought a lot of apprehension.

Peer pressure was mounting on our little girl; all her friends, of course, are in school or getting ready to start. Until recently C thought school would simply be another adventure and a chance to meet new friends.

A blessing in disguise appeared: A prestigious private school offered a four week summer camp. Approximately half the time would be spent in “academic learning” and the other half in activities such as swimming, bowling, skating, hiking, etc.

We decided to let her go, risking the possibility that she might equate this “fun time” with school. We felt that if it were truly a good experience, then she should have it anyway.

The first week was great. She met new friends, the activities she loved, and the “academic learning” was all right (even though sitting in class seemed to be something of a bore).

The second week the pressure began and all of a sudden C couldn't seem to do the academic work even though she had done more advanced things at home. C was visibly upset and all her behavior showed it.

Our role at this point was to talk and listen as openly and honestly as we knew how.

We talked to the teacher and told her that “academic learning” was not important to us and we told C that she could just go later in the morning and skip the lessons. She skipped a couple of days that week.

She continued to go during the time for “academic learning” with mounting frustration; apparently, she didn't want to be different. She wanted to be involved in the activities but even these seemed to change for her. Too, it seemed as though her newfound friends, who were so much fun the first week, weren't so great in the third.

In order to avoid confrontation she began to play games with the teacher.

Instead of giving her teacher the opportunity to chastise her about her work, she simply didn't turn it in (papers were graded and turned back, but not recorded). We were uneasy about this game-playing as we were afraid it was building bad habits. But we were delighted that she confided in us almost every detail about how she "tricked" the teacher. After talking with her we realized that she didn't think trickery was good, but under the circumstances it was all she could do.

At the end of the third week there was a whole day of activities and we expected her to be excited. Instead, she announced rather matter-of-factly she could do those things anytime with mommy—she didn't return to school after that.

Little or nothing was said about the subject of school for several weeks. (We also decided early that we would not preach or bludgeon our child with the moral evils of school.)

One day a neighbor of ours, a large, loud, threatening woman demanded of C, "Are you ready to start school?" C very frankly stated, "I'm not going to school. They never do anything there."

We find now that our apprehension was for naught. We merely had to support and nurture our child—she seems to have ferreted out very well what was good for her. She wanted new friends and exciting activity. We suspect that in school she found something wrong with the children and, therefore, she found the activities there to be lifeless.

Now that she has made *her own decision* to stay out of school, we feel she will have no trouble being "different." We notice that if her friends pressure her on the subject of school, if a simple explanation will not do, she simply changes friends.

We think children do want the companionship of peers, but that children get nothing from friends who are under pressure to perform like circus animals. We think that children, if allowed, will naturally choose loving support at home.

Boot Camp

Ann Kauble writes:

Here's another item—a quote from a local Head Start worker, on a tape recording I made of a recent school board meeting. The Head Start people were asking to continue to use a school building for their program, and they justified their importance to the school board as follows:

“I think we should be considered part of the Springdale school system because we are teachers. As a Head Start teacher, I'm not in there running the schools, but when our kids get ready for the first grade they are *totally ready for the first grade*. They have been through the school “system”: I mean *they know about sittin' still, about recess, about lunch time, because they are taught this* from the time they get into Head Start until they get into public school.”

Board member asks: “What ages attend Head Start?”

She answers: “Three through six.”

They got continued use of public school property (an old house).

They Have A Choice

Many people write to say that when they take their children out of school and the local school superintendent begins to take legal action against them, he says that he “has no choice.” Most of the people who say this are probably sincere. Because they don’t know the law about home-schooling, they really think it is illegal, and so believe that if they allow it to happen, they will be aiding and abetting a crime, which is itself against the law. This may well be why so many of them move so quickly—though there are surely other reasons.

The fact is, however, that in thinking that they “have no choice”, they are mistaken. This is true not only because of what the courts have said about the rights of parents to teach their own children, but even more, because the compulsory education statutes in all states—certainly all those I have heard about—say that for one reason or another, children may be excused from regular school attendance provided that the local school authorities approve this. In other words, the law in most, and I suspect all, states very specifically gives the superintendent the right to approve homeschooling if he wishes to do so. There is no legal burden of proof on him to show to some other authority that his reasons for doing so are justified. If he says it’s OK, it’s OK, and that is an end of the matter. So if and when a superintendent says to you that he has no choice but to take you to court, or that it is his legal duty to do so, be sure to correct him on this matter. If he takes you to court, it is only because he *wants* to, not because he has to. And it would probably be a good idea to make this point clear early in the discussions, even before the question of court comes up.

Tenn. Report

A teacher writes:

I work for the public schools as a sort of reformer. I started out as a homebound teacher, teaching kids who can't come to school for one reason or another. I started getting students who got physically sick from school itself—it made some kids so nervous and upset that they would get headaches, throw up, run away, cry, just at the mention of school. These kids were great students at home with the pressure off, but compulsory attendance laws have compelled the superintendent and director of special ed to try to figure out what to do with these kids. They *have* to be served *somehow*, but homebound was not considered the way to do it. Teachers complain that homebound is being abused by these kids who have no physical reasons for not going to school. (Their problems are emotional and therefore not “real.”)

After checking into the situation in more depth, I found an incredible number of kids not going to school *at all*, first graders through 12th graders. (Kids cannot quit until age 17 legally, lower limit is age 7.) I started some digging, going through old attendance records, talking with kids and teachers, and came up with a list of 300 kids not going to school in our county, out of about 3000 students total. I figure this is a conservative estimate because a lot of kids probably never start school here and therefore we don't know about them. Also, the attendance records were mostly garbage—obviously falsified for the purpose of getting state money. Some teachers had no absences marked for the *entire year*.

With so many kids not going to school, it seems like a physical impossibility to do much of anything about it. In the past, nothing ever was done about it. The “attendance teacher” (our version of the truant officer) has *never* taken any kids to court for truancy, and doesn't want to start. No truancy cases have ever been brought to court in the history of the county. If someone reports a child to the attendance teacher, he will go and check it out, talk to the people, and that's all.

I've been working on setting up alternative classes next year as a sort of “haven” where some kids can go to school and not be pressured by grades and expectations, and where hopefully they can feel comfortable and at home. Of course these classes could not even begin to touch the *numbers* of

kids unwilling to go to school.

It really makes sense to me for the school to officially approve home education, because that is what is happening here on a fairly large scale. Our superintendent is open-minded enough to realize that the schools are inappropriate for large numbers of kids, and he's not willing to *force* the kids to go to school, at least not until there is something better to offer.

I have no intention of sending my own 4 year old son to school when he is school age. I anticipate no problems either. About 15 other like-minded families are getting together to start our own private school—which I anticipate will be our legal structure for getting around the laws, while most of the teaching will go on at home. In Tenn., only a charter is needed for starting a private school. It is not necessary to be approved, there are hundreds of private schools in the state now that are not approved. We have requested a charter application but have not received it as yet—so I don't know yet what that will involve.

Some families say they are willing to move to escape legal battles. We would welcome them here and offer our support.

Unschooling in Holland

Brigitta Van Daam sent us this translation of a Dutch news story:

1 May 1979—NRC Handelsblad, Rotterdam

Parents agreed with by judges of district court, child allowed to stay home

Groningen, 21 April—Parents who object to whatever education is available may keep their children home. This is the most important conclusion from the verdict given by two judges from Groningen, M. H. de Wildt and F. V. Gimbrere, to two fathers who had refused to enroll their little sons of six and seven years of age in an elementary school.

The two fathers, Mark Dunning Lester, 32, and Simon Chajes, 31, are members of the alternative living community “Impuls” in the village of Pieterburen.

Simon Chajes was exempted from sending his son to school for one year, last year, by the municipality of Eenrum. Prior to this, a lengthy correspondence and countless meetings with the municipality of Eenrum, the superintendent, and the department of education were necessary.

The city refused to renew the exemption for this year, also to Mark Dunning, whose son became of school age. Both parents were summoned for breaking the compulsory education law.

Two weeks ago, the public prosecutor requested acquittal based on Article 5b of the compulsory education law. It states that parents, if they have considerable objections against the education of the schools in the neighborhood, are exempted from the duty to have their children schooled.

The Groninger district court judges accepted the conclusion of the public prosecutor. They did state, though, that the consequences of the verdict could be less happy. Parents could also object to a school with

a democratic and anti-authoritarian direction or object to a school admitting Jewish or black children. “A lawful exemption in that case goes against the grain”, said the judges in their accounts.

They did find the considerations of the two “Impuls” fathers respectable.

Success Story—Ark.

With the start of the new year we took our three children out of public school. We followed the procedure suggested by Hal Bennett in *No More Public School*, sending a letter to both principal and home room teachers, explaining that the children would no longer attend that school and had been enrolled in a private school. Everything went very smoothly, with which we are very pleased. This is a small community, pop. 5,000, and the news about our kids out of school spread from people just being curious to people wanting to do the same thing. Some people wondered which private school they were attending as there are only two small parochial schools in the area. We explained to them that we had enrolled them in the Calvert School which is a correspondence school that offers a home study program, and that teaching my own children was something I had been wanting to do for many years and felt the time was right for us to take this step.

The law on school attendance in Arkansas says that children need to be enrolled in a public, private or parochial school. On further checking with the State Department of Education, I found out that a private school need not be state approved and there are no rules governing unapproved private schools, except that it would be expected that the private school work toward state approval.

There are several other unschoolers in the area. One family who took their child out of a neighboring school several years ago had a lot of trouble including having to go to court. Eventually the case was dropped. This year two other families took their children out without any resistance. We are very pleased to see this cooperative attitude.

Legislative Approach

People in a number of states and provinces of the U.S. and Canada (notably N.H. and Manitoba) have told me that some of their state/provincial legislators are interested in passing some kind of resolution or law favorable to homeschooling. And even where legislators have not yet expressed any such interest, we should be thinking about ways to get them to do so.

The question is, what kind of resolution or legislation do we want? Some unschoolers have suggested some kind of special state board or commission to review all proposals for homeschooling. Others have suggested that the legislature draw up a set of guidelines for homeschooling proposals.

I have been thinking hard about this, and my strong feeling right now is that both of these proposals would work against us sooner or later and probably sooner. The idea of the impartial board, mediating between unschoolers on the one hand and the schools on the other, is appealing. But what has happened to the regulatory commissions of the U.S. government would almost certainly happen to this board—it would soon be taken over by the organization it was trying to regulate. It seems almost certain that any unschooling board of review, or whatever it was called, would very quickly be dominated by professional educators, whose real interest would be in protecting the interests, not of homeschoolers, but of the schools.

In the same way, if legislatures were to set up guidelines governing homeschooling, the chances are, first, that professional educators would have a lot to say about these guidelines, and secondly, that the guidelines would be so strict and narrow that many well qualified unschoolers would not be able to pass them, and if they did, would find that they did not have much real choice about how to teach their children. In short, under such guidelines many people now teaching their own children would not be allowed to teach them as they chose, or even to teach them at all. These regulations would surely be biased in favor of affluent people with much schooling.

What I think we want from the legislatures—and this might be much easier to get—is a statement of general principles which will make it much easier for unschoolers to bargain with their local schools on a case by case basis. Something like the following might do the job:

The compulsory school attendance laws of this state/province shall not

be construed as authorizing any educational authorities to impose on students under their jurisdiction a uniform curriculum, or uniform methods of instruction or evaluation. There are and will continue to be large and legitimate differences of opinion, among experts and laypersons alike, on the subjects that should be taught to children, on the order and ways in which these are to be taught, on the materials which are to be used, and on the ways in which this teaching and learning are to be evaluated. Only by allowing and supporting a wide range of education practices can we have the diversity of experience from which we can learn to educate our children more effectively, and it is the intent of this legislature to allow and encourage such variety.

I think we may be able to get statements of this kind passed in a number of places—though we can expect the professional educators to oppose even this much with all their strength—and I think that any such statements of legislative intent will make things much easier for unschoolers.

In talking to legislators about this, we should point out that what we are asking the legislators to say is only what the U.S. Supreme Court has already said, first in *Pierce*, then again in *Farrington v. Togushige* 273 U.S. 284 (1927). In the latter, speaking of legislation passed by the legislature of the territory of Hawaii to regulate Japanese-language private schools, the Court said:

Enforcement of the Act probably would destroy most, if not all, of (the Japanese-language private schools); and, certainly, it would deprive parents of fair opportunity to procure for their children instruction which they think important and we cannot say is harmful. The Japanese parent has the right to direct the education of his own child without unreasonable restrictions. . . . Apparently all (the provisions of the Hawaii Act) are parts of a deliberate plan to bring foreign language schools under a strict governmental control for which the record discloses no adequate reason.

In short, the courts have always held that while the states have a right to regulate private schools, they do not have a right to say that private schools must all do exactly what the public schools are doing. Parents are entitled under the Constitution to choose not just which school building they will send their children to, but *what kind of schooling* they want for them. They

are entitled to a real educational choice, which means, the right to an education which may be in many ways significantly *different* from that given by the public schools (which, by the way, differ widely among themselves).

New Books Available Here

We are adding *Understood Betsy* by Dorothy Canfield Fisher to our list of children's books (\$1.35 + post.). Donna Richoux writes: "This was one of my absolutely favorite books when I was younger, and I was delighted to find, upon rereading it recently, that it had lost none of its appeal. Elizabeth Ann is a shy nine-year-old who lives with aunts who constantly fuss over her, until she is sent (because of an aunt's illness) to live with her strange, forbidding Vermont cousins. We see almost every moment of those first few days through the eyes of Elizabeth Ann—now "Betsy"—and with her, we find that her cousins' silence and "queerness" is actually acceptance, warmth, and humor. Bit by bit, her awkwardness and fear drop away, as she starts to learn how to help on the farm, to understand the jokes, and to look after herself. GWS readers will appreciate the contrast between the big, brick, modern school she went to in the city, and the tiny, friendly one-room schoolhouse in Vermont. The book is funny, touching, and very perceptive—I wholeheartedly recommend it."

Man's Domain: A Thematic Atlas of the World (McGraw Hill, pub; \$5.35 + post.) is a fascinating book to browse through. The back cover tells a lot about how maps are made. Inside are lists of the most populous countries, the largest countries, the most densely populated countries, the largest cities, the largest islands, the largest mountains (by continents), the oceans, the longest rivers, the largest lakes, the highest waterfalls—just the kind of world-book-of-records information that children (and many adults) like.

Did you know that, not counting the Great Lakes themselves, there are seven lakes bigger than Lake Erie?

On pages 2—27 there are maps of the world, showing Glaciation; Continental Drift; Volcanic and Earthquake Zones; Ocean Currents; Time Zones; Religions; Races; Languages ; Population; Income; Population Growth; Climate; Agriculture; Rainfall; Precipitation; Winds; etc., etc. Later, more of the same kinds of maps, but in more detail, for the continents and regions of the world.

In short, the kind of book that makes you turn the pages thinking, "Well, I never knew that."

Possum Living, by Dolly Freed (\$3.50 +post.) is a delightful book, direct,

candid, unsentimental, and very funny, about how two people, the author (an 18 year old girl) and her father, live very comfortably and happily about 40 miles from Philadelphia on a cash income of about \$1200 per year. They raise, make, or else do without most of the things that most people have to buy (or think they have to). They are not mystics or fanatics, or even ascetics—they enjoy the pleasures of good food and drink, among many others. What they have done is solve a problem that most people would like to solve but don't know how—how to live a life they enjoy without having to pay for it by spending a lot of time doing work they hate.

The schools like to say—sincerely—that they are teaching children survival skills. What they in fact teach children is to be totally dependent on economic institutions over which they have no control and which often break down unpredictably (as now). This book does teach survival skills, and as such, will be very valuable to unschoolers and their children.

Steady State Economics by Herman Daly (\$5.85 + post.) This (as far as I know) is the first serious economics textbook for the general reader about how a stable and non-destructive economy would work, and why the conventional arguments against it are based on false assumptions and bad reasoning. I emphasize “for the general reader.” Though it is a textbook, a carefully and closely reasoned piece of scientific writing, it is not at all obscure, nor does it depend on a lot of mathematics that only specialized experts can understand. With a little effort, the ordinary reader can grasp most, if not all, of what Daly is saying, and it is well worth the effort, for it will convince us that our hopes for a different world are practical, even as the world understands the term. A book to feed the mind and stiffen the spine.

We are planning to add many new titles to our book list during the next year, particularly books for children. If there are any books (still in print, preferably paperback) that you loved reading as a child, or that your children love, please tell us about them.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Associate Editor—Donna Richoux

Growing Without Schooling 13

March 1980

I just spent several hours being interviewed by Pat Stone of *Mother Earth News* for their “Plowboy” feature. He said it might appear as early as the May issue (and then again, it may not.) I’m rather excited at the idea of reaching their huge audience.

In the last two months, I’ve been traveling and lecturing more than I expected. In January, I spoke at the Schlumberger Corp. in Ridgefield, Ct., and to an overflow crowd in Worcester, Mass. At the end of the month, I flew to Seattle, Wash., spoke at the University of Washington, the Little School, and a local KING-TV show. In February, I gave talks at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada; St. Paul, Minnesota; Fargo, ND; and Lake City, Illinois.

In between lectures, I’ve been working hard on my unschooling book. Hope to finish it by April; it should be out by next winter. No definite title yet.

Thanks to everyone who has answered the Survey from GWS #11, so far. It will take us a while to process them all. Meanwhile, if you haven’t yet answered, you still can at any time, and we hope you do. The information has already been valuable to us, and will be to other unschoolers.

The Van Daams in Rhode Island (#10) have told us the charges against them were finally dismissed.

More good news: the Santa Fe Community school held a fund-raising drive, and got enough money to buy the land they’ve rented.

Very important article in *Reader’s Digest* (March) about Ralph Nader’s report on standardized tests. We’ll get reprints (for one, send us a SASE). The Feb. 19 *Atlantic* also had a good article on tests. As I promised, we’ve begun to expand our mail-order booklist; you’ll find reviews of many new additions in this issue.

A Young Explorer

Early last winter several things happened: (1) J (age 8) was miserable, withdrawn, and hostile at a special private school for gifted children. She had pre-ulcerous stomach pain and was to be scheduled for X-rays. (2) The article appeared in *Time* magazine (12/4/78) about John Holt's ideas concerning teaching children at home..

During J's 1978 Christmas break, we did a great deal of soul-searching and then told her school that she was leaving to attend another school (we didn't tell them where.)

J was absolutely overjoyed and declared that she hated school. And especially she said no more math ever. Workbooks and pointless repetition had ruined math for her.

What a turnaround for our eager learner! J had loved learning since the day she was born and had loved it until she went to school. She was always able to do things at a much earlier age than the experts said she could be expected to do them. We always tried to help learning be fun by allowing her the freedom to choose what she wished to do. Since she was fascinated with everything, her preschool studies were varied. She learned to read words as she learned to speak them. She added and understood what numbers represented by the time she was two.

When she was four and attending kindergarten at the previously mentioned special school, the Tutankhamun relics exhibit came to our city and we got the catalog about the exhibit before we went. J read it repeatedly, asking questions all the while, until she understood what each object was and what it was used for. Also, she learned some background about the period. When we went to the exhibit, she was more knowledgeable than most of the adults there.

Her enjoyment of ancient history was something that she could share with some of the adults she knew. But when she wanted to share her fascination about ancient history with some of her classmates, no one could understand her.

She went on to study Greek mythology for a year and a half (an off-shoot of this was an abiding interest in astronomy, originally sparked by the Greek names of the constellations). But again not a "childish" interest which could

be shared with her classmates.

Our first step in our new school was months of no “classes” at all, to let J recover from her school miseries. We organized nothing and only did what J wanted to do. She did take a college course at the planetarium (we have taken seven classes there together.)

The three of us spent the month of May in Europe. J and I studied European history and planned where we were to travel. The experience of planning and taking the trip was invaluable. Our math-hater could convert currencies in her head. Also she learned, for example: some German, how to read train time tables listed in 24-hour clock form, to read maps, to translate menus, plus a *great* deal about European history—her latest fascination.

Since we returned from Europe, she wants to learn math because she knows how math can be used. We have also taken more astronomy classes, the Connections course on TV, a ceramics class, etc.

J is again the happy, eager, joking and joyful child we knew before we sent her to school. We had hoped to find a school which wouldn’t undo all that we had done with her. Such a place doesn’t seem to exist, so we are continuing on our own, and plan to keep learning at home until J wants to go to an organized school (my current guess would be college).

J has grown over 3 inches and gained 11 pounds in the past year since she has been unschooled. During her 2½ school years she only grew in the summer and didn’t total that much growth during those years. Although she was tall for her age before she went to school, she is now short for her age. She was constantly suffering from infections of various sorts while in school and is *much* healthier now.

More N.C. News

Last year, the General Assembly of North Carolina (1979 Session) passed laws freeing private schools from almost all state regulations.

When we heard of this, we wrote to the Clerk of the Senate in Raleigh, and also to the NC State Library, describing the legislation and asking for a copy. Within a few weeks, they both responded. Actually, it was good we wrote to both, for they each sent a different bill—there were two highly similar bills passed the same day, identical except that Senate Bill 383 dealt with “religious schools” and Senate Bill 526 with “certain qualified nonpublic schools.” However, all a school has to do to “qualify” is to receive no funding from the State of North Carolina.

The legislation requires the schools to keep attendance, immunization, and standardized test records, and send to the state a “notice of intent to operate.” It says, “any such school may, on a voluntary basis, participate in any State operated or sponsored program which would otherwise be available to such school.” The final paragraph is “No qualifying nonpublic school, which complies with the requirements of this Article, shall be subject to any other provision of law relating to education except requirements of law respecting fire, safety, sanitation and immunization.”

Good news that North Carolina legislature has put some clear, deliberate limits on the state’s power. I hope the ominous “revisions” that some NC educational officials have hinted at do not come to pass.

A Chicago School

In Sept. 1977 we began our own school. We have 11 students, aged 3–9.

Our hours are secretly flexible (Illinois asks for so many school day hours). Children choose what they wish to learn. One tactic we are using with “hate schoolitis” is to have parents and teachers work on their own projects at school, too. So far it is good. Young people often join in or begin to bring their own interests to us.

Several other examples of how we work: One young person’s father is a small contractor and the child spends one day a week working with him rather than going to school. My son did not wish to be in school one day when all the others did, so one of the adults went to the Natural History Museum with him. We have an arrangement with the local Y to use the gym and also spend a lot of time out of doors.

Early this year, one particularly beautiful day, we went to the beach. A friend remarked, “How do you justify the waste of time?” I replied that the children had examined 15 different insects, had seen sandpipers (rare in Chicago), had discovered that if you dig close to the shoreline you hit water, and dug holes at several intervals to check the water levels, found glass worn smooth and talked about how pebbles and other things are worn by the water and where sand comes from (“very tiny rocks,” said a delighted four year old), found a warm water current, noticed that the water near the surface was warmest that day (later in the year it reversed, much to their surprise—so we talked about water’s stability and why it is important that ice is lighter than water), and one child who had been afraid of the water went on in because no one said she had to; and that I certainly didn’t consider it a waste of time!! (Not to mention sand castles and all that entails about strength, cement, etc., etc.) Besides, all these were things the young people wanted to learn and had fun learning and hence *will remember*.

Mail Order Games

Family Pastimes, R.R.4, Perth, Ontario, Canada K7H 3C6, has sent us a catalog of very interesting-looking cooperative board and puzzle games for different ages. If interested, write for a catalog. If you try out some of these games and find some that you like, please let us know, and we will tell others. For families that enjoy games, this is worth looking into.

Also, Clonlara School (1289 Jewett, Ann Arbor MI 48104) has just told us they have become a distributor for the Family Pastimes games, so you can write them for a catalog.

Learn

Peggy Holladay is organizing a “Library of Educational Aids and Resources Network.” Members will be able to borrow books, games, records, science materials, etc., through the mail. For more information, write her at LEARN, Box 168B, Rt. 2, Clifton, TN 38425.

Interview

I heard the cassette tape of John Merrow's interview with me for the radio show "*Options in Education*," and I liked it. If you would like a copy, send \$6.00 to National Public Radio—Education, Washington DC 20036. Ask for Program #215, "*Profile of John Holt*."

Booklet

Frank Turano (GWS 9) has written a booklet, “*The Need to be Free—The Fight for Home Education*,” about his family’s homeschooling and the legal issues involved. If you would like a copy, send \$4.00 to him at 277 Westhill Av, Somerset MA 02726.

Calif. School

Lawrence and Bonnie Williams, who have started the Oak Meadow School (PO Box 1051, Ojai CA 93023), a home study program for grades 1–3, write:

We are still quite small; only about a dozen families involved at this point, but all are enjoying it immensely and seem to be growing more every day. Although we supply them with a curriculum suited to their individual needs, we encourage the development of their creative abilities through artistic, musical and craft activities. The parents seem to appreciate the guidelines that the curriculum provides, but they don't seem to feel tied to the completion of a particular schedule. We find ourselves talking on the telephone much more than we had intended, but it seems to help keep a strong rapport between us, which we feel is essential.

Group in Mass. . . .

Unschoolers in the Massachusetts area have been meeting at the Resource Center, 198 Concord St, W. Gloucester, MA 01930. Info: Elizabeth Bourne, 1-281-0661.

And Florida

Susan Price writes:

We have formed a Florida Association for Schooling at Home (FLASH) here in Florida. Our purpose is to protect the legal right of parents to teach their children at home.

It sounds as if we might run into some difficulty here, as the following quote from a newspaper article about a homeschooling family in Florida shows:

“(The assistant superintendent) said he has learned from state educators that some courts have decided that “when in fact there is a private school with only three students, that is not a private school but a private tutoring situation. In this situation, you would have to have a teaching certificate, keep records, make reports and meet other requirements’. The assistant superintendent said he understands there is a movement underway to draft legislation—acceptable to the traditional private schools—to keep potential abuse of the private school laws from occurring. (He stated) “I think the legislation should exist which would give some reasonable assurance that the school did have a well-designed program and to prohibit parents from denying their children the opportunity to have an education.’”

I am trying to find out (through my representative in the legislature) what this proposed new legislation is all about and will keep any people in Florida interested in knowing about it informed as I find out about it. Send me a card (1455 90th Av, Lot 45, Vera Beach FL 32960) if you want to be in FLASH and on the mailing list. We will run on contributions.

Minn. Testimony

On my recent lecture trip to Minnesota, I was invited to testify before the House Education Committee, which was holding hearings on the subject of homeschooling. Public school superintendents, school boards, and county attorneys had been asking the Education Committee and the legislature to “clarify” the compulsory school attendance laws with respect to homeschooling. What this “clarify” means is that they wanted the law changed to make it easier to prosecute people who tried to teach their children at home. We can expect this word “clarify” to pop up in other states. Wherever it does, it will mean the same thing.

I sent the committee a written statement in advance, hoping they might have time to read it before I appeared. To that statement I added a few other words in person, and then answered questions from Committee members who, with one exception, seemed friendly and interested in what I had to say.

What I said was, in brief: 1) Neither the state nor its schools has any thing to fear from homeschooling. 2) Minnesota state law, *as it stands*, can be reasonably interpreted to allow homeschooling; no school district and/or county attorney is, under the present laws, legally *obligated* to prosecute parents who teach their children at home. 3) The state would be wise to allow parents to do this. Trying to crack down on them will only lead to further and more protracted court battles, and much waste of judges’ time and taxpayers’ money, since parents who are for different reasons deeply dissatisfied with public schools are not going to send their children to them no matter what the state says or does. 4) Where parents have prepared their case fully and wisely, courts are more and more ruling in their favor.

In saying this I made a comparison with the Prohibition Amendment. I said that a good case could probably have been made, or made right now, that the state and its citizens would be healthier if no one drank alcohol, but that this is neither here nor there. The point is that there is a limit beyond which the power of the state cannot reach, and that when it tries to exceed its natural power it only destroys its own legitimacy, and runs a grave risk of becoming tyrannical and corrupt. This argument may be useful to other unschoolers.

We don’t have space in this issue to print my written statement (we may print some of it in later issues.) Meanwhile, readers may obtain a copy of it

by sending us \$2.00. Some of it, at least, may be useful in other states where the schools are trying to persuade the legislature to “clarify” the law.

Mass. Memo

Another valuable document we may not have time or room to reprint in GWS is a seven-page memo about homeschooling that was sent from the Massachusetts Dept. of Education to all school committees and superintendents in the state. (See “*Helpful*,” GWS #12.) The memo, written by Rhoda Schneider, General Counsel to the Department, briefly reviews the laws about home-schooling, and discusses the implications of the *Perchemlides* case (GWS #9). Ms. Schneider says, “The *Perchemlides* decision is the most thorough and well-reasoned decision on this issue to date in Massachusetts or any other state, and it offers substantial guidance for school officials as well as parents.”

The memo clearly outlines what school officials may consider to evaluate a homeschooling plan (hours, texts, etc.), according to *Perchemlides*, and what they may not (e.g. lack of “social life”). It also lists the steps the officials must take to guarantee the parents “due process of law,” such as prior notice of a hearing, the right to witnesses, etc. Although Ms. Schneider makes clear that the *Perchemlides* case is not a binding precedent outside of its own county, she emphasizes that “as long as the school officials making the decision to approve or disapprove a home education program do so reasonably and in good faith, using the standards and procedures discussed above, it is unlikely that a court would overturn the decision.”

We’ll send you a copy of the memo for \$1.00. It should be useful not only to individual families seeking permission from their local authorities, but also anyone getting involved in those statewide or regional efforts to define “equivalency,” draft new legislation, and so on.

News From Minn.

From Sharon Hillestad, 9669 E 123 St, Hastings, MN 55033:

It was surprisingly easy to obtain permission to teach Matthew at home. The first step I took was to call the State Education Department. I talked to the chief, Dr. Peterson. He informed me that I would need the permission of the superintendent of our school district, to provide a qualified teacher, and arrange five hours a day of class work.

My husband and I met with the superintendent and presented him with a written proposal. Although Mr. LaCroix did not give his approval, he did grant us permission. He asked me to submit a schedule, curriculum plan, and method of evaluation. The school has been extremely cooperative. I met with Matthew's teacher at the Accelerated Christian Education School that he attended for his first and second grades. He obtained all the books and paces (workbooks) for me.

We have had three days of home school. The first day was a great adjustment for me as I discovered myself being a "classroom teacher," trying to implement the schedule and "get through" the subjects. My son protested vigorously and I decided the schedule and the plans were mostly for the benefit of the administrators and could have little bearing on what Matt would eventually learn. Now we handle about four subjects a day, whatever and whenever he will learn. I think it will be a fun year.

Study versus Play

Lynne Davies (Manitoba), the “Working Mother” of GWS 11, replied to a letter I wrote her:

When you mentioned that J was able to “study” at home, the word study implied to me arduous, unenjoyable forced activity. He certainly was not doing that. He spent most of his time watching TV and playing with his toys. I was slightly worried about the TV watching, and my worrying was encouraged by a few people who knew how he was spending his time. But the wise side of me said, “Let it be.” I discovered that he learned to read quite a lot from TV, and was quite critical of the programs he watched. So I suppose he *was* studying. It’s just that we school-conditioned parents have difficulty interpreting words in an “unschool” context.

Now J doesn’t seem very tied to TV any more. He’s making new friends around our apartment block, and is getting out a lot more.

At Home in N.H.

Nancy Wallace (NH) writes:

A few words about our school. Every morning we practice our French, play the piano, and do some writing—letter writing, journal, poetry, etc. Every evening we read aloud to Vita and Ishmael for about 1½ hours. And in between? Ishmael takes two drama classes, a French class and a piano lesson for 1-hour periods once a week, we go to the library, explore the woods, observe nature and read (Ishmael reads for about three hours a day.)

I seem to have forgotten to mention math! We do it every day, in one form or another. When Ishmael was finally released from school a year ago, he seemed practically “retarded” in math. He had regressed to the point where he couldn’t even subtract 3 from 5, and even the thought of numbers gave him severe headaches. The school board demanded that Ishmael complete his second grade math book and it was hell, although an improvement over school, since we cuddled a lot, went slowly and sympathized.

But this summer we were free! We completely dropped the artificial approach to numbers (workbooks) and did a lot of real math—cooking, carpentry, celestial navigation, etc. This fall, we had to go back to a workbook, but three things had changed. First, Ishmael gained a bit of self-confidence using numbers for practical things; second, music became the most important aspect of his life (except books) and numbers are, of course, the backbone of music; and third, we found a “modern” math book that does an interesting thing. It approaches math as a form of expression—just another language. And Ishmael loves language! Now, for example, instead of freaking out trying to draw the answer to $14-9$ out of his memory, he easily *translates* the problem into $(14-4)-5$ and the solution is easy. We don’t do any drill in math facts and we continue to make use of this newly discovered language—math—as we do with French, in our every day lives.

One more thing—we never ask our kids to do things that we don’t do ourselves, and consequently we inspire each other. We *all* read a lot, we *all* write a lot, we *all* speak very broken French we *all* practice the piano, etc. People are often amazed at how “selfless” I am. They think they could *never* spend so much time with their kids, do all the necessary preparation it must take to “teach” all those subjects, etc. Actually, I have never been so self-

indulgent. I always wanted to learn French and take piano lessons and when Ishmael asked to do these things, I knew that here was my chance. As for math, I can barely balance our checkbook, so I enjoy learning along with Ishmael. And he teaches me spelling and history (don't tell!), so I am feeling very alive and full. And I can't even begin to tell how much Vita benefits. She's only 4, but she keeps right up with French and piano and is beginning to read and loves numbers.

A Reader's Memories

Quite a while ago I said I would write you an account of my unschooled childhood sixty to seventy years ago. At last, here goes.

I was a bouncing child until I had measles at four. After that, my temperature was erratic. At that time normal temperature was supposed to be 98.6°, with no recognition of a normal range of variation. Any deviation had to mean something bad. Mine would go up to 99.2° in the afternoon. I was dragged to one doctor after another. No one could find anything wrong with me, but the thermometer said there had to be! So my parents would be told to keep me out of school and keep me quiet, and maybe I'd outgrow it.

Sometimes they would be told to keep me in bed until my temperature had been normal for three days. If that had ever actually been done I'd be there yet. The longest I was ever in bed was three months. After a while they'd try letting me up for half an hour a day, and gradually I'd work back to normal activity, except for not going to school, until someone would take my temperature and put me back to bed.

I always took a pile of books and *National Geographic* magazines to bed with me, and of course writing materials. I kept my poems and stories hidden until I got into college. I still like to curl up in bed with a book or a clipboard.

The school authorities accepted the medical excuse. They lent me the books my class would use for the year, and I was expected to read them, but I was never tested on them. Any time when the doctor said I could try school I'd be allowed to go in with my class, but it never lasted long. Of course I hated school, as all the children I knew did, and it was a relief to me when I'd be taken out again.

Aside from the few compulsory books and a little while with Mother or Father on arithmetic a few times a week, I was free to explore the world of ideas. The little Carnegie library in town was my oyster, and I had the freedom of my parents' bookshelves. Later I learned the resources of the college library. Whenever I was in school I was amazed at the inane level of the reading done by my classmates.

I suspect that my mother was glad to keep one child out of the school's clutches. She used to say that vacations were just long enough to get the kids civilized, and then they'd go back to school and be savages again. Once when

I was nearly grown she said, “You are the most truly educated of all my children.” She had a lot of theories about child development, and about exposing children to ideas and letting them take it from there. She respected our minds, and never tried to spoon-feed us things “suitable for our age.” She thought no child should remember learning letters, colors, numbers, etc. These should be absorbed in the cradle, from hearing people talk. She extended this to Latin and German grammar, and would chant declensions and lists of prepositions which I remember to this day. (Mit, nach, nebst, samt, bei, zeit, von, zu, zuwieder, entgagen, binen, aus, steht mit dem dative nieder.)

She encouraged the memorizing and “spouting” of poems or dramatic scenes that we liked. No one was allowed to ridicule this. She also encouraged all kinds of things to develop physical coordination, bouncing, juggling, balancing, etc.

I kept notebooks in which I meticulously copied poems and quotations that I liked before returning books to the library. I didn’t realize until much later that my mother had initiated this idea in the belief that mastery of the language came from familiarity with it, rather than from the study of grammar and composition. Copying fine literature, comma for comma, gave me a grasp of sentence structure and punctuation such that I never needed to learn English grammar. I believe that English grammar is a monstrosity invented by Latin scholars who tried in vain to force the language into the classical mould.

One of my few problems in school (the times I went) came from my having no patience to learn English grammar. It made no sense to me. Mother bought me a self-help book for businessmen, and I learned enough to squeak through my “minimum essentials” test. When I took up foreign languages I learned grammar easily, because there I needed it. Even then I found that to memorize a model sentence illustrating a rule of grammar was more useful than memorizing the rule. Even in my adult life, when I taught English as a foreign language, I found English grammar an encumbrance. It is much more useful to inculcate speech patterns.

I should mention my effort to learn to read. I don’t know how old I was, but since I was reading books at four it must have been fairly early. I decided that it was time to learn to read, so I asked my mother to read me “*Beauty and the Beast*” every night. I thought that by watching the first and last

words that she said on each page I would learn a lot of words. It didn't work. When she asked me why I had to have that story every night I told her what I was doing. She said it hadn't worked because she turned the page several words before her voice got to the end. Being thus alerted that I was ready for reading, she began to cooperate with me, and helped me in various ways so that I soon learned.

One of the finest features of not going to school was being able to get absorbed in a subject or project for a day or a week without having to keep skipping to something else every time the bell rang. I could spend uninterrupted hours memorizing a poem or building a birdhouse or taming squirrels.

I did have to read the school books, but they could be finished within a few weeks. I'd put them in a basket with a long rope, climb a tree, pull the books up, and sit reading in the branches. Even geography went pretty fast that way, though the book was deadly dull compared to my *National Geographic* magazines.

In my second year with my French tutor, when I could read any textbook in French fluently but was still stymied by French literature, I was consigned to bed for a while. I asked my father to bring me "*The Three Musketeers*" in French from the library. I had read it in English, and the story was lively enough to carry me over any tough spots. I just read along, ignoring things that weren't clear, until the rhythms and patterns of the language became my own, and from then on I could read anything.

As long as I worked at home my standard was perfection. I didn't think I had done anything until it was done right (Ed. italics). When I was admitted to college, and for the first time had to cope with academic work of some substance, I soon found that if I hadn't done an assignment no one knew the difference, and the class went right ahead. Being human, I soon became a shrewd bluffer and goofer-offer, spending my time reading, writing, hiking and philosophizing with friends rather than working on my courses. In most courses if I listened well in class there was no need to read the book at all.

Ed. note: About "copying fine literature, comma for comma": this is similar to the way Aaron Copland used to learn a lot of music. He would go to the Brooklyn Public Library and copy out orchestra scores.

Adoption

Ann Bodine (NJ) writes:

I solved our “companionship” problem by adopting two children last summer. We are finding it *much* easier and happier to have three unschooled children (actually one is an infant so we really only have two) than one solitary one.

The adoption organization is Latin American Parents Association, PO Box 828, Hightstown, NJ 08520. There are *lots* of homeless little kids around.

Music At Home

More from Nancy Wallace:

Speaking of the piano. After six months of serious searching I finally found a teacher I approved of. One with musical integrity who maintained a respect for his students. Bob Froley teaches families, because he feels that as a group they can teach and inspire each other more than he ever could just with one pupil. So we all take lessons—each of us for as long as it makes sense (we pay by the quarter hour) and we go along at our own speed—he never pushes. And yet he is very exacting about phrasing, rhythm, our posture, etc., even with Vita who is only 4. He never encourages competition; we all help each other and measure ourselves by our own standards. And because our kids don't spend their lives exhausted by school, they seem to love to practice—Ishmael for about 1 hour a day and Vita for about 20 minutes. By the way, we are being taught with the "Suzuki Method."

I am feeling great because even though I've only studied the piano since August, I have my first pupil. In return her mother gives us botany lessons, and she's a great teacher!

Self-Reliant

From Edith Newman (B.C.):

Most people that come in contact with our children notice that they are “different” (in a favorable sense). Both children take Suzuki piano lessons. Besides her own pleasure at being able to play, these lessons make a provision for M (age 7) to show people who tend to be skeptical of what we are doing that she is able to do something well, that she is outgoing and socially mature.

People ask how well she reads. I tell them that she is at least three years beyond her “grade level.” None of these people has ever asked her to read to them. (By the way, she taught herself to read when she was four.) She sews some of her own clothes, cooks, carves (her father is an artist-carver), gardens, etc.

C (age 4), too, is fast becoming very independent. Last night he used the sewing machine for the first time, mending a nightgown he intended to wear to bed. Today he opened a can of soup and heated it up on the stove—unsupervised—I was in another room of the house and felt it wiser to stay where I was. He will spend hours “doing math,” playing with numbers, arranging and rearranging Cuisenaire rods, dominoes, etc. Every time he figures something out, his eyes light up and he shows such pleasure with what he has just learned.

The First “R” . . .

A reader writes:

You bring up the lack of proof that certified teachers get better results. I know of one quite opposite proof. When Arizona began a statewide 3rd grade reading test, the first year they had questions included about the teachers' training in Reading. It was glaringly clear from the answers that the more courses teachers had in Reading in college, the worse their class results were. The worst scores in the state were in a school in a good economic district where all the primary teachers had master's degrees in Reading (mostly, of course, from Arizona universities). Members of the education establishment, including Reading professors, obviously were unhappy about this news and the publicity it received. The next year, the information about the teachers' "credentials" no longer accompanied the test scores.

This information was learned from and can be verified by the Reading Reform Foundation, 7054 E. Indian School Rd, Scottsdale AZ 85251.

. . . And the Third

From the Lacrosse (WI) Tribune:

Older children and adults may be lousy problem solvers because of mathematics instruction received in the early grades, a study by university researchers says.

The researchers said they discovered that first graders can solve math word problems by using fairly sophisticated methods before receiving formal mathematics education.

“What we’re finding is that young children may in fact be solving problems better than older children,” (Researcher Thomas P. Carpenter, U. of Wisc., Madison) said. “They’re paying attention to the context of the problem. They really analyze it. They don’t deal with it superficially.”

Mistakes, the researchers said, “may actually be a result of learning symbolic representations. In other words, their natural problem solving skills are by-passed, and they too often resort to superficial problem characteristics to identify a correct operation.

“This may result not only in a superficial concept of addition and subtraction but also in a decline in general problem solving ability.”

Spelling Self-Test

Ever since I began teaching I have been trying to figure out a way in which people (who wanted to) could give themselves spelling tests. Of course, with cassette recorders, we could easily dictate a list of words onto a tape, and then later play back the tape, spell the words, and then check the words against the original list. But now I have thought of an easier and cheaper way, which even young children can use.

First of all, I should say that I don't really believe in spelling tests. The best way to spell better is to read a lot and write a lot. This will fill your eye with the *look* of words, and your fingers with the *feel* of them. Good spellers do not look many words up in dictionaries, or memorize spelling rules. When they are not sure of how to spell a word, they spell it several ways and pick the one that looks best. In almost every case it turns out to be right. People who spell badly—I have taught many of them—are not much helped by rules and drills. In all my work as a teacher, nothing I ever did to help bad spellers was as effective as not doing *anything*, except telling them to stop worrying about it, and to get on with their reading and writing.

People who already spell somewhat badly would probably spell better if they taught themselves to type. Learning to type would make them look more carefully at words, and as they concentrated on hitting the right keys they would, so to speak, build the proper spelling of these words into their fingers. It is often easier to build a new and correct habit into our neuro-muscular system than to get an old incorrect one out.

But many will not agree with this, and will still insist that people can improve their own, or their children's spelling by some kind of practice, drill, testing, etc. For them, here is a self-test for spelling, which enables students to keep track of which words they know and which they don't, and to work on the ones they don't.

It starts with the idea I wrote about in the piece "*Study Tip*," in the first issue of *GWS*. What we need is a way to apply that idea, which works, in the field of spelling. On one side of a card we can print the word itself. Then, on the other side of the card, we need something to tell us what the word is without actually showing us the word, which would of course defeat the point of the test. I propose that we write each word on one side of a card, and on

the other side write either 1) a picture that will tell what the word is, and/or 2) a sentence or two in which the word is used, but leaving the word itself blank.

Thus, to take a very simple example, a child writing a card for the word “horse” would write HORSE on one side (perhaps both in caps and lower case letters), and on the other side would draw a figure of a horse, or perhaps stick on a picture taken from a magazine. The child might also write a sentence about a horse, like “I want to ride a _____,” or “My _____ eats hay,” or “A colt is a young _____,” and so on. It is important that those who will use the card draw the picture and/or make up the sentence(s); that way they are much more likely to remember.

Then when the time comes to test themselves, the students can put the cards down, picture side up, take a card, look at the picture and read the sentence, figure out what the word is, spell it on another piece of paper, and then turn the card over to see whether they were right. The “right” cards could be put aside in one stack, the “wrong” cards in another. It would probably be good for students to go through their “wrong” cards again at the end of the test. The students themselves would decide how many words to try. People who are anxious about spelling would probably do better not to test themselves too long at a time. And it would probably be a good idea, whenever there got to be as many as, say, five cards in the “wrong” stack, for students to re-test themselves on them, before going on with other words. What is crucial in all this is that the *students* be in control of this testing and checking process.

But I beg, urge, and plead that you *not* do any of this with children just starting out to read and write. As I said, if they do plenty of reading and writing, for pleasure, their spelling will improve as they get more and better word images in their minds. I would only use this method with children who had already become quite bad spellers.

One more question. Where would this list of words come from that the children would make up cards for? From one place *only*—misspelled words in their own writing. There could be no greater waste of time than asking children to learn to spell words that they are not *using*.

This method would work just as well for adults. If you and/or any of your children do this, let us know how it works.

Starting To Read

A father in Tennessee wrote:

My wife and I still have two years before we must begin our efforts to keep our kids out of the hands of the state. Our oldest child has been reading for about a year (don't bother to ask who taught him) and his younger sister is starting to show *him* how to write (she is just playing at it at 2, but he keeps claiming that she is teaching him).

From a later letter:

I wrote you that our 5 year old could read; we have somehow entered a new phase.

T has been able to read for a LONG time. But he has not really been interested in actually DOING it. Now and then he would read through some familiar favorite, and if anyone asked him to read he would quickly go and get the very easiest book we have (it has about six pairs of opposites like "big-little") and this would be what he would offer to read. Now and then I might ask him to read a word here or there in some story I would be reading to him (and to his little sister), and he would do fine. Clearly he lacked confidence.

My wife and I were beginning to wonder if he would ever want to read on his own instead of always asking us to read to him (which he did quite often. He would sit and listen just as long as we were willing to sit and read and then ask for more.) A couple of days ago we were shopping for gifts in a book store, and T came to me with a book asking that I buy it for him. This particular book seemed not too bad, but it did not really interest me so I said "no." I could see he was disappointed, but he accepted my decision. But he wasn't quite ready to give up this book and asked for some explanation: "Why not?" Well, I took another look at the book, decided it was not really awful and told him that it did not interest me but if he wanted to get it he could. "But," I told him, "I won't read it to you, and neither will Mother." He said he would read it himself.

The two kids and I were sitting on a bench inside the shopping mall waiting for Mother. A group of school kids came up. Among them was a neighbor kid who knew T and began to talk to him. He saw our bag of new

books and I suggested T show him the new book. He began reading it to T. Age 8 or 9, he read OK, but he skipped a word here or there. After a couple of pages of reading, the school kids all had to move on (teachers lined them up and herded them off). Soon we were in the car and T had out the book again and began reading it to me. I pointed out one word the other kid had skipped. T knew it. This seemed to make a big impression on him; he pointed it out to his mother. When we got home he immediately sat down and read the book. Then he read it to his mother, then he read it to me. We were all delighted.

My wife had picked out another book for him (another one I didn't especially like) and had read it to him. It was a much longer and more difficult book than the one he chose. But he somehow felt able/interested in reading this one for himself. And he did. It took hours. He woke up this morning and started on it again and finished it before breakfast. His mother and I are thrilled. He is even more thrilled (I think). Most surprising to me is how *well* he reads. I am a little worried about not pushing him too much, so I intend to continue reading to him as if there were no change, unless he offers to read himself. I'll be watching to see how he goes on from here.

I told you this rather long story because I think it may reveal something interesting about "the social life" of kids. No doubt T, having told me he would read his new book for himself, would have carried out his part of the bargain. But it does seem that he was much encouraged by hearing another kid, not a smooth reader, struggle to read just as he struggles; making mistakes, skipping words, guessing—the whole range of activities was fascinating to him. T has been read to a lot; but mostly by people (old and young) who read pretty well. (His cousin has to be advised to slow down for him to follow—she is 13.) All these good readers must have presented to him quite a hard standard. I don't think it's stretching the facts too far to suggest that he got a lot of confidence from the brief encounter with another beginning reader. BUT IT ONLY TOOK TWO MINUTES. Whatever benefit he got from the experience happened suddenly and more or less completely. He didn't have to spend hours/weeks/months listening to others in their struggle. He was, perhaps, ready for it and it happened.

My tentative conclusion is that kids really do need and benefit from time spent with peers, but a lot of the benefit (maybe all) must be spontaneous, fleeting, and happenstantial. How quickly possibilities must deteriorate when

peer contact is carefully controlled; extended through long restless, boring hours; managed for some adult's predetermined purposes. Wonderful things can happen between kids when the time is theirs—quality social time. When the time belongs to teachers or other adults, no matter how “social” we may try to make it, it is surely worse than worthless.

Update From Mo.

Albert Hobart (GWS #7), now at Rt. 7, Box 134, Licking MO 65542, writes:

Robert continues to do well and to enjoy his unschooling status. His favorite pastime is drawing, and because he doesn't go to school, he has plenty of time to improve his skills. My wife and I both have degrees in Fine Arts, but he's been able to outdraw us for several years. He especially enjoys making up his own comics. Each week he and an unschooling friend of his exchange several of these homemade "publications" based on the adventures of their pet dogs, Sweetie and Bruno, who are forever battling their archenemies, the Space Cats. Occasionally Robert draws quite realistic renditions of life around our farm, and he sends these to his grandparents and to his city-dwelling friends back in Massachusetts.

Robert also likes reading, and he spends several hours a day with his favorite books. He particularly enjoys reading out loud, and every evening he reads us a chapter or two. Books he's read to us include Volume I of *The Lord Of The Rings*, *The Chronicles Of Narnia* (the entire series), *Watership Down*, several *Wizard Of Oz* stories, parts of *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Wind In The Willows*, and two Hardy Boys adventures. I listed the titles because some of these books are considered fairly difficult for a ten year old. Robert was slow to begin reading, and for a year or two he was quite a bit "behind" his conventionally schooled friends. We never pressured him to read, however, nor did we ever give him any kind of formal instruction. What he learned, he learned in his own time and in his own way.

Incidentally, Robert reads out loud with great feeling, and he's not at all shy about reading to strangers. My wife and I are much more embarrassed about reading out loud a remnant of the anxiety we felt as students. So—not only is our son the most accomplished artist in the family, he's the best reader, as well. Fortunately, he's kind hearted, and he doesn't lord it over us.

I should mention that I've discussed Robert's progress in reading because it's a "school subject," and I know that you're interested in the academic progress of children who learn at home. But for us, Robert's schoolwork seems like a relatively unimportant part of his education. We're much more concerned about the sort of person he's becoming, and so far he seems to be doing very well. He's a generous, good-natured boy who enjoys his

childhood. He's able to entertain himself for hours at a time, and he rarely gets bored. He makes friends easily, and his playmates value his company. He respects the truth, and he tries to do what's right.

In The Mail

The method of teaching typing suggested last spring in *GWS #8* worked extremely well for us. Our six year old learned touch typing in two months, earned a used electric typewriter of his own, and uses his skill regularly both for school work and his own projects.

We have been using Calvert to please the school board since neither my husband nor I have a college degree. I really don't like Calvert. It has some of the most boring textbooks imaginable (although the VII Grade science one was really outstanding), and places much too much emphasis on learning by rote. We skip a lot.

I appreciated your discussion of right/left (*GWS #3*). My problem has been "clockwise." I always assumed I was the clock, which if running would put 12 at my head, 3 at my left side, 6 at feet and yet this is not what I found they all meant by clockwise.

Two of the new subscriptions will be going to our two nearest libraries. I am also donating to each of them a copy of *Instead Of Education* with my phone number written in them for interested people to contact.

We've watched D (6½) reading to J (3½) and interpreting the stories to him—listened to J retelling them to his kitten—and vowed that they will *never* have to write a formal book report!

Worth It

From a reader:

Unschooling, for me, has been physically and emotionally exhausting—perhaps because of the way I have chosen to go about it. I've been working hard earning a Master's degree, concurrently accumulating undergraduate credits for teacher certification, trying to satisfy the increasingly precise record-keeping requirements of the home study school, (all in the interests of legality). Then there is the little matter of 46 hours per week spent working in a paid job and commuting on the subway!

There is no way that unschooling can be made easy for the common garden variety poor parent. On the other hand, the tremendous joy and intellectual excitement which are a part of unschooling are worth any price. We must think of those who lack the resources to pay the price, and devise and demand systemic changes which would make it possible for all who wish to unschool their kids to do so without a total sacrifice of rest and leisure.

Unschooling in Ill.

Karen Demmin (IL) writes:

Just wanted to let you know what's happening down here in southern Illinois. There are about half a dozen families unschooling their children and lots of interested friends with real young children. Last September many of us in our area pioneered keeping our children home from public school. Our family (children 7 and 4) registered as a private school. The form was very simple—didn't ask about "staff" credentials at all. I am the "teacher" without a credential. In December the State Board of Education came for a visit. They asked questions like "How many hours do you spend in formal academic lessons?" The Superintendent of this region told another family that a child getting one-on-one instruction didn't need 5½ hours a day and couldn't be compared with one instructor in a room of 30 children (one-on-thirty). We spend about an hour or so "practicing" reading or arithmetic most mornings, and they suggested we schedule more time. Another question: "What texts are you using?" One we use is Dr. Seuss' early readers—they thought they were fine.

They did ask why we didn't want to send the kids to public school and answered "Too many children, and restrictive environment." I used basic ideas from *Instead Of Education* including the idea of a "club" for exploring and learning unpressured. I was never more diplomatic in my life!

They seemed happy with a journal where I jot down what projects or learning goes on—especially the spur of the moment question/answer, "Mommy, how do you make clothes?"

It's been a month now and I haven't heard from them pro or con. But another family took the route of advising the superintendent that they were keeping their three children home (ages 9, 12 & 14) and asked for the school board to okay their curriculum outline. These folks talked to the superintendent in person and his words were "Well, I believe in public education or I wouldn't be in it, but you do have a legal right to teach your children at home." Those words brought a sigh of relief from a lot of people around here.

This same family also had a visit from the state board with much the same questions and results. Neither of us have been contacted since.

From Nova Scotia

Gary Arnett (see Directory) writes:

We have taken our children out of the public schools. We have set up a private school with other families nearby (20 minutes). I am a former school teacher and licensed here, so I serve as Program Director and Teacher. The families involved wanted to establish a legal and convenient option for themselves and other parents in the community who might want to remove their children from the public schools. In some cases, parents with little formal education of their own, or for other reasons, might have difficulty convincing the authorities of their ability to teach their own children—consequently the need for a “school” where parents could have this opportunity.

We formed a Board of Directors and approached the Inspector of Schools—the law says he must “certify” the children are receiving an “equivalent education.” The inspector gave us a letter certifying that we have notified the Dept. of Education. He mentioned he would come by to inspect at some point.

We were required by the Inspector to follow the Public Schools Program of Studies. At a later time, we received a letter asking for a detailed outline of our program.

I’m familiar with the public schools and wrote up a giant, 20-page elaboration on how our courses are to be developed, the curriculum, etc.

There are five children. I have ordered all the right text books, etc., that would be used in public schools.

We have kept a low profile with the media. Many individuals in the area know of our “school.” The most common reaction is “I didn’t know you were allowed to do that.”

I would like to help, in any way I can, other Nova Scotia parents to unschool their children. I could help them set up approved programs, curriculums, etc., if they can’t find someone who is familiar with how schools are to look on paper.

N.H. Standards

More from Nancy Wallace:

We now have no official guidelines or regulations on home instruction in N.H. and Bob is currently working with a committee to draw up some. The state attorney general (interpreting the N.H. statutes) insists that children can only be withdrawn from school if they are suffering a “manifest educational hardship.” So this committee must define “manifest ed. hardship” and figure out some educational standards that must be maintained and evaluation procedures.

Basically, they approved of our definition of “manifest ed. hardship”—any child who is offered a quality education at home will suffer “hardship” if forced to remain at school. They made up a list of nine “quality indicators” and school boards are instructed to look for one or more of these in any home instruction plan. They include things like: the educational plan demonstrates the effective use and coordination of community resources, makes special provision for the development of the child’s creative abilities, etc. Basically a lot of paperwork, but something almost all parents should be able to deal with.

Now the committee is hashing out “minimum educational standards.” We don’t think there should be any minimum standards as such. We feel that parents should be required to write up their educational goals in math, English, etc., and the approach they are going to use to fulfill their goals. So, for example, the parent may write, “I want my 6 year old to grow up literate and always loving books and therefore I am not going to give him reading lessons because.” Whereas everyone else thinks parents should be required to *teach* certain subjects. It’s a battle. As for Evaluation, everyone is aware of the judge’s ruling in the Perchemlides’ case which says that any evaluation procedure must be logically related to the child’s educational program. We’ll see.

Meanwhile, some homeschoolers are a bit upset with us. They don’t want to do the paperwork we are suggesting and would rather be required to teach Calvert (and then fake it). But what about us honest folks? Bob and I thought we’d write an “underground” pamphlet showing people just what to write—a sort of outline—and really, except for the expense of paper and ink, it

shouldn't be too difficult.

VT Guide

The Vermont State Dept. of Education has developed a list of “Basic Competencies” in reading, writing, speaking, listening, math, and reasoning, and a “Pupil Progress Record” to be maintained for each student. Interested people can get the record, manual, and teacher’s guide from the state. It would be a good idea for home study plans to refer specifically to the skills described, and to state how they plan to touch on each aspect. One Vermont mother has said her 11 year old found it easy to meet the requirements.

Degree Manual

We sent a postcard to the Dept. of Defense, Office of Manpower, Reserve Affairs and Logistics, Washington DC 20301, asking them to send us DOD 1322.8-C, the Dante's Guide To External Degree Programs. Before long it arrived in the mail, by far the most complete guide to these programs that I have seen, and almost certainly the best one that exists.

The introduction says the term "external degree" is applied to:

"instructional programs which have modified the requirement that students study on campus. These programs are often reliant on non-tradition instructional approaches. The institutions are regionally accredited, require brief seminars or no on campus residency, permit flexibility in scheduling, make extensive use of independent study and credit-by-examination. Many of them also recognize and translate career and prior learning experiences into usable academic credit and often permit the student to plan individualized programs of study. The programs are arranged by levels of instruction: high school, post-secondary, and graduate."

There is too much information in it to summarize. I will only say that it lists four states, Arkansas, Illinois, Nebraska, and Utah as having external high school programs. GWS readers have already told us that the Nebraska programs, which can be used by persons outside the state, are excellent. I know nothing about the others.

Strongly recommend this directory to all unschoolers.

Canadian Ruling

Here are excerpts from the Ontario ruling we mentioned in the last issue:

In The Provincial Court (Family Division) Of The County Of Lambton, *The Lambton County Board Of Education Vs. Mireille Beauchamp*:

Mrs. Beauchamp contends her son is “legally excused” from attendance under further provisions of the (Education Act of Ontario) and for that reason is not guilty of the offence charged.

Section 20(2) of the Act provides that:

A child is excused from attendance at school, inter alia, if (a) He is receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere.

Mrs. Beauchamp urges that her son is in fact receiving satisfactory instruction at home at her hands employing correspondence materials from Christian Liberty Academy which is located in Prospect Heights, Illinois.

In full and able written argument, neither counsel has been able to refer the Court to reported cases in the Province of Ontario interpreting or applying the relevant provisions of the Ontario Act.

Historically, it appears that the defence of alternate education entered the statutes primarily as a concession to the establishment and operation of parochial or denominational “separate” schools, but it also has been widely used in the establishment of non-sectarian private schools.

It seems clear to me that the Ontario statute does not limit the defense of alternative education in such a way as to preclude home instruction, nor obviously does it purport to prevent the inclusion in alternative education of the inculcation of religious tenets and values training, whether those principles be held by a minority or a majority of the populace.

The various legislatures, however, have clearly intended to place limits on the exercise of this right of alternative education, and such, no doubt, was a partial intent of the legislature of Ontario in enacting Sections 20, 23(2), 25(4), and 29.

The language of the legislation does not make the extent of the expressions of this intent obvious, in that it does not specify or spell out exactly what form of education is an acceptable alternative. It appears reasonable to infer that the legislature of this province intended to ensure that the alternative program be of a quality comparable to that of the public school system, however.

In his argument, counsel for Mrs. Beauchamp noted that there appears to have been no attempt by ministry officials through guidelines, regulations, or through directives in this particular area to define what was or could be satisfactory education at home.

In some provinces, the determination of equivalency of the alternate education is reserved to officials of the Ministry of Education and is expressed through the issuance of a certificate or ministerial opinion. This is not the case in Ontario where it appears clear that the courts do not lack jurisdiction to make this determination in the face of an executive decision, as is the case in the Province of Alberta as seen in the case of *The Queen vs. Wiebe*, (1978) 3 W.W.R. 36; but on the other hand, that the Court itself must make this determination based on evidence adduced.

Mrs. Beauchamp's evidence consisted of the reading of a paper delineating her concerns with and rejection of aspects of the public educational system, and expressing her intent and philosophy with respect to the education of her children. Mrs. Beauchamp is obviously an able, intelligent and sincere person whose views would be shared in whole or in part by a not-insignificant number of Canadians.

I have no doubt that the legislature of Ontario, in enacting *The Education Act*, intended a purpose with which the majority of the population agrees, and that it is to maintain at least a minimum degree or standard of education for its citizens; and to that end, the state is accorded the right to interfere with the rights of parents to educate

their children as they wish.

Obviously, there will always be persons who for religious, cultural, or other sectarian purposes reject all or part of the public educational system, and pressing against them will be the intent of the state to protect their children from what may be the ignorance, excess, or folly of their parents which may in turn deprive their children of the right to full and free development and may result in them becoming a burden and a charge upon society as a whole.

It is very important that there be a fine balance between these contending rights and interests.

An American judge (McReynolds J.) in the case of *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925), 268 U.S. 510 at 534-535 and 39 A.L.R. 468 aptly encapsulates a statutory recognition of this societal tension as follows:

“ . . . the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control. The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.”

In my opinion, this high duty is shared by parents with the state.

At issue in this case is not a parent's right to insist on the inclusion of religious and moral precepts in the education of his or her child. That right is at this time well established, provided the parent is sufficiently able and determined. The issue is the adequacy of the alternative educational system provided to that child in all its other aspects.

On the other hand, I am satisfied that those seeking to invoke the compulsive powers of the state in the face of the alleged failure of the parent or guardian to provide an adequate alternative and thereby to impose the sanctions of quasi criminal legislation, have a substantial burden of proof.

In this case the evidence tendered on behalf of the Lambton County Board of Education falls short of establishing beyond a reasonable doubt that Mireille Beauchamp is guilty of the offence charged. I must

conclude that as the law of Ontario now stands, that the educational authorities must conclusively prove their case through the introduction of substantial, detailed, and expert testimony if necessary.

This may impose a very difficult onus on the educational authorities and perhaps present an extraordinary challenge to the courts, but I have no alternative in this matter before the Court than to find Mireille Beauchamp not guilty of the offence charged, and I so find.

(Signed) Judge David F. Kent.

Ideas Needed

Peggy Vaughan, PO Box 5626, Hilton Head Island, SC 29928, writes:

I am trying to locate short-term (3 to 5 months) learning experiences for teenagers. I want to give my 15-year old son a chance to do something in an independent way as part of a group brought together just for the special experience. I'm referring to things such as a "floating school"—short term study program aboard a boat; or a special program in theater, ecology, autos, etc. where he lives and works with a group for the duration of the program.

I'm hoping to locate something like this for him to experience during the coming spring term while I continue to explore non-traditional educational alternatives for his last two years of school after this.

City Farmer

An article by Jerry Howard in Horticulture, reprinted in Manas Magazine (PO Box 32112, L.A., CA 90032):

Bill McElwain, a Harvard man who had taught French, run a laundromat, and become a discouraged farmer, moved to the prosperous town of Weston, Mass., and saw a lot of fertile suburban land going to waste, on the way to and from his work in Boston (rehabilitating houses in the South End).

He saw suburban teenagers with few alternatives to football, tennis, drama or boredom, and he saw poor city people paying more for food in Roxbury than he was in Weston. (Bill surveyed the cost of twenty-five identical items in both areas and counted a 13% difference.)

In April, 1970, Bill began with borrowed hand tools and donations of seed and fertilizer. With a handful of dedicated helpers, he cultivated almost an acre; the produce was trucked into Roxbury and distributed free to a children's food program and a housing project. There, residents collected donations that found their way back to the farm.

Within a year, Bill was hired as project director of the new Weston Youth Commission. In 1972, he convinced the town to buy the farm land. He ignited a small but dedicated cadre of supporters, including enough people in the volunteer government to insure the continued support of the town. More kids got involved with the farm, and with the proceeds from the vegetables (now sold in Boston for a nominal \$1 a crate) he paid workers a minimum wage. The town put more money and equipment into the project, and by 1975, the farm was growing as much as 100 tons of produce a year. About 25% of this was sold locally; the rest went into Boston.

Bill McElwain was fifty years old when the town bought the farm. He is still project director for the Youth Commission, despite his cavalier view of keeping fiscal records, and he still writes a column for the *Weston Town Crier*, in which he proposes dozens of other activities for the young to take part in.

One fall, for instance, Bill counted 600 maple trees along Weston roadsides. In a year and a half, he and a crew built a sugarhouse near the junior high school (using pine boards milled from local trees); scrounged buckets, taps, and evaporating equipment; and produced a cash crop of 250

gallons of grade A maple syrup. There was cider pressing, orchard reclamation, firewood cutting, crate making, construction of a small observatory, and an alternative course at the high school with regular field trips to Boston's ethnic neighborhoods, and to rural New Hampshire.

Virtually all his plans, large or small, have these common ingredients: they provide young people with paying jobs that are educational, socially useful, and fun; they operate on a small scale, need little capital, and use readily available resources, preferably neglected ones; and they bring a variety of people together to solve common problems in an enjoyable context. Building community is one of Bill's more crucial goals, and he'll seize any opportunity—planting, harvesting, “sugaring off,” a woodcarving workshop, or May Day—to bring folks together for a festive occasion.

A typical day in Bill's life begins with the loading of crates of vegetables at the farm, to be taken to Boston that morning. This time there will be cabbage, collards, onions, string beans, summer squash, okra and corn.

He has worked long and closely with Roxbury's Augusta Bailey to provide vegetables that are staples of the black diet and others that are less familiar. Mrs. Bailey, unofficial first lady of Boston's urban gardening movement and founder of the Roxbury-Dorchester Beautification Program, has an ulterior motive: she wants to introduce new foods—at virtually no cost—that will change people's eating and health habits. It was to her that Bill brought his first trickle of produce in 1970 and to her that he brings the lion's share of the bounty now.

He and the youngsters are farming twenty acres, which had been named Green Power Farm, but his mind is on seventy acres in nearby Topsfield, donated by an admiring benefactor, along with a substantial endowment. Bill will help to organize these resources into a model farm.

Greenhouse

Beth Hagins (Pembroke Co-Op, Box 445, Hopkins Park IL 60944) writes:

We are working to create a biological research setting for children in the south Chicago area. It's a large solar greenhouse that we have built with people in the black township of Pembroke, IL. It's a very rural, low-income community. The quality of life is superbly suited to growing without schooling.

I don't know how to describe the place without sounding like a grant application. I've been "learning" there for the past four years, largely being taught by the older people. They've taught me how to grow, how to make compost, how to conserve, how to slaughter, how to cooperate. I've never been happier learning anywhere. It's even helped put my own formal academic instruction in perspective (K-PhD).

The greenhouse manager is a 67-year-old man who's been selling and growing all his life. Our experiments are economic and biological. We are raising laying hens, getting eggs, saving chicken manure; growing worms, fertilizing starter plants, and watching our chickens and plants *flourish* in all the sunlight. We would love to have a few children to work with. We are working to get a few local children involved actively, but it is always more exciting for them to have friends from outside the area coming to learn, too.

It's funny. As I think back on school, the one thing that I feel most molded by was the reward structure for getting A's. Apart from a "B" in sociology as a sophomore in college, I don't think I got anything but A's since fourth grade. I discovered I could get A's in anything, although I am to this day not very quick on my feet in terms of thinking. I suppose that the A's were what opened doors for me, got me into more exciting learning situations—like regional orchestras, national debate forums, and other kinds of special "larger than life" experiences that can stimulate and impress if they do not intimidate. I don't know enough about the deschooling movement to know if this kind of larger association of children is possible. We hope to be able to do something like this with the greenhouse experiments, and to introduce the children to some of the schooled, practicing experimenters who nonetheless share the values of the deschoolers. Many of the solar societies are organized and powered by very wonderful scientists and researchers who would like the

opportunity to work on a limited basis with children outside a formal school context.

People can write or call 312-481-6168 and ask for me or Jim Laukes.

Choosing Work

From a recent Sports Illustrated article:

One of the youngest and most successful design teams in contemporary ocean racing (has) Ron Holland, 32, as its equally unlikely chief. Holland failed the most elementary public exam for secondary schools in his native Auckland, New Zealand, repeatedly flunked math (considered by many to be a requisite in yacht design) and has no formal qualifications whatsoever in naval architecture. He even elected not to complete a boatbuilding apprenticeship. Yet today everybody wants a Holland design.

At 16 he walked out of secondary school—"too academic," he says—and told his mother later. Even then he seemed to know that his future lay in boats. Until a primary schoolteacher introduced him to Arthur Ransome's *Swallows And Amazons*, a classic children's tale about a sailing holiday off England's Norfolk Broads, Holland had read nothing. Teachers had sent him to remedial reading classes. But after *Swallows And Amazons* he became a bookworm. He had been sailing since he was seven, when his father bought him a seven-foot dinghy, undaunted by the fact that in his first race he finished fourth and last.

Holland got into the boating industry as an apprentice, and quickly chucked that job because the boss would not give him time off to go ocean racing.

He spent nearly three years working with American designers, first Gary Mull and finally the flamboyant Charlie Morgan.

It was in 1973, after less than three years of intermittent design experience, that Holland changed course again. He left Morgan to campaign his own quarter-tonner, *Eyghene*, in the world championships at Weymouth, England. It was a radical design—based, Holland admits now, on intuition, not "plain arithmetic." *Eyghene* won.

And just in time. With Laurel, whom he had married in 1971, he was living aboard the cramped quarter-tonner. A potential sale had just

fallen through. He had no money in the bank.

Ron Holland sets a good example for people trying to find their work. If you know what kind of work you want to do, move toward it *in the most direct way possible*. If you want someday to build boats, go where people are building boats, find out as much as you can what they know. When you've learned all you can, or all they will tell you, move on. Before long, even in the highly technical field of yacht design, you may find you know as much as anyone, enough to do whatever you want to do.

Of course, if none of the people doing your chosen work will even let you in the door without some piece of school paper, you may have to pay some school time and money to get it. Or, if you find out that there are many things you want or need to know that the people working won't tell you, but that you can find out most easily in school, then go for that reason. At least, you will know exactly why you are there. But don't assume that school is the best way or the only way to learn something without carefully checking first. There may be quicker, cheaper, and more interesting ways.

Here are some other examples. From Solar Age, Dec. '79:

At age 22, Ken Schmitt is head of Research and Development for Alternative Energy Limited (AEL), a small new, company which plans to sell (alcohol) stills beginning some time next year . . .

At 17, he owned a construction company, which "gave me the capital to experiment." Schmitt has experimented with solar energy systems for the last two years. His pilot plant for methanol (wood alcohol) synthesis may be the forerunner of a plant that will produce half a million gallons per day for Los Angeles motorists; and five foreign countries may buy rights to use a pyrolysis process he developed.

And from The Boston Monthly, Dec. 79:

The head of the Boston Computer Society, a group that regularly publishes a newsletter and holds meetings to learn and exchange

computer ideas and information, is 16 years old. Technicians for many of the local computer stores are high school students. Computerland in Wellesley has a volunteer expert with a terrifying knowledge of computers who works with their customers in exchange for unlimited computer time—he is twelve years old.

In School And Out

Harold Dunn (OR) writes:

My primary interest is in building non-school alternatives for kids. Two years ago, when I still believed that Free Schools were the answer, I started a mini-school, with five kids and two adults living with me in my home, a converted school bus parked way out in the Oregon woods beside a small lake. Tuition was free, teaching nonexistent, curriculum based on survival since we had less than \$100 a month for all eight of us to live on.

Two of the boys, aged 14 and 15, had spent much of the summer out at my place, always busy and creative in their play. They dreaded the return to public school in September, so we called ourselves a school and just continued on as we had all summer. Only it didn't work out. They became bored, restless, and complained they weren't learning anything.

It took me quite a while to realize that since they were now in "school," they expected somebody to do something to them. It didn't matter that all summer they had been exploring new realms and expanding their limits with no adult supervision. Now they demanded to be told what to do. Somebody was supposed to learn them something, or else it wasn't a real school and no damn good after all.

I realized then how much we had destroyed for these two boys just by calling ourselves a school. Of course, the destruction happened gradually during all their previous schooling, as they were conditioned to believe that learning is a passive thing, and that school is where it happens.

The three other kids in our school, age 5, 10, and 12, had never been to school, so had no preconceived ideas of what to expect. What a joy it was to watch them explore the world and themselves. Their greatest treasure was my library card, which allowed them to read hundreds of pages each day. They never seemed to get their fill of books, yet they still had energy to cook, bake, chop wood, wash dishes, and clean house. The two oldest girls did far more than their share of the work needed to sustain us all—because they *wanted* to. They were alive, eager, and incredibly inventive. They saw the whole world as open to them, because nobody had taught them there were things they couldn't do.

In a month's time, M (12) went from being a virtual non-swimmer to

being the first kid to pass the “Mountain-Man Test,” a challenge I had put up to a group of boys that hung out at the lake all that summer. The test consisted of swimming out to the middle of the lake (about 100 yards), alone, at midnight, and diving to the bottom (12 feet), bringing back some mud to prove it. Several boys had tried it, but they all chickened out, even those that were much better swimmers than M. But she stuck with it, working hard to overcome her fears. (It’s *dark* down in that lake at night.) And the night she passed the test she announced that since she was now the only member of the Mountain-Man Club, she was changing the name to Mountaineers!

The incredible contrast between these girls, who had no previous schooling, even in free schools, and the two boys so conditioned by their years of public school dogma, was a powerful lesson for me. For many years, I had dreamed of starting a new kind of free school, run entirely by the kids themselves, rather than controlled by the parents or the teachers, as is usually the case. Finally my dream had come true, only to teach me its own absurdity. Any kids truly free to run their own school exactly as they see fit, will immediately declare a permanent vacation, and that will be the end of it. They may get together as before, and do the same things, but they won’t call it school unless you make them—and then *you’re* running the show, and that’s not freedom, even if you’re doing it, as I was, “for their own good” to keep them out of public school.

Any kid who has ever been to school knows that “school” is only a special name for a kid’s jail, and it’s hard for them to imagine having fun, doing what they want, or being creative in jail. So they expect you to tell them what to do, because that’s what happens in “school.” I find that playing jailer just takes too much energy. I burn out quickly. Yet I can be with those same kids all summer long when they don’t expect anything from me, and they give *me* energy. It could go on forever, and I’d never burn out.

Last spring, eleven of us spent two months exploring the deserts of Baja in our school bus. The four school-age boys with us had an incredible learning experience—all the more so because the purpose of the trip was just to have fun. We speared fish in the warm Gulf waters, hiked deserted seashores, climbed cliffs, and explored the ruins of an old silver-mining town. The kids were with us as we learned the secrets of economical grocery shopping in a foreign land, and while we searched through two Baja towns for kerosene.

Together we experienced the adventures of a blowout in the middle of the

desert, and a week-long delay due to a broken drive shaft. During that delay D (8) and a Mexican boy were invited to spend all one night shrimping on a Mexican shrimp boat. Everywhere we went, we played with the Mexican kids we met in the parks or on the streets.

But our greatest adventure was when we joined up with a small Mexican circus, and went on the road with them for 15 days, playing the little fishing villages way out on the Vizcaine Peninsula, two days by horrible dirt roads out into the wilderness. Originally we were asked to join the circus because one of our group was a professional juggler. Then gradually the rest of us were encouraged to work up acts and be part of the show. Gilberto, whose family made up the whole circus, taught our kids clowning, tumbling, and whatever else they wanted to learn. All day they practiced and played with Gilberto's kids, developing friendships as deep as any they had ever known. Although they picked up a feel for the Spanish language, and learned a few words, what they really learned was that words aren't all that important.

During those two weeks we were totally immersed in the life of the circus; several of us found new skills and performed for the first time. C, at 15, has since become a juggler and professional clown.

Later, when it became obvious that our bus was isolating us from even more experiences we might be having, several of us left the main group to hitch or ride the trains and buses. Although our trip cost less than \$100/month apiece, I've since been spending about \$15/month on my own trips, hitching and hiking around Baja, working for a day or so whenever I feel like it. This is the sort of alternative to school that seems ideal for so many adventure-seeking, broke teenagers.

Kids On Tour

Mabel Dennison (ME) writes:

There is a serious, adult theater which uses puppetry, pageantry, and music in their shows. They produce a summer festival in Glover, VT, in which children take part.

The theater, called "The Bread and Puppet Theater," makes tours abroad and decided to try children on one of these tours, taking along several families on a big, expensive tour of 30 people. There were about eight children, ages 5-12, and two 15 year olds, whose performing was judged very successful and reliable.

The theater has a strong director who makes the shows out of old stories, and uses whatever talents people have, to move or dance, good voices for speech and song, ad-libbing ability, comedians, musicians. The children had parts in the show like the adults, some improvised and comic, others precisely rehearsed and using their various skills. Most of the company wore red costumes for part of the show, a bird dance. It started with the shortest children and ended with adults on taller and taller stilts.

Some of the children were completely organized from the start about taking care of their props and costumes backstage, but they all had to learn this. They did one part of the show together, however, where the mislaid props didn't matter. They were gangster assassins. They made themselves moustaches with black tape and wore any hats and jackets they could find. Anything was all right for a gun, even a hammer in a violin case.

Children enjoyed the short periods of sight- seeing with whichever adults had the most ambitious plans. There was the risk that younger children on the tour would get sick for short periods, tie up an adult, and require special arrangements, which did happen, but adults, too, get exhausted or sick occasionally on these tours. The children loved hotel rooms and elevators, adults liked the restaurants. Adults with large appetites had a regular child companion at meals to share food with. Since the adults had so much beer or wine to drink, the children insisted that they get soda. No one on the tour was paid much. The adults argued a little on how much to pay children, since they wouldn't have living expenses on the tour. After three months the children were willing to go home, but not eager to return to school.

Rescue

From the San Francisco Chronicle, 4/27/79:

While his mother slept, a 13-year-old ham radio operator helped coordinate the rescue of three men whose boat was sinking a continent away, Coast Guard officials said yesterday.

A fishing vessel with three Flemish men aboard started to sink 75 miles south of Jamaica early Wednesday, said Coast Guard spokesman Chuck Schneider. Using a battery-powered radio, the crew issued an SOS that was picked up in New Zealand.

Michael Davis of Torrance (CA) was trying to contact an East Coast point about 1 a.m. and heard the exchange. "I knew that it (the New Zealand operator) couldn't do much," said Michael later. "The guy that was receiving had the wrong longitude and latitude, so I asked the guy (on the boat) for the right longitude and latitude and called up the Coast Guard in Long Beach."

The guard's search and rescue branch in Long Beach relayed the call to the Coast Guard in Miami.

"But Miami couldn't get in touch with the boat because they didn't have any ham gear," said Coast Guard spokesman Garth Groff. "So Mike Davis stayed on the air and acted as a relay between the ship and the Coast Guard until the sun started to come up (on the East Coast)."

By that time, Groff said, closer ham operators took over.

A Coast Guard cutter reached the foundering vessel Wednesday evening and took it into Montego Bay, Jamaica. The three men aboard apparently were not injured.

"The boat was taking on water, out of fuel, in danger of sinking," Groff said. "I don't know how (Michael) knew what to do, but he handled the whole situation by himself with no adult assistance."

Solar Energy Digest

I've been meaning to write about the *Solar Energy Digest* for some time, but other matters have always crowded it out. Now I've decided I can't wait any longer. The *S.E.D.* (Box 17776, San Diego CA 92117) is one of the most interesting, exciting, hopeful, and encouraging publications I know. It is not just about solar energy, but about all kinds and methods of energy production and/or conservation, and is by far the most complete and up-to-date source of such news. For an 8-12 page monthly, it isn't cheap—\$35 a year. But I think it is worth every penny of it, and would strongly urge people who can't afford the full \$35 to get together with others in a joint subscription, passing it around.

I think it's valuable to unschoolers not just because it gives us hope, which we all need in these times, but also because of the answers it may offer to young people who are asking themselves, "How, and where, can I find work worth doing?" Any issue of *S.E.D.* will have at least a dozen answers to that question.

Also, many of the ideas and inventions in its pages may be ones that *GWS* readers can put to work in their own homes, businesses, communities, etc.

“Neglect Case”

A Nebraska Supreme Court ruling, appearing in The United States Law Week, 12/4/79:

Nebraska V. Rice, 11/13/79. The parents and their 13 year old child are “born-again Christians.” They had become dissatisfied with the curriculum and textbooks of the public school system, primarily because they were not religiously oriented. In search of an alternative, they learned of an organization that operated a religious primary and secondary school accredited by Illinois, as well as approximately 300 satellite schools consisting of 1,000 students scattered throughout the 50 states. The parents then founded their “academy” with the child’s father as the headmaster, her mother as the teacher, and the child as the only student. A classroom was set up in their home, and textbooks, lesson plans, reading lists, problems, and tests were furnished by the organization in Illinois. The academy was not approved by this state.

The superintendent of schools criticized the academy’s history book and noted the apparent absence of courses in physical education, health, and safety. Other deficiencies were said to be the absence of courses presenting alternative philosophies and the absence of daily interaction with peer groups. On the other hand, as revealed by testing of the child, an assistant professor of psychology ventured the opinion that the child’s education was quite satisfactory.

During the school year in question, the child attended no school other than her parents’ academy. By statute, only school systems approved for continued legal operation by the state are considered to be providing a program of instruction that is in compliance with the state compulsory education laws.

The state now contends that the compulsory education laws must be construed *in pari materia* (Ed—“as pertaining to the same subject”) with the child neglect statute and that therefore, the statutorily required “proper or necessary *** education *** necessary for the health, morals, or well-being of such child” is attendance at a school approved for compulsory attendance.

The present day language of the child neglect statute was first used when the legislature sought to separate for definitional purposes a dependent and a neglected child. It is obvious from an examination of the statutory language that the legislative intent was to categorize children who are destitute or without home or support as dependent; those who are abandoned for practical purposes or are not receiving the proper kind of parental care as neglected; and those who are vicious or with criminal bent as delinquent.

The compulsory school attendance law and the statute regarding the neglect of children generally do not pertain to the same subject matter and should not be construed *in pari materia*. The legislature, when enacting legislation, is presumed to have knowledge of all previous legislation on the subject. Thus, *if it had intended to equate non-attendance under the compulsory education laws with "neglect" under this statute it would have said so.* (Ed. italics.) The child neglect statute relates to actions by parents amounting to neglect, abandonment, or denial of proper care as will endanger the child's health, morals, or well-being. In view of the evidence, such a situation does not exist here and is not proved simply by establishing that the parents "may" be violating the compulsory school attendance law.

(Signed), Hastings, J.

Going Back

A number of parents, perhaps half a dozen or so, have written to me to say that one or more of their children have chosen to go back to school. They sound a little apologetic about this, as if they thought they had betrayed “the cause.” But there is nothing at all to feel apologetic about. In the first place, unschooling is not a “cause”; our interest is not in causes, but in children, and their growth, learning, and happiness. And even if we saw unschooling as a cause, we would not have to feel that the cause had suffered a defeat because some children who had been out of school chose to go back. I see that as more of a triumph and vindication for unschooling than a defeat. These children were not going back to school because they did not like learning at home, or saw it as some sort of failure. No, they were going to go to school by their own choice and for their own reasons, because they now saw it, not as a place they had to go to that they could not stand and from which they could not get anything useful, but as a part of the world, one of many parts, which they thought they could put to good use.

Most of these children who go back to school, even to the school they earlier wanted to escape, are happy there and do well. This does not mean at all that their previous inability to stand or make good use of school was some kind of defect or disease, cured by a spell of staying at home. What made school bad before, and now good, is the motive of the child. School is jail, and therefore harmful, for most children, because they know they have not chosen to go there and, no matter how much they may dislike it, cannot get out. In this sense the fact that for almost all children schools are compulsory has in large part created the disorder and violence that have become such an enormous and seemingly insoluble problem for the schools.

One mother wrote:

This year we are no longer “unschoolers.” No changes in philosophical beliefs, just that I needed not to have that responsibility this year—many changes in my life. I was scared at the idea of full-time school at first but adjusted very rapidly. I have assured her that if she finds herself getting too bored she can stay home from school a day at a time as long as she has a plan for what she wants to do. So far there are too many attractive things that she doesn’t want to miss, gym, after-school sports, music, art, etc. Anyway, she is

doing extremely well in all her work and the school wanted to accelerate her. I decided against it because I felt she would be pushed into an early adolescence.

We may well go back to home study some time in the future but I suspect not before ninth grade.

I don't plan much in the future and just try to stay flexible. It's a good feeling to know we have the option of homeschooling and will not be at the mercy of the school system.

News From The McCahills

From Judy McCahill (GWS #2, 5, 6; see MD Dir.) in England:

It was so nice to hear from you again, and it's probably a good thing you waited until now to ask about Michael's return to school. The honeymoon period is over and we can all be more realistic about the event.

I think I told you how eager he was to go back to school. He had never liked our decision to keep him home and made it clear that he wanted the companionship of boys his own age, as well as the chance to do sports. Unlike the other three kids, he had never been able to find enough to do at home. He spent most of his time reading and taking long walks.

From the beginning he was realistic about the effort he'd have to put into academic work. The transition was wondrously easy, both for Michael and the rest of the family. Knowing a few kids before he entered helped him over the hump of being the only American. He seems to do well in his lessons. He was moved to a more advanced math group this fall and we're delighted by the essays and poems he's had to write for English.

Other than being behind in French because he was put into an ongoing class though he'd never had French before, nothing about the regular school routine seems to bother Michael. He seems to be so philosophical about the dues you have to pay to belong to a fraternity.

What *has* started to bother him the last couple of weeks, and begun to affect the rest of his life, is his poor performance at sports (he says he's always the last picked for a team) and the teasing of other boys when he does poorly. Of course he's playing with boys who have grown up with football (soccer to Americans) and cricket. Michael loved the story Denny told him about his own disastrous baseball career. After several games of painful disgrace, Denny got his first hit during one hot July game. As he trotted triumphantly to first base, one of his teammates on the bench said "Tomorrow it'll snow."

As for the rest of us, we had no trouble accepting Michael's new situation. Denny and I learned that we needed to be flexible, as well as relinquish certain controls from time to time. We know we have to reassess our home education ambitions every now and then. Colleen was concerned that we were compromising our principles by sending Michael back to school, but

she understood when I explained how Michael liked more structure imposed on his day than she did. We gave her the choice of returning to school, too, if she wanted to, but she declined, saying she would never get caught up in math.

Sean was a little anxious at first because he knew he didn't want to go back to school, though he suddenly wanted to do school work. For one whole day he did as many arithmetic problems as I would write for him. (He had an arithmetic day after Michael went back to school this fall, too.) Kevin complained because he had never been to school and he just wanted to go to see what it was like. We told Sean and Kevin they could decide when they were 10 or 11 years old whether or not to go to school; this was enough to reassure Sean and satisfy Kevin. They go to Sunday school every week now and I'm sure are the most enthusiastic kids there. All the kids are making friends in one way or another, so that's no problem.

I do have the worst time explaining to people how I teach the kids. The trouble arises from the very basic concept, which most people can't grasp, that the kids actually teach themselves. I find it impossible, both time-wise and because of my live-and-let-live nature, to give any sort of formal lessons. Recently I thought I would begin giving myself systematic lessons in basic science so that I could teach the kids better, but after three days that failed because I always seemed to have something more important to do than study. So I continue with my major technique of just answering questions as well as I can and helping the kids to ferret out information when they want it.

It interests me, though, how quickly the kids latch onto my *real* enthusiasms and, without anybody intending anything, begin to learn. Last summer I visited the Tate Gallery (a big art museum in London) with a girl who had just finished a year-long course in the history of art. She infected me with her enthusiasm, I attended a slide-illustrated lecture that day, and I examined incredulously the calendar of (free!!!) events the Tate had set up—all sorts of lectures, films, special exhibitions and guided tours.

I've only been back to the Tate once since then, but I brought home a couple of books and gloatingly circled all the events I would attend if I could. (Next week I am going to a performance of "Julietta" by the English National Opera which is connected to a film and lecture on Surrealism at the Tate.) Last month our 18-year-old niece came to stay with us and she and Colleen have gone to the Tate three or four times. She has checked an art book out of

the library (never having been interested in art before). And the boys often page through the books, studying the pictures. We have many discussions arising from what the girls have seen at the Tate; Colleen takes notes on the lectures for my benefit. So something new has entered our life, and it was completely accidental.

Mother And Son

From Valerie Vaughan (MA):

Another thing we are socialized to do is stop a baby's crying, with food, pacifiers, amusements, distractions, lies and drugs. I am not someone who enjoys hearing a child cry, but I learned with Gabe that if his crying was *not* a call for food or "hold me" or other physical needs, it was more often than not a way of *releasing* and processing emotional energy. (By the way, having a child at home in a natural way, without drugs, etc., I was always tuned in to Gabe's needs. This sort of "bonding" has been seen in primitive cultures and with animals.) So when Gabe would cry in this way, I would breathe along with him, relate to the intensity, feel with him, support him, and he would culminate his crying ... something he obviously *completed*, without advice or criticism or suppression by an adult. If there is anything the schools and our legal system and our psychologists and most adults cannot understand, it is how to deal with such emotional processing. It is given fancy medical names as you get older. Sometimes it is called a tantrum. As I see it (not to be overly simplistic), it is all creative energy, trying to find a way to express itself.

I kept a journal about Gabriel during his first year, and recorded our first "real" conversation (back and forth) ... he was six weeks old. He said "ah" and I said "ah" and he said "ah," etc., for about a minute. His conversations got quite intricate after that. He developed certain sounds himself (not imitations), which I learned. He retains his own words for some things, like "gah" means water and "fie" means money.

Gabriel (now 19 months) has had an interest in knives since about age one. I let him play with them, and he is quite proficient in using knives, hammers, scissors, screwdrivers and wrenches. He never hurts himself. No, that's not true. One time—the only time—he hurt himself was when someone was in the same room who was very nervous about his playing with the knife. I think children simply "pick up" the emotional charge in the atmosphere around them.

For about a month now, Gabriel has been sharing an activity with me—using the electric juicer. He enjoys putting it together, cutting the fruit, putting food into juice, taking machine apart, etc. Again, he is 19 months old!

Gabriel has one word ("down") which actually means to him the direction

of up *and/or* down. He uses it to say “pick me up” and he uses it to indicate going up and down stairs, and he uses it as a *name* for stairs. I have stopped trying to “correct” him because he will learn eventually what other people mean when they say “up” or “down.” But it made me wonder about how many other words such as left/right, etc., might be seen as the *whole thing*—the entire process or an axis of movement.

The Continuum Concept

The Continuum Concept by Jean Liedloff (available [here](#), \$2.25 +postage). This seems to me as important a book as any I have ever read. In it Jean Liedloff says and *shows* that babies grow best in health, happiness, intelligence, independence, self-reliance, courage, and cooperativeness when they are born and reared in the “continuum” of the human biological experience, i.e. as “primitive” mothers bear and rear their babies, and probably always have born and reared them through all the millions of years of human existence. What babies have always enjoyed, needed, and thrived on, for the first year or so of their lives, until they reach the crawling and exploring stage, is constant *physical* contact with their mothers (or someone equally well known and trusted). Babies have always had this, at least up until the last thousand years or so, and each newborn baby, knowing nothing of history but everything of his own animal nature, expects it, wants it, needs it, and suffers terribly if he does not get it.

Here, in only one of many passages of extraordinary vividness and sensitivity, is Ms. Liedloff’s description of the early life of a baby among the Yequana Indians of the Amazon basin, with whom she lived for some time:

From birth, continuum infants are taken everywhere. Before the umbilicus comes off, the infant’s life is already full of action. He is asleep most of the time, but even as he sleeps he is becoming accustomed to the voices of his people, to the sounds of their activities, to the bumpings, jostlings, and moves without warning, to stops without warning, to lifts and pressures on various parts of his body as his caretaker shifts him about to accommodate her work or her comfort, and to the rhythms of day and night, the changes of texture and temperature on his skin, and the safe, right feel of being held to a living body.

The result of this kind of treatment is not, as most modern people might expect, a timid, clinging, whiny, dependent infant, but the exact opposite. Liedloff writes:

When all the shelter and stimulus of his experience in arms have been given in full measure, the baby can look forward, outward, to the

world beyond his mother. The need for constant contact tapers off quickly when its experience quota has been filled, and a baby, tot, or child will require reinforcement of the strength it gave him only in moments of stress with which his current powers cannot cope. These moments become increasingly rare and self-reliance grows with a speed, depth, and breadth that would seem prodigious to anyone who has known only civilized children deprived of the complete in-arms experience.

As Liedloff shows, children so reared very quickly notice what people are doing around them, and want to join in and take part as soon and as far as their powers permit. No one has to *do* anything in order to “socialize” the children, or *make* them take part in the life of the group. They are born social, it is their nature. One of the strangest, nuttiest, and most destructive ideas that “civilized” people have ever cooked up, not out of experience but out of their heads, is that children are born bad and must be threatened and punished into doing what everyone around them does. No continuum culture expects children to be bad as a matter of course, to misbehave, to make trouble, to refuse to help, to destroy things and cause pain to others, and in cultures with long traditions these common (to us) forms of child behavior are simply unknown.

Some years ago a group of American child experts went to China to study Chinese children, childrearing, and schools. To their Chinese counterparts they eagerly asked what *they* did when their children had tantrums, fought, teased, whined, broke things, hurt people, etc. The Chinese looked at them with baffled faces. The Americans might as well have asked, “What do you do when your children jump 300 feet straight up in the air?” The Chinese could only say over and over, “Children don’t do those things.” The American visitors went away equally baffled. It never occurred to them (though it did to me) to suppose that the reason Chinese children are not bad in the way so many of ours seem to be is that nobody expects them to be. Being small, ignorant, inexperienced, and passionate, they may now and then stray off the path of good behavior. But correcting them is only a matter of patiently pointing out that they *have* strayed, that here we don’t do things like that. No one assumes that their deep intent is to do wrong, and that only a long hard struggle will break them of that intent and force them to do right.

In short, the problem children of the affluent Western world are as much a product of our culture as our automobiles. What we call psychology, our supposed knowledge of “human nature,” is and can only be the study of the peculiar ways of severely deprived people, so far from the norms of long-term human biological experience that it would not be stretching matters to call them (us) freaks. Liedloff’s description of “modern,” “medical,” “scientific” childbirth, and the ensuing days and months as a baby must experience them, is enough to make one weep, or have nightmares, or both. It’s a wonder we’re no worse off than we are.

But I wish that Ms. Liedloff had said early in the book what she finally says at the end, that some or many of the most harmful effects of severe early deprivation (of closeness and contact) can be largely made up for or cured if a human being is richly supplied with these necessities, in ways she suggests, later in life. This is important. Many sensitive and loving mothers and fathers who bore and raised children in the modern “civilized” way, upon reading this book and realizing what they had unknowingly denied their children, might be almost overwhelmed by guilt and grief. With enough kindness, tenderness, patience, and courtesy, one can make up for much of this early loss.

It is impossible for me to say how important I think this book is. I have spent most of the past twenty-five years of my life realizing, more clearly all the time, that our world-wide scientific and industrial civilization, for all its apparent wealth and power, was in fact tearing itself apart, and moving every day closer to its total destruction. What is wrong? What can we do? Many people are doing good work and are pointing toward useful answers. But only in the last year or two has it become clear, at least to me, that one of the most deep-rooted of the causes of our problems is the way we treat children, and above all, babies. I am equally convinced that no program of social and political change that does not include and begin with changes in the ways in which we bear and rear children has any chance of making things better.

So I hope that many people will read this book, the more the better, and above all mothers and fathers of young children and babies, parents-to-be, people who have no children but think someday they might, young marrieds or marrieds-to-be, teenagers, baby-sitters, older brothers and sisters of babies, and also doctors, nurses, psychologists, etc. In short, anyone who may have any contact with, or anything to do with, babies or little children. The human

race, after all, changes with every new generation, and only a generation or two of healthy and happy babies might be enough to turn us around.

Other New Books Here

Anatomy Of An Illness by Norman Cousins (\$9.00 +post.) Not long ago, Norman Cousins, the long-time editor of *Saturday Review*, lay in a hospital in great pain, dying from a disease that official medicine could name but couldn't treat or cure. He finally decided that if the doctors couldn't cure him he was going to have to try to cure himself. He thought and read about his disease, what had caused it and what might cure it, and after a while, with the support of one understanding doctor, took himself out of the hospital, stopped taking painkilling drugs (which he felt were making him sicker), alleviated his pain with laughter (which worked), ate good food (unavailable in the hospital), took massive doses of vitamins—and got well. In this book he tells this inspiring and exciting story.

The book seems to me to have several important meanings for unschoolers. In the first place, it shows us once again how wrong the experts can be, and that an intelligent, informed, and resourceful person may be able to find ways to solve a problem that the experts can't solve. Second, it is about the interconnectedness, the one-ness, the indivisibility of mind and body. More specifically, it may give many parents strong grounds for saying that the schools that are making their children bored, frightened, and unhappy are by the same token making them physically sick, and that in demanding the right to teach their children at home they are not just indulging a whim but actually protecting their children's health. As more and more doctors understand, as they are beginning to, the significance of Cousins' experience, more of them may be willing to say, in good faith and without reservations, that certain children should be excused from attending school for strict reasons of health. Perhaps we should begin to look, I'm not quite sure how, for doctors who have taken Cousins' message to heart.

The Acorn People, by Ron Jones (\$1.15 +post.) This is Ron Jones' short, moving account of his first two weeks as a counselor in a summer camp for severely handicapped children. First, he tells of his own quite natural feelings of revulsion towards these strange and misshapen children, and of how, when he slowly came to know them as people, he came to see their handicaps only as differences that didn't make any more difference than differences in color of eyes or hair in "normal" children. He is very honest in showing us that, no

matter how noble may be our ideas and intentions, at the gut level we are, at first, horrified by people who look and act unusual, and that we should not be too surprised by or ashamed of these reactions. At the same time, he shows that with only a little effort we can move past this stage and into some real human contact.

In the second part of the story, the children, with the help of people who trust and believe in them, begin to do things that most experts on the handicapped would have claimed were impossible. The kids in Ron's group, for example, triumphantly climb a mountain on a six-mile hike. In this sense of refuting the experts, the book is a companion to *Anatomy Of An Illness*. At any rate, it is a most inspiring story.

The Facts Of Life, by R.D. Laing (\$1.75 +post.) This book, by a doctor and psychiatrist, is a devastating criticism of modern scientific medicine as he has seen it, above all as it deals with childbirth. Beyond that, it attacks very convincingly the very mistaken and dangerous assumption of modern science in general that it is possible to see reality "objectively" and that this is the best way to learn about it. Parents in legal conflict with their schools will find in this book more than a few quotes that might be very helpful to them. A powerful and important book.

Obedience To Authority, by Stanley Milgram (\$3.50 +post.) This is the story of one of the most important and terrifying psychological experiments of our time. What the experimenter, Dr. Milgram wanted to find out was, up to what point will people obey the orders of experts and authorities, at what point will they say, "No, that's enough, I won't do that." What he found, first in the U.S. and later in other countries, was that in the course of a "scientific experiment," most people were willing to give what they thought were severe electric shocks to another person, whom they believed to be wholly innocent of any wrong, and whom they saw as simply another volunteer taking part in the experiment like themselves. Worse than that, large numbers of people showed that they were willing to increase this pain to their fellow "volunteer" even up to the point of causing his death! It seems hardly believable, but there is not the slightest doubt that this is what these people (mistakenly) thought they were doing.

I am not recommending this book to unschoolers simply to make them shudder with horror (though it will do that), or to give them one more reason for worrying about our times. It seems to me that Dr. Milgram's experiment

is a powerful argument, perhaps someday even in court, against the kind of unquestioning obedience that the schools try (not always successfully) to train into children, and also, the kind of “socializing” that goes on in those schools.

The book certainly disposes once and for all of the argument that all we need to make a better country is more obedience to authority. In the front end papers of one of my earlier books I wrote, “Obedience is the great multiplier of evil.” Most people will do under orders crimes they would never think of doing on their own, and many people will order other people to do what they would never do themselves. As someone else put it during the Vietnam War, “Those who kill, do not plan; those who plan, do not kill.”

In short, we need higher and better definitions of authority and obedience, and this book may help some of us to look for them.

New Children's Books Here

Richard Scarry's Best First Book Ever (\$4.50 +post.) When he began writing books for young children, Richard Scarry broke all the rules. The rules were that on each page you had to have one big picture, and at the bottom of the page, a few words about the picture. Instead, Scarry filled his pages with many little pictures and many little groups of words telling what the pictures were about. The pictures were usually related, all parts of one big scene. But the point was that in that scene—as in the real world—many things were happening at once.

His idea was a great success. Children loved his books, adults loved reading them to children, and soon they were, deservedly, best-sellers. We plan to carry several on our booklist. This is a good one to begin with.

All of the characters in his books are animals, which little children like. Some have complained that all the female characters are shown in the homes, while all the workers in the “outside” world are male characters. Those who object to this can very easily read and explain the stories so as to make many of these male characters into women. Sometimes they may have to re-write a word in the text, often not.

Indeed, another virtue of the Scarry books is that there are many more objects on a page than he names, so that as adults read these books to a child, they could put on the page the names of many more words, using little pieces of pressure sensitive labels (available at any office supply store). The books, as well as being fun to read, become a kind of visual dictionary for little children. But the main point of them is that they are fun to read, and are full of interesting information about the world.

Books by Beatrix Potter: Set of 8 books, \$8.50 +postage. *Peter Rabbit* (\$1.00), *Mr. Jeremy Fisher* (\$1.00), *Benjamin Bunny* (\$1.15), *Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle* (\$1.15), *The Pie And The Patty Pan* (\$1.15), *Squirrel Nutkin* (\$1.15), *Tailor Of Gloucester* (\$1.15), *Two Bad Mice* (\$1.15). Postage charge: count complete set as one ordinary book. For individual titles, charge is 15¢ per book. Beatrix Potter lived in England in the 19th century, and was a very gifted botanist who spent most of her life fighting the then very strong prejudices against women scientists. As a sideline, she wrote, designed, and illustrated in beautiful water-colors these classic little books for young

children. It was her idea that the books should be small enough for small hands to hold comfortably, and from the beginning they have been printed in the size of this edition, about 4" by 5." The stories themselves are charming, told without any cuteness or condescension, as fun to read aloud as to hear.

Books by Laura Ingalls Wilder: *Little House In The Big Woods*, *Little House On The Prairie*, *On The Banks Of Plum Creek*, *Farmer Boy*. (Each book \$2.25 +post.) Here are the first four of Laura Ingalls Wilder's books; we plan to carry them all soon.

For years I have been hearing from the parents of children or from children themselves how much they loved these books. Not long ago I bought them to try out for our readers. I began to read the first (*Little House In The Big Woods*) and in only a page or two was in another world, smaller than ours and full of hardships, disappointments, and dangers, but also enviably full of excitement, challenge, warmth, love, and joy. In that world, people had to work very hard just to stay alive. But the challenges and dangers they faced were ones they understood and often could do something about, with work, skill, and a little luck. Almost never did they feel as helpless or hopeless as many people now do. In fact, they had a trust and confidence in life that for us today seems hard to imagine.

In the books, Mrs. Wilder tells about her growing up in different pioneer settlements in the American Midwest. One book, *Farmer Boy*, is about her husband in the tenth year of his boyhood; the rest are about herself and her family. In the first book, she is about four; at the end of the series she is eighteen and just married. As soon as I finished one book, I began the next. Her family and her world seemed so real, hopeful, and happy, that I did not want to be away from them any longer than I could help. I was sorry to come to the end of the last book. I wanted to find out, and still want to find out, what became of them all.

The books are fairly short, with charming pencil illustrations by Garth Williams, and simply though beautifully written. Children as young as eight or so will probably enjoy reading them themselves, and much younger children would probably like hearing them read aloud. The books tell us more about what pioneer Americans were like, and how they lived and worked, than any history I ever studied in school. Yet they leave us wanting to know even more. I look forward to reading them all again, a year or so from now.

Diary Of An Early American Boy by Eric Sloane (\$2.65 +post.) This is a

good companion to the Wilder books. Sloane began with an actual diary of an American boy, living on a small farm in New England in the year 1805, and building on the bare facts recited there, has given us a fictional but surely true-to-life account of the boy's life. Along with the text he has given us many of his beautiful pen and ink drawings, showing in minute and fascinating detail how this boy, his family, and their neighbors built their houses, mills, and bridges, raised their food, made their tools, and so on.

As in the Wilder books, we can only admire and indeed envy the energy, self-reliance, inventiveness, and optimism of these early Americans. The narrow world they lived in presented them with many real and serious problems, but it also gave them the means of solving these problems with their own skill, ingenuity, and hard work. This made their lives enormously interesting and exciting, and much of that feeling comes through the pages of this lovely book.

Treasure Island, by Robert Louis Stevenson (\$1.60 +post.). Hadn't read this since I was a kid, until now. It is just as great a tale as ever. What a marvelous teller of tales Stevenson was, how varied and vivid are his characters, what rich and wonderful speech he put into their mouths. Even his villains were real people, three-dimensional and complicated, worthy opponents, in some ways even admirable. What fun to read this for the first time, or even for the first time in a long time.

The Wonderful Wizard Of Oz, by L. Frank Baum (\$3.15 +post.) A great story. I enjoyed it when little, but even more now. Baum was a very good writer, put just enough detail into his fantasies to make them real, but above all understood the importance of keeping the story moving along. Something is always happening; each time Dorothy and her friends master or escape one crisis, another turns up. Fun to read aloud at bedtime; each episode ends, the children aren't left in agonized suspense. Yet they know something else exciting is going to happen next time. This good-quality edition contains the original illustrations.

The Hobbit, by J.R.R. Tolkien (\$2.25 +post.) I remember reading *The Hobbit* when I was around nine, and being completely enchanted. From the opening scene of Bilbo Baggins blowing smoke rings on his front doorstep, to the final Battle of the Five Armies, it was a most satisfying adventure. Tolkien's world is so believable. Hobbits are not very heroic, and Bilbo's feelings upon being dragged off into the wilderness, often cold, wet, and

hungry, were rather what I thought I would feel myself. When Bilbo and his friends were in the stuffy forest of Mirkwood, attacked by giant spiders, I could really smell those spiders and feel those webs. Yet the book is quite funny in a number of places. I envy anyone lucky enough to read it for the first time.—Donna Richoux

PS from JH: One of the many things I love about *The Hobbit* (and, come to think of it, about most of the children's books that I do like) is that it shows people using their wits to solve problems and get out of scrapes. Children are encouraged and excited to think that such a thing is possible. I like them to think that little smart folks can often outwit and escape big, mean, dumb folks.

The Lord Of The Rings, by J.R.R. Tolkien. Set of 3 volumes, \$6.50. Vol. I, *The Fellowship Of The Ring*; Vol. II *The Two Towers*; Vol. III *The Return Of The King*. Separately, \$2.25 each. (Postage: count set as 3 books.) *The Lord Of The Rings* begins in the same light-hearted style as *The Hobbit*, but it gradually becomes much more than a simple adventure story, as Tolkien develops his themes of power and corruption, friendship and valor, good and evil. Tolkien, who had an immense interest in languages and mythology, slowly shifts to a richer, deeper tone as he lets us glimpse at his vast creation of Middle Earth, its history and its peoples. Yet the action doesn't get bogged down, and we always want to know what happens next.

There are simply no other books like these. Reading them is the best "escape" I know of; the images and characters in my mind are far more vivid than anything I could ever find on TV or the movies. If you haven't yet read these, I suggest you start with *The Hobbit*. If you have read them, why not read them again? – DR

Harriet The Spy, by Louise Fitzhugh (\$1.60 +post.) This is a delightful story about an eleven year old girl (though she seems more like nine to me) who lives in the city with her rich and social parents and a governess, and who wants to learn about and understand everything, above all, the mysterious ways of grownups. The last section of the book is for me a bit of a let-down, and I wish Louise Fitzhugh had left it out (as I have always wished that Mark Twain had left out the last fifty or so pages of *Huck Finn*). But the first section is so delightful, such a loving and sensitive picture of a child on the edge of becoming a grown-up, that I still recommend the book.

The Autobiography Of Miss Jane Pittman, by Ernest J. Gaines (\$2.00

+post.) This powerful and beautiful novel is the life story of a black woman in Louisiana. At least, I think it's a novel—the *New York Times Book Review* called it one. In his Introduction, the author says that he spent many months interviewing Miss Pittman (and friends of hers) on tape, and that the book is a reconstruction of those tapes. Is this true? Or is it a fictional introduction to a work of fiction? I don't know. It doesn't make much difference; even if the story is made up, it is based on truth.

Miss Jane Pittman's life story begins just as the Civil War has ended, when she is about ten or eleven, and ends as she, now over 100 years old, is about to risk her life in a Civil Rights demonstration. The story of all those years, and those struggles, has been told many times and in many ways, but never more vividly, honestly, and truthfully than here. None of the cruelty of racism is glossed over, and yet one doesn't come to the end of this book full of self-righteous hatred of Southern whites. As much as blacks, they were trapped in a web of attitude and custom, and only a few of them had enough vision and courage even to think of breaking out. Even the worst of the whites seem human enough so that we can't be sure we would have done much or any better in their place.

Mr. Gaines tells his story simply and beautifully. He has taken himself completely out of it; we hear only Jane Pittman's voice and see only through her eyes. From beginning to end she is a real person, whom we are glad and proud to know, and from whom I'm afraid we still have much to learn.

The I Hate Mathematics Book, by Marilyn Burns (\$4.50 +post.) This is a delightful book, as interesting as it is funny, about real mathematics (not school-arithmetic) that children and/or grown-ups can do—even if they've never done any mathematics and don't know much arithmetic. Cartoons, riddles, games, puzzles, and many laughs.

1980 Guinness Book Of World Records by Norris Megrowing Whirter (\$8 .00 +post.) When our first copy arrived in the office, I opened it at random, to page 109. In a few seconds I was reading aloud to Peggy and Donna, "In 1937 a giant earthworm measuring 22 feet in length when naturally extended was collected in the Transvaal." A moment later I presented them with the information that one kind of moth can fly 35 miles an hour. At that point I quickly closed the book. Addictive—for all ages.

Good News From Cape Cod

Elaine Mahoney (MA), whose story appeared in GWS #11, wrote:

The assistant superintendent and curriculum director of our district were delighted to hear from community members about your positive remarks on Channel 5 (WCBV-TV) concerning the Barnstable school system. The superintendent of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket called our supt. with inquiries. I am not sure if it was to use Barnstable as a model for possible unschoolers on the Islands or if it was just curiosity.

The schools also received a long distance phone call from someone in Worcester who had seen you on Channel 5 and wanted to get in touch with me. They have also been receiving letters addressed to me through them, one from a GWS reader from Tennessee. Others came directly to me, one from a school committee member in N.J. (as a result of the *Cape Cod Times* article in GWS #11.) All are very supportive and our school people seem to be thrilled.

Friendly School Districts

We are going to start printing in each issue, just before the Directory, a list of school districts that are willingly and happily cooperating with home schoolers, and who are willing to be listed in *GWS* as doing so. This list will start off very short, of course, but it will grow, and I hope that soon it may become very long indeed.

One reason for such a list: I want to encourage and reassure school officials who may be hesitant about approving homeschooling, to let them know that there are other districts enjoying good relationships with their homeschooling families. Also, families who are willing to move to escape a difficult situation with school officials would have at least some ideas about where to go.

Because some people seem a little uneasy about this, let me make clear that we will only list these school districts under the following conditions:

1) The family has to be not just satisfied but *pleased* with the cooperation the schools are giving to their homeschooling efforts. 2) The schools themselves have to be pleased with the relationship with the family. 3) The family has to be happy with the idea of asking the schools whether they want to be included in this list. If they feel that listing the schools, or asking the schools if they want to be listed, may endanger their good present relationship, then they shouldn't ask. 4) The schools themselves have to be happy about being included in the list. If they are uneasy about it, or fear that it may get them in trouble with someone, we'd rather not subject them to that risk.

So—if your district is cooperating with your homeschooling, and you would like them to be on this list, ask them, and let us know if they say to go ahead.

By the way, we would also like to hear from schools that would *like* to help homeschooling families, but have not been able to do so because no families have yet asked them.

Here are the first two districts on our list:

Rockland Public Schools, Rockland MA 02370; Supt. John W. Rogers.

Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield MA 01257;
Director of Guidance, Paul Shafiroff.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee

Associate Editor—Donna Richoux

Growing Without Schooling 14

May 1980

As you can see, we're switching to a three-column format with this issue. We think it will be more readable, and harmonize better with the larger typeface we've used since *GWS* #11. You may also have noticed our new headlines. They're made on a "Kroytype" lettering machine; an art store is charging us a very small amount to use theirs.

The manuscript of the homeschooling book is just about ready to put into my editor's hands.

Besides the March and April speaking engagements announced in *GWS* (Omaha, Huntingdon IN, Lake Geneva WI, and Newark), I also spent April 16 at the Northern Illinois University in Dekalb. I've enjoyed meeting a number of unschooling families on these trips, some of whom had to drive four or five hours to come.

By the time you get this, I will have spoken at the Hobart & Smith Colleges in New York (Apr. 26), and the Antioch Graduate School, Keene NH (May 16). I also expect to stop in at the Holyoke, MA, conference for the National Coalition for Alternative Community Schools (May 17).

I will be speaking at Rio Grande College, Rio Grande OH sometime during the week of 9/15/80.

Thanks again to Sharon Hillestad of Minnesota, her daughter Holly, and niece Amy, who volunteered to spend a long afternoon of their Boston vacation in our office, sending out renewal notices. We enjoyed their company, and because of their efforts got almost all the mailing done in a single day.

Mother Earth News now says the "Plowboy" interview will be in the July issue.

Two good court decisions handed down in Michigan and Ohio—details inside.

Good News from Ontario

From Mary Syrett:

We experienced fantastic growth in the GWS movement in Canada in the last two years. GWS groups are starting in every province—some started by people in our group sub! Every few weeks I get a phone call from another mother who has got my name from your directory or from Wendy Priesnitz's (*Natural Life Magazine*), or just through word of mouth. It feels like “new roots”!

Getting into College . . .

From an article on home schooling in the Wall Street Journal, 9/13/79:

University admissions officers confirm that a home education needn't be a deficient education. Each year the University of California at Berkeley gets a half dozen or so applicants who are home educated and don't have the traditional credentials, says Robert L. Bailey, director of admissions and records. "We give them proficiency tests, and if they pass them, we go ahead and take a chance on them," he says. "They usually do very well."

And Staying Out

The reply by the Indians to the Virginia colonists who had proposed to educate six Indian boys at Williamsburg College in 1774:

We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those Colleges, and that the Maintenance of our young Men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, therefore, that you mean to do us good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you, who are wise, must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things; and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our Ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same with yours. We have had some Experience of it. Several of our young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces; they were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods ... neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less oblig'd by your kind Offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them.

News from Iowa

From the Des Moines Register, 1/18/80:

According to Larry Bartlett, an administrative consultant for the Iowa State Department of Public Instruction, between 600 and 800 Iowa pupils are enrolled in correspondence type instruction, and the numbers are growing.

Celebrity Unschoolers

From The Book of Lists (by Wallechinsky, Wallace, & Wallace):

15 Famous People Who Never Graduated From Grade School:

Andrew Carnegie, Charlie Chaplin, Buffalo Bill Cody, Noel Coward, Charles Dickens, Isadora Duncan, Thomas Edison, Samuel Campers, Maksim Gorky, Claude Monet, Sean O'Casey, Alfred E. Smith, John Philip Sousa, Henry M. Stanley, Mark Twain.

20 Famous High-School Or Secondary-School Dropouts: Harry Belafonte, Cher, Mary Baker Eddy, Henry Ford, George Gershwin, D. W. Griffith, Adolf Hitler, Jack London, Dean Martin, Bill Mauldin, Rod McKuen, Steve McQueen, Amedeo Modigliani, Al Pacino, Will Rogers, William Saroyan, Frank Sinatra, Marshal Tito, Orville Wright, Wilbur Wright.

20 Famous People Who Never Attended College: Joseph Chamberlain, Grover Cleveland, Joseph Conrad, Aaron Copland, Hart Crane, Eugene Debs, Amelia Earhart, Paul Gauguin, Kahlil Gibran, Ernest Hemingway, Rudyard Kipling, Abraham Lincoln, H. L. Mencken, John D. Rockefeller, Eleanor Roosevelt, George Bernard Shaw, Dylan Thomas, Harry S. Truman, George Washington, Virginia Woolf.

13 Famous American Lawyers Who Never Went To Law School:

Patrick Henry, John Jay*, John Marshall*, William Wirt, Roger B. Taney*, Daniel

Webster, Salmon P. Chase*, Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, Clarence Darrow (attended one year), Robert Storey, J. Strom Thurmond, James O. Eastland. (*—Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court.)

Pen Pals

The *GWS* Directory has afforded our children the opportunity to practice their writing and communication skills, as well as to have fun getting to know others. Our oldest daughter received a letter from a young girl who had selected her name from the *GWS* listing. She asked our daughter to be a pen pal, and they now correspond eagerly and frequently.

Our six year old, spurred on by her sister's example, has decided to write to several children in the Directory to see if they will be pen pals. She was delighted by a recent positive response.

So far, none of the children have brought up the subject of school in their letters. There certainly are more interesting things to talk about.

A Muslim Family

Like many other families who are schooling their children at home, our main reason for wanting to make this move was a religious one. In our case, however, the religion is Islam, not Christianity. We are a very committed Muslim family, and it is of the greatest importance to us that our children grow up in an atmosphere which is not destructive to their religious orientation and values. For this reason, we are obviously in total disagreement with many social and moral values (or “unvalues”) which are being propagated in schools, as well as with the limited educational approaches. Moreover, in our faith religious and other learning is not to be approached as two separate matters since Islam does not acknowledge any schism between “sacred” and “secular” aspects of life.

Our three older children had grown up in public schools, with very serious consequences to their sense of self-worth and the rightness of their values, and above all on the integratedness of their personalities. They passed through the hands of a series of junior high and high school teachers and situations in which religion, and anyone who upholds high moral and ethical values, was viewed with contempt or at least stigmatized as being very, very strange and abnormal. When my son was in the first year of junior high, we had just come back from a year overseas and the boy was feeling very much at odds with similar inclinations? The response of the principal was astonishing. He told me he would look into my son’s record and behavior and talk with his counselor to see if he was really normal and fit in. Of course, you can imagine how I felt after this encounter and the club idea naturally died of its own accord although I tried without success to interest other people in the community in it. I felt and still do feel that such an organization would be very important and meaningful to young people who care about religion and values but have no support and are even afraid to voice their opinions under prevailing conditions.

When the fourth child, Y, was old enough for kindergarten, we enrolled him in a Catholic school, hoping it would be in some significant way an improvement over public school. But it was a total disappointment, in no real way different in atmosphere or approach. Thus, toward the end of Y’s kindergarten year, seeing that there was no workable solution except to teach

the children at home, I went to discuss the matter with the local superintendent of instruction.

Although he made it clear that he is not in favor of home schooling, he was helpful and cooperative. We must, he said, submit a letter to him by early summer, which he would submit to the local school board, who would in turn submit it to the state board of education. My husband and I wrote a very brief statement that “because the religion of our family, Islam, is a complete way of life which requires that religious education go hand-in-hand with secular education, the educational needs of our children cannot be met in a normal school situation.” We also mentioned that we might be spending time outside the country and hence needed to have a method of schooling which could be continued wherever we might be residing. Permission for home schooling was given under the understanding that I would be using the Calvert materials, would teach 176 days a year, and would be under the general supervision of the local school principal (i.e., would submit the Calvert tests and confer with her once a quarter, and the child would have to take standard achievement tests and end-of-the-year tests, if any, annually.)

We enrolled Y in Calvert’s second grade program as it was clear that first grade would be a complete waste of time. He is an exceptionally motivated child who loves to study and learn. In the beginning, as I was very uncertain of my ability to “teach” since I had no teaching experience at all, the structuredness of the Calvert material was tremendously helpful and reassuring. However, I have since left its method largely behind as it moves much too slowly for the child, who is now proceeding at his own pace. The younger child, H (3?) was a bit of a problem in the beginning. She wanted a great deal of attention and was not satisfied to spend the school period simply playing. I began working with her very gradually, assisted ably by Y, who spent long periods teaching her out of pre-school workbooks. She is now learning to read and enjoying the experience greatly. I expect to start her “formal” education with second grade after working with her in a completely unstructured manner until she reaches that level. I spend the first part of the school time working on religious studies with Y. Afterwards; I work with H while Y continues with the Calvert and supplementary material on his own. My role is as a resource person rather than as a teacher standing over a child to “teach” him what he can easily learn on his own.

The experience of teaching my children has given me endless new insights

concerning the role of parents (especially mothers), both what it is for most of us and what I could and should be, and the nature and meaning of education. I cannot express what a satisfaction it is to see my children growing up with stable, integrated, happy personalities, especially after the struggle of watching the harmful effects of school on the three older children.

A Way to Help

As most *GWS* readers know, Linda and Bob Sessions (IA), their children, and I were on the *Phil Donahue* show on Dec. 7, 1978. It was aired over various stations for the next two or three months. Because of the show, we received about 10,000 letters, which is about 100 times as great a response as we have ever had from any other article or TV show. Most of the people who have subscribed during the past year did so because of that program

We still get letters now and then from people who say, “I just saw you on the *Donahue* show.” This tells us that certain local stations are repeating that particular program, which suggests in turn that one thing people could do to help *GWS* would be to ask their local TV station to re-run that particular show.

We have a list of stations carrying the *Donahue* show, in case you have trouble finding the appropriate station in your area.

Please let us know what your local station says when you write or call them, and whether they decide to re-run the program. Thanks for whatever you can do.

Personal

Will “D.O.C.” who forwarded a letter through us to “D” of *GWS* #2 please contact us? We have a reply for you but no address.

Skilled Children

Mary Bergman wrote in the cover story of the April 1980 Home Educators Newsletter:

These children (of homeschooling families) form an exclusive student body as they are each born into the school. They take their places according to ability rather than grade level. They listen to works far above their comprehension, just to be part of the present company. In our own instance we have one child that keeps all vehicles in top running shape, another who provides milk, eggs, and meat for the table, another who displays beautiful art work, and another who enjoys gardening.

Katrina spends several house morning and afternoon doing her farm work, but she is the beneficiary of her own labour, keeps all records for feed, hay, and other purchases so that she can calculate her profit when animals are sold and what man hours and money have been expended to gain that profit. I personally am not the least interested in any type of farm work and yet I know that this is developing within Katrina an ability far beyond anything that I could teach her. How much barley will a pig eat in a week, a month, till time for the market? What animals have the quickest turnover? What type of labour hours are necessary to operate a farm? I couldn't answer any of these questions, though Katrina can, and for an eleven-year-old girl I consider that quite an accomplishment. She has a reading assignment just like the other children of 200 pages per week plus a written paper every day. She generally turns in a paper that has to do with her present projects.

It is a rare occasion that I do not get the type of workmanship out of my children that I would get out of some adult. We are presently sectioning off a room in the basement and all the partitions will be built by the children. One startling fact is that John, at age seven, has all his own tools, including a power saw and drill. He builds beautiful miniature log cabins and will be in charge of measuring and cutting boards for the partition project. He is also planning on paneling his own room.

Kevin has repaired all my major appliances since he was kindergarten age. Recently I had to hire a repair-man to come and fix my furnace motor, which turned out to be shot and had to be replaced. This repairman hadn't been here for several years and his first question was "Why can't Kevin fix this?" When

he discovered the problem he knew that the present motor was beyond repair and he went to get another. However, he brought the burned-out one back because he felt that Kevin could use parts for it.

My dishwasher has been child-repaired, my bathroom was child-paneled, my toilets were child-plumbed. They enjoy developing their abilities, it saves money, and we can use this gained savings for enjoyable activities.

One more wonder that was performed by a child is the light switch which regulates the living room and hall lights. One switch turns the living room lights on while it turns the hall light off and then turns the hall light on at night when the living room lights are not needed. An electrician noticed this strange arrangement and said it couldn't be done, but it's been working for a long time.

We have tours through out home occasionally and people never stop marveling at the many things our children know how to do. Kevin built his own motorized three-wheel all-terrain vehicle, as well as helping his dad build a one-man plane. He has developed one patent and is working on another.

People often ask me how I can tolerate the children doing things that are normally only done by adults, and professionals at that. Well, I watch the children carefully and never expect one to do a job which is over his head. I experiment constantly, finding natural abilities and letting them try their wings in harmless, inexpensive ways. If a child shows an ability in a certain area such as plumbing, I try them out taking apart an elbow and putting it back together without a leak. Next comes faucets, or setting a toilet. Next might come the installation of a shower unit, and finally the child is ready to plumb a bathroom. I would have no qualms about letting my thirteen-year-old plumb my entire house. After all, he wired it for D.C. electricity when he was only eight. Our daughter Cathy is remodeling her own home now (she's nineteen), and she has done all her own plumbing, plastering, wallpapering and carpentry. Matter of fact, that's how she helped pay for her college education. She worked as a carpenter in an all-male shop!

Earning Money

From Pamela Feeney Jolly, 7210 SW Philomath Blvd, Corvallis OR 97330:

Recently I have had to settle how I feel about my children and money. Until now I didn't feel they needed money of their own because they didn't understand its real value. When they had money from relatives it seemed to be a burden to them. They would spend it on the first thing they saw. Not because it was something they wanted but to get rid of the money. I might add here that we rarely have more money than we need just to survive so we don't spend money as a pastime.

We are now living with relatives whose son gets an allowance. I have never liked the idea of allowances but I was made aware that our children needed to have access to money. I found ways for them to earn it. Not by doing things they should be responsible for anyway (like picking up their messes and washing themselves) but by doing extra kinds of jobs. Mostly seasonal work like raking leaves or picking fruit. (Things they will still do for enjoyment.) I pay them \$3 an hour. I realize this may seem absurd to some but I think it is just. I have always been underpaid (or not paid at all) for the work I have done. It's not good for the self-image. I don't want to use or insult my children in that way. I feel that if they are to be paid for work at all, they should be paid at least minimum wage.

My five year old son spent 45 minutes washing the kitchen floor (not so appropriate) and raking leaves (better). They were jobs I could have done much more thoroughly in half the time. But that is not the point. The point is that he worked as hard as he could for that 45 minutes. Much harder than anyone I've worked with at any job for which we were paid.

I feel my son earned the \$2.25 I paid him. It is his money to spend however he chooses. I have learned not to give helpful suggestions here and to thoroughly repress my judgment that what they buy isn't worth it. To them it is worth it, and if it isn't, that is something they have to learn for themselves.

I remember so well the guilt and anxiety I felt over every purchase until I was 26 years old! Every single time I bought something, I thought it was my last chance. I hope my children can grow up knowing that money is a tool that they can earn and use whenever they need to.

Art Exhibit

Judy McCahill (Md.) writes from England:

Here is a story I think you will liked. Last Saturday for something to do, because Dennis was out of the country, I said to the boys, “Let’s go to the art exhibit.” Sean and Kevin thought it was a wonderful idea and began discussing what sort of art they would do there and what pictures (of their own) they might bring from home. Startled, I tried to explain to them what an art exhibit was all about and they were genuinely puzzled at my trying to tell them they were just going there to look at somebody else’s pictures. Puzzled, but not deterred, S gathered his supplies, two sets of paints, a brush, some paper, and a jar full of water which he handed to me to carry; and K made us all wait while he finished a full color marker pen painting of an army tank.

When we got there, we strolled along the sidewalks near the craft shop that was hosting the exhibit, dutifully examining the works and passing several fully grown and wise looking artists sitting in portable lawn chairs, all the while S at my heels urging me to find out how he was supposed to enter the show and me ahead of S, stalling.

Finally an old man who works in the shop, who once told me a long story about his difficulties getting home to Cobham one night during the war when London was being bombed, greeted me. I introduced S to him and asked him to explain what an art exhibit was. He started to, but then he and his daughter, who also works in the shop, saw that S was ready to do some work and after a good laugh with a couple of customers over it, gave him a couple of nice big pieces of “card” to paint on. He sat on the doorstep of a small office building nearby and painted, while the rest of us strolled through the exhibit again, windowshopped, and ate ice cream cones.

When he had finished, it was a beautiful picture of a black dog, fur flying, running up a hill on a windy day, a glorious sun in the sky. It seemed to reflect his mood of magic. He took the picture into the shop, where the man said he would put it on sale for 50 pence (and confusedly explained about how the artists had to pay rent to the exhibit), and we went home.

A few days later, still full of the experience, S told a friend of mine about it. She promptly went out to buy the picture, and it was gone! When I suggested to S that he go and check to see if his painting had been sold, he

replied that he already had, the next day (which of course was Sunday), and the shop was closed.

And that was that. He was too busy doing something else to give it another thought. Not to belabor this point, I must say that I've noticed this before in the children, that it's the doing of a piece of work that matters, and not what happens to it afterwards.

The Best Work

From Manas, 10/31/79:

In a recent Ecologist Quarterly, Edward Goldsmith said: “Obviously the most satisfying work must be that which we are willing to do for nothing.” With all the sententious talk, these days, about the legitimacy and importance of profits, it becomes vital to point out that the best work is done by people who do it, not for money, but because it is right and good and necessary. They may get a little money, but barely enough to get by. The only sensible way to look at money is as an instrument of freedom to do what you care about and are determined to do anyway.

Q. & A.

Questions from a mother's letter, and the answers I gave:

Q. My greatest concern is that I don't want to slant my children's view of life all through "mother-colored" glasses.

A. If you mean, determine your children's view of life, you couldn't do it even if you wanted to. You are an influence on your children, and an important one, but by no means the only one, or even the only important one. How they later see the world is going to be determined by a great many things, many of them probably not to your liking, and most of them out of your control. On the other hand, it would be impossible, even if you wanted to, not to have some influence on your children's view of life.

Q. I also wonder if I can have the thoroughness, the follow-through demanded, the patience, and the continuing enthusiasm for a diversity of interests they will undoubtedly have.

A. Well, who in any school would have more, or even as much? I was a good student in the "best" schools, and very few adults there were even slightly concerned with my interests. Beyond that, you may expect too much of yourself. Your children's learning is not all going to come from you, but from them, and their interaction with the world around them, which of course includes you. You do not have to know everything they want to know, or be interested in everything they are interested in. As for patience, maybe you won't have enough at first; like many home teaching parents, you may start by trying to do too much, know too much, control too much. But like the rest, you will learn from experience—mostly, to trust your children.

Q. I get the impression that most unschoolers live on farms growing their own vegetables (which I'd like) or have unique life styles in urban areas, and heavy father participation in children's education. What about suburbanites with modern-convenienced homes and fathers who work for a company 10 to 12 hours a day away from home? What differences will this make? Will unschooling work as well?

A. Well enough. You and your children will have to find out as you go along what differences they make, and deal with them as best you can. Once, people said that the suburbs were the best of all possible worlds in which to bring up children; now it is the fashion to say they are the worst. Both views

are exaggerated. In city, country, or suburb, there is more than enough to give young people an interesting world to grow up in, plenty of food for thought and action. You don't have to have everything in the way of resources for your children, and if you did, they wouldn't have enough time to make use of all of it.

Q. Is the father's involvement crucial?

A. It can certainly be helpful, but it is not crucial. Some of the most successful unschoolers we know of are single mothers. And there may be many others we don't know about.

Q. What if the children want to go to school?

A. This is a hard question. There is more than one good answer to it, and these often conflict. Parents could argue, and some do, that since they believe that school can and probably will do their children deep and lasting harm, they have as much right to keep them out, even if they want to go, as they would to tell them they could not play on a pile of radioactive wastes. This argument seems more weighty in the case of younger children, who could not be expected to understand how school might hurt them. If somewhat older children said determinedly and often, and for good reasons, that they really wanted to go to school, I would tend to say, let them go. How much older? What are good reasons? I don't know. A bad reason might be, "The other kids tell me that at school lunch you can have chocolate milk."

Q. Since people feel that as a religious group (Christian Scientists) we neglect our children (which is not the case), I'm concerned that someone might be eager to take us to court and take away our children.

A. The schools have in a number of cases tried—shamefully—to take children away from unschooling parents. I think there are legal counters to this, strategies which would make it highly unlikely that a court would take such action. And if worse came to worst, and a court said, "Put your children back in school or we'll take them away," you can always put them back in while you plan what to do next—which might simply be to move to another state or even school or judicial district.

Q. I don't want to feel I'm sheltering my children or running away from adversity.

A. Why not? It is your right, and your proper business, as parents, to shelter your children and protect them from adversity, at least as much as you can. Many of the world's children are starved or malnourished, but you

would not starve your children so that they would know what this was like. You would not let your children play in the middle of a street full of high-speed traffic. Your business is, as far as you can, to help them realize their human potential, and to that end you put as much as you can of good into their lives, and keep out as much as you can of bad. If you think—as you do—that school is bad, then it is clear what you should do.

Q. I value their learning how to handle challenges or problems.

A. There will be plenty of these. Growing up was probably never easy, and it is particularly hard in a world as anxious, confused, and fear-ridden as ours. To learn to know oneself, and to find a life worth living and work worth doing, is problem and challenge enough, without having to waste time on the fake and unworthy challenges of school—pleasing the teacher, staying out of trouble, fitting in with the gang, being popular, doing what everyone else does.

Q. Will they have the opportunity to overcome or do things that they think they don't want to do?

A. I'm not sure what this question means. If it means, will unschooled children know what it is to have to do difficult and demanding things in order to reach goals they have set for themselves, I would say, yes, life is full of such requirements. But this is not at all the same thing as doing something, and in the case of school usually something stupid and boring, simply because someone else tells you you'll be punished if you don't. Whether children resist such demands or yield to them, it is bad for them. Struggling with the inherent difficulties of a chosen or inescapable task builds character; merely submitting to superior force destroys it.

At Home in Calif.

From Shirley Chapman (CA):

As you know, I am teaching Howard at home. Howard is now very interested in raising and caring for house plants. As a result he is reading several books on the subject. Some are mine, some are from libraries, and some have been loaned to him by my friends.

Howard wanted a schedule made. We do not follow it strictly. Howard reads a great deal at night and I also am busy reading, writing, etc. His home study program is very easy-going and flexible. He is: “interested, energetic, alert, attentive and learning!” (from *Never Too Late*). Also, I might add, he is healthy and happy. What more could any parent possibly want for their child/children?

When Howard is absorbed in a given subject or project, he doesn't want to be interrupted. I endeavor to have materials and books and myself available. That is all. I leave the rest up to him.

When he was enrolled in school, he was depressed, had nightmares, headaches, upset stomach and was somewhat withdrawn. All that has reversed in this present school year: since he has been in a home-study program!!

Howard does a great deal of writing in his journal which he says is private and personal so I am not allowed to read it. I grant him his complete right to privacy. He also makes cassette tapes of “radio shows” and his artistic, creative ability and verbal communication skills are outstanding. He finds writing slows him down so the cassette tapes enable him to create almost as fast as he can think. He is still composing music for his guitar. He switches from his house-plant project to music to reading to listening to records and tapes to making “radio shows” to drawing to hiking to eating and sleeping. He is very active and—again, let me emphasize: very happy.

From Washington State

LeAnn Ellis (WA) writes:

Since our names appeared in the GWS Directory several issues ago, we have received about 5-6 letters from interested mothers here in Washington

(State) wanting to know how we are staying out of trouble with the authorities. I love helping others in any way possible along these lines but it is very discouraging in this state. Washington absolutely requires a credentialed teacher in the classroom on a daily basis, which makes it impossible for most mothers to teach their children legally. I was lucky to have a Calif. teaching credential when we moved here a year ago, but getting that switched to a Wash. credential has been a real hassle. The alternatives of having a credentialed person oversee your program or using an accredited correspondence program with your children are not acceptable to the Wash. State Dept. of Education. In typical bureaucratic style, all the emphasis is put on having the credential and then there is no follow-up at all to see if any instruction is taking place.

She later wrote that they had obtained approval as a private school.

Another reader wrote:

Yes, Washington is a tough state for unschooling.

Although the law appears tight, it is cumbersome enough to provide real enforcement problems. I think the law is proving to be very impractical from the state's point of view. The fine and penalty system is more complex than is indicated by these (enclosed) articles. Most prosecuting attorneys do not want to get into the area, specially on individual student-parent cases. They should have too much else to do, right?

At a time of severe school funding cut-backs here, most school districts are not staffed to spend much time in drawn out hassles. If the parent wants the student in school they are more apt to pursue the student, but if the parent is "un-cooperative" they are likely to lay off. Here in our town, for example, the attendance officer reports "un-cooperative" parents, who don't try to get their youngster to school, to the State Department of Social and Health

Services. There, according to him, the case gets buried in paper work. He told me that he has yet to hear back from them. What he was really saying, I think, is that this is an easy way for him to take care of what he thinks his responsibility is in such cases. He told me how expensive it is for the school district to pursue such cases and that it wasn't worth it to the school district.

An editorial from Seattle:

Tough new state legislation prescribing stiff penalties against parents whose children consistently skip school has been on the books for some months now, but nobody has been hauled into court yet.

Maybe it's just as well.

School officials and local prosecutors who have been studying the 1979 amendments to the State Compulsory Attendance Law are discovering that the legislation is considerably looser than it looks.

It provides, for instance, that penalties cannot be imposed when parents or guardians can demonstrate that they have exercised "reasonable diligence" to compel their children's classroom attendance.

And the law also says a school district must show it has done everything possible to work with parents and students to solve truancy problems, even including adjustments in school programs, before fines are levied.

Given such limitations, it is little wonder that school officials and local prosecutors have taken a cautious attitude toward enforcement, recognizing that a court referral could prove unjust or even useless.

The potential financial penalties are severe. The law prescribes a fine of \$25 for each day of unexcused absence. By the time a case came to trial, the fine could run into several hundred dollars.

Common sense dictates that the fundamental responsibility for school attendance begins at home, and that school districts can help parents by making sure that something of value is available in classrooms

once the student head count is completed.

The tough amendments enacted in the 1979 Legislature seem well-intentioned. But if they cannot be enforced or have no practical value in improving the truancy problem, they should be repealed.

Supportive District

Margaret De Rivera wrote in The New Family Newsletter:

Six years ago when I approached the Worcester (Mass.) Public School authorities for permission to teach my youngest child at home, I was told that if I could find some recent precedent in the state for such a program, they would be willing to consider approving my request. I was not able to do this but hired a lawyer to draw up a legal brief arguing that a home study program could, in fact, comply with the state compulsory education laws. This reassured enough members of the school committee that the request was finally approved by a bare majority.

The program runs from 9 to 3 week days and follows the calendar of the Worcester Public Schools.

At the beginning of each day, the children, with the help of the teacher, plan their activities for the day. The children work alone or together depending on their skills and interests. They share with each other frequently during the day.

Thirty minutes to an hour each day is given over to working on basic academic skills. Informal activities such as caring for gerbils, cooking, woodworking, starting collections of things, etc., provide opportunities for mathematical learning and understanding. The computational skills and mathematical notation that is learned in the academic period can be applied in these real situations.

The children do a great deal of reading and writing. They visit the library each week and keep records on the books they take out, when they are due, etc. They keep a daily log (as does the teacher) and write poems, stories, "books," letters, notices, and labels.

Drawing is also an important and favorite activity which provides an opportunity to work out ideas and fantasies which often stimulate story writing. There are many opportunities for artwork and the children are free to develop their own ideas and explore the possibilities of the materials. Emphasis is on the children's own expression rather than on technique.

With such a small group, field trips are easy to arrange and happen almost weekly. In the past, the children have visited Sturbridge Village and the Art Museum frequently, and occasionally have gone to the Science Museum, the

New England Aquarium, Higgins Armory, and the Children's Museum in Boston.

Physical development and coordination are considered important so the children are active each day in a variety of ways: swimming once a week, playing basketball, baseball, tag, soccer, badminton, kickball, bike riding, jump rope, hiking, dancing, and jogging.

The teacher keeps a daily log of the activities and a summary of the child's learning is written each year. This together with samples of each child's work, the child's log and the teacher's log are the materials we share with the public school administration each year. The School Board approves the program on a yearly basis.

Since that fragile beginning, our home study program has been approved each year without difficulty, and the school administration has become a friendly support to the program.

In the first three years, we hired teachers since I was working full time, people who were sympathetic to informal education and could be flexible in their teaching style and responsive to the needs and interests of the children. The first year, our daughter was the only pupil; the second year another child joined her, and the third year two more came. The addition of other children offered the obvious opportunities for social learning as well as reducing the financial costs.

Year four, we decided to make some more radical changes and enroll our daughter half time in the neighborhood public school. The other half of her program was still at home, this time alone with me as her teacher. This arrangement gave her the opportunity to meet the neighborhood children and to gain a sense of confidence that she could "do" public school as well as any of them, an important concern for many "middle aged" children. In addition, the time at home provided her continued opportunities for more informal, self-directed learning. Happily, the school was very cooperative in this arrangement and the children accepted her very well into their social life.

We feel that the successful operation of this home study program for the last five years constitutes a strong legal precedent so that other families in the state who wish to teach their children at home should feel confident that such a request should be considered reasonable. A petition that is respectfully worded and avoids criticisms of the public schools will have the best prospects of being approved without hassle. Describing sample learning

activities and arranging these under curriculum headings help to reassure the school authorities that the program will be “equivalent” to the public school program.

Exchange on Math

Donna Richoux asked Nancy Wallace about the math book she mentioned in GWS #13. Nancy replied:

The math book is *Patterns in Mathematics* published by Laidlaw Brothers. I wouldn't really recommend it though. It's good for Ishmael because of its orientation towards language, but it might just as easily bog another kid down. Also, we do a lot of picking and choosing.

I'm very confused about math. The kids I've seen who really are "growing without schooling" are usually advanced in reading and vocabulary and can barely add or subtract. Does that mean that numbers are really unimportant to *life*? Or unnecessary?

I suppose my expectations are far too high. I mean, how often do we use algebra, geometry, calculus, etc., anyway? The important thing is that we aren't totally freaked out by the thought of numbers so that we remain free to learn math when we are ready. And if all we can do is balance a checkbook (I can't) and play cards by the time we're 18, we can still get by fine. And when you take out a mortgage or get insurance it's just as well to have your head in the clouds. It's not worth knowing how much you are going to have to pay! The truth is that I think better on paper. I guess my confusion is obvious.

We have a friend whose daughter was out of school last year and he said, "She didn't do a damn thing all year." "Not a thing?" I asked incredulously. "Well, she read almost constantly," he replied, "but reading is *candy*. I wish I had time to read like that." Reading *is* candy, but why don't most people feel the same about math?

Donna wrote back:

Maybe your questions about math were just meant to be rhetorical, but they sure hit a sympathetic nerve in me. Those sorts of frustrating questions are some of the reasons why I am no longer teaching math.

During the two years I taught at a technical school, I had access to a lot of people who had spent many years doing practical things—fixing cars, building houses, repairing electronics equipment, etc. I kept asking everybody, "What math do you need? What good is it all? When do you need

it?” and so on. To my surprise, almost all the instructors were convinced that their students *did* need to know and use math, although they couldn’t always explain why. In the simpler fields (welding, for example) the instructors would worry or complain if their students couldn’t do arithmetic; in the more complex fields (electronics, machine shop) they would complain if they couldn’t solve equations. So there *did* seem to be *some* real need somewhere.

But it was almost impossible for me to grasp examples of how they used math. Every time they would start talking about gear ratios or frequency or some such thing, I would get lost. I simply had no practical, concrete images to relate to. So no way could I bring in realistic examples to my classroom.

But on the other hand, I couldn’t believe that teaching math as an abstract bunch of rules, which was all that was expected of me, was going to do any good. Many people who can get right answers to purely arithmetical problems can’t solve word problems. And not everybody who can do word problems can apply mathematics to the world (JH: or vice versa). Part of the trouble is that “word problems” are artificial—nobody comes across a “word problem” in real life, they come across a *real* problem and they have to supply the words themselves. But in any case, word problems are as close as a math teacher can get to ever applying the procedures.

The only way for me to reconcile all this was to decide that math shouldn’t be taught abstractly at all, that all math should be taught on the spot by the instructor of the specific field. What good was it for me to teach and test a class about ratios in January (after which they promptly forgot it all, of course) when next October their own regular instructor would demonstrate graphically how essential ratios are to their field, and teach them how to solve ratios in a way they’d never forget?

Numbers are important *as they are used*. If kids can’t add or subtract, it’s because they don’t have any reason to add or subtract.

I would say that arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, plus maybe decimals and percents) is held to be essential in our society because that’s basically all you need to deal with money, which of course is also held to be essential in our society. If you throw in fractions, you have enough to do almost all measuring, which is something a good many people use—people who *do* things (create, repair, etc.) as opposed to those who merely observe, consume, etc.

The higher branches? Anybody who knows simple algebra can hardly

imagine not knowing it—it is no more difficult than much of arithmetic (simpler than a lot of it, come to think of it) and it is such a basic language. Probably a lot of what you and Ishmael are doing is what I could consider simple algebra. A lot of geometry is not very hard either, and I tend to think of it as being necessary to be literate in math. The problem here is that high schools always get it confused with teaching deductive logic, which is something else altogether.

Any other stuff—quadratic equations, trigonometry, calculus, etc.—I would just say, don't worry about it. Those things are not all that hard in themselves, really, either, and they are useful to some people. Machinists use trig a lot, for example; not the highly abstract pre-calculus trig they give you in high school or college, but simple formulas for finding lengths of sides of triangles or the size of angles. In general, if you ever have to learn these things, you can.

Arithmetic may be enough for ordinary measurements: the length of a board, the weight of a loaded truck. But how do you measure the distance between two stars, or the size of a molecule? How do you know whether a proposed building will collapse or not? When you deal with the invisible, intangible, far-away, or imaginary, the techniques of “higher” math are essential.

However, most of the math they do in college is garbage. The professors have lost all touch with reality and don't care. They play with ideas for the sake of playing (and for tenure and money) and they can't explain the use of anything they do. A good book on this is *Why The Professor Can't Teach* by Morris Kline.

Having said all this, I find I still have some conflicting feelings. One is, I personally am glad I know a lot more math than just arithmetic and basic algebra and geometry. I have gotten a lot of pleasure solving problems—true, largely theoretical—that I couldn't have solved if I didn't have a much better grasp of mathematical tools. But it is the same sort of pleasure as doing a jigsaw puzzle or solving a riddle. The delight of discovery, the satisfaction of getting everything to work. Perhaps if I had gone into a line of work like engineering or computer systems, I could get that kind of satisfaction out of a real, tangible problem. But you just don't find that sort of thing washing the dishes or doing your taxes or even putting out a magazine.

Another important difficulty. As long as kids are going to be tested year

after year, as long as they are supposed to be able to do long division by age nine, percents by age 11, equations by age 14 (or whatever—that's off the top of my head), unschooling parents are going to be in a very big quandary. Do they struggle through all that abstract stuff in order to prove their kids aren't dumb, they can add and subtract like other kids their age? And meanwhile turn them off, leave them resentful and confused? Or do the parents leave them alone, hoping they'll pick it up?

It's the same sort of problem as teaching kids to read by timetable, but as you say, reading is candy. The parents read, the friends read, words are everywhere, good books lead you on and on to become a better and better reader. While none of this may be present for math.

I guess you have to work at a compromise—encouraging situations where math is used naturally. Letting the kids work with money (their own checking accounts, their own income from work they do, etc.). Encouraging things like the carpentry and celestial navigation you mention. Have you ever seen John's *What Do I Do Monday?* His chapters in there on measuring—suggesting really neat things to measure—are great.

Only a small part of the population of the country right now has ever really grasped and enjoyed math, say at the algebra through calculus level. Whether that number of people would go up or down if all children learned arithmetic by practical means, I don't know. On the one hand, I think that such children would have a love of numbers and a lack of fear that would allow them to keep going and going. But on the other hand, maybe they would be such capable, practical people that they would have too much else to do to ever bother with it.

Nancy responded:

We enjoyed your letter a whole lot. My questions about math were rhetorical, mainly because I didn't expect you or anyone to be able to answer them. Math is my weak point, to say the least—I can't believe how ineptly I was taught.

I have always been confused about what one *needs* to know to get along in life and what one *needs* to know to be happy. Of course everyone's needs are different, and while one person is content to read soup labels, I'm glad I can read a whole lot more than that.

Even if only a small portion of home-schooled kids go on to advanced math, at least the others won't have wasted so much of their precious time; they will have been indulging their other interests—manual or intellectual.

As for Ishmael's education, as long as he is conversant with the practical uses of numbers and *aware* that you can do so much more if you want to (*Mathematics, A Human Endeavor* for example) I will be happy. But as for me, home-schooling has given me an excuse to continue my education and I am enjoying math more than anything (except music and maybe French) and by the time I'm 40 I should be pretty good.

Postscript from Donna to GWS readers: I'd love to hear others' reactions to these letters and to math in general. It seems to be a loaded subject, emotionally, and I'm sure many people have thoughts to share.

Teaching Ideas

From Jocelyn Kopel (OH):

We bought the first grade materials from A BEKA Book Publications and they're as good as any structured curriculum I've seen. Kim doesn't follow any lesson plan. She's just going through the books as her interest and ability dictate. She quits whenever it bores her or when the material is too difficult. I look at it as more of a record than anything else. I am repulsed by the need to produce some written work to prove learning is taking place. Instead, I am relying heavily on keeping a journal for both Kim and Burt. It's a much better record of the rich education they're receiving at home! (By the way, parents can buy BEKA materials for about \$100 per grade, including teacher's editions if they're interested. Address is 125 St. John St., Pensacola FL 32503.)

Our son is 4 and he loves to tell stories he makes up. One day he wanted to write his story down and make a book. He thought maybe a friend would draw pictures for his story, since the friend is quite a good artist. He was frustrated, though, since he can't really spell a lot of words himself yet, so I suggested he tell his story and record it on the tape recorder. Then I would type it for him. It has been a great adventure for both the kids. Their favorite self-made story is "The Children Who Lived Underground."

I've discovered two activities that Kim enjoys and which improve her ability and interest in reading. One thing I do is to write up a list of questions which can be answered with a "yes" or "no" and she loves figuring out what the question is asking. For example, "Do you have two eyes?" "Are you one year old?" "Are bananas green?" (Sometimes.) "Can a balloon break?" "Is purple your favorite color?" "Does a cow have five legs?" It's amazing how many words she can read simply because she wants to find out whether what I've written is right or wrong, or because it's a chance for her to tell what she likes and doesn't like.

Another thing I've done is to write a little story about her or Burt or their adventures together. Naturally when they see their own names in a story, they want to find out what is being said about them.

I feel very strongly about not pushing the kids ahead. I find great satisfaction in seeing them do things over and over until they gain

confidence. Then they move forward to something else. Security seems to be a major factor in their learning. I see this very clearly with Kim with respect to violin lessons. She loves to go over and over something she already knows. At times when I see her getting bogged down with a new piece (or in reading, a new word or sound—or in math, a new concept) I try to direct her back to the things she can already do. This seems to re-establish her confidence and give her strength to try again. It seems to me that whenever the kids get to the place where they're straining to understand or do something, it's time for them to take a break and give their minds a chance to think over new ideas and skills in peace, without the pressure to produce. This is just my personal observation. I think it's dangerous for us to imagine that no learning occurs in those spaces between our concentrated efforts to learn or comprehend.

It seems many people are concerned that if their kids don't "practice" every day, they'll forget what they already know, whether it be a song, words, number facts, whatever. I have never seen my kids forget what they already knew. They always seem to be going forward, even if there are weeks between activities. It just proves to me that all those "spaces" are very productive. I consider it my responsibility to give them that space (without pressuring them for products of proof) and to be there when they're ready to step forward to give whatever help they ask. Parenthood is an exciting adventure for me!

When Lore Rasmussen was teaching math at the Miquon Lower School (near Pennsylvania), which she and her husband then ran, she made up a large number of varied and ingenious math work sheets. (By the way, they are now commercially available from the Key Curriculum Project, PO Box 2304, Berkeley CA 94702.) These were kept in a file cabinet, and children could go to the cabinet, get whatever sheets they wanted, do them, and hand them in. What Lore found, to her great interest (and mine), was that even after doing a particular worksheet completely correctly, a child might do that same work sheet half a dozen times or more before moving on to something else. Apparently the children got much pleasure and satisfaction from doing a second, third, etc., time, more easily and confidently each time, what they had to struggle to do the first time. Only when it became so easy that it was boring did they decide that they had enough—and they were the best judges

of this. In other words, children are perfectly able to tell how much pure repetition—“drill”—they need to do in order to make a new piece of knowledge or skill secure.

Reading Aloud

From Jean Nosbisch-Smith (IL):

When I was a child and older, I was petrified about reading aloud. I must have been very self-conscious and when I had to read, the words seemed to jump all over the page. I would read words from other lines and misread the ones that were there. Everyone kept saying, “Move your eyes ahead of what you’re reading. Look at the whole line at once.” I couldn’t do this. I read one word at a time. I would hide behind the person in front of me when the teacher called on people to read. Teachers used to say about me, “Straight A student, but the worst reader in the class.” I read fine silently.

I have only recently begun to read aloud and that is to my children. I am getting better though. I think very often children benefit more when they are left to read silently rather than aloud. When I was in college we had to tutor a problem reader for three months. I never once had the child read aloud. He read silently and I helped with the words he didn’t know. He had good comprehension. The school put him on 1st grade level. At the end of my sessions he was reading “normally” at his 5th grade level.

“Practicing” Music

A father asked how he could get his kids to practice their musical instruments. I wrote in reply:

About “practice.” I think we ought to abolish the word. It only makes trouble. You say that your daughter likes to play the violin, but hates to practice. Why talk about “practice”? Why not just talk about playing the violin?

I entirely agree about making more music available than just her lesson book. I also believe very strongly in encouraging people to spend some of their time making up their own tunes on their instrument. Perhaps she might be interested in that. And I think it’s terribly important for people to get into chamber music, playing with one or more other people. This is almost always neglected in music instruction.

I’m really serious about getting rid of this word “practice.” For a professional performer, the distinction between “playing” and “practicing” is perfectly clear. “Playing” is where you perform before other people, and “practicing” is when you get ready to do it. But this distinction is nonsense for amateurs. What I do is, I play the cello. I don’t spend part of my time getting ready to play it, and the rest of the time playing it. Some of the time I play scales or things like that; some of the time I play pieces that I am going to play with other people; some of the time I read new music; some of the time I improvise. But all the time I am playing the cello.

One of the great things that my first teacher did for me was to get me started playing great music, even if it was much too hard for me. And one of my amusements now is playing the first dozen or so bars of *Schelomo*, which is a virtuoso piece, most of which I couldn’t even touch. But there are parts of it I can play, and this is very exciting to me. Same goes for the Dvorak Cello Concerto. Your daughter ought to have a chance to play some of the great violin music, even if only some of the easier passages from it.

Let me know what you think about this, and feel free to read this letter to her, or tell her that I said there was no such thing as “practice,” that when you play an instrument you play an instrument, and that’s all there is to it.

Music Teachers

From “Violinist Par Excellence,” in Music Magazine, Feb. 1980:

Nathan Milstein says his own family in Odessa was not particularly musical. “They became musical eventually,” he laughed. “But I don’t think a musical family makes much of a difference.” His mother wanted him to play violin not because she was musical, but because, as he said once, she “wanted to calm me down and she thought the violin would do it.”

Later, he taught his younger brother how to play the cello. “It wasn’t difficult. If somebody’s smart and knows music, he can do it. I could teach him because I played the same family of instrument: violin, cello, it’s the same, only you put your fingers further apart. People exaggerate everything.”

Like many artists, Milstein suspects that even the role of teachers is exaggerated. “A teacher doesn’t help much. Not many teachers do. Young people often think that if they go to a teacher, the teacher will tell them how to play. No! Nobody can tell you. A teacher may play very well in one way, but his student might not be able to play as well if he is taught to play the same way. That’s why I think that the teacher’s business is to explain to the pupil, especially the gifted ones, that the teacher can’t do very much except to try to open the pupil’s mind so that he can develop his own thinking. The fact is that the pupils have to do it. They have to do the job; not the teacher.”

Looking back, Milstein admits that none of his teachers were particularly helpful in this way. “But you see,” he explains, “I was always very curious and experimenting. Instinctively I thought that if I will not help myself my teacher will not help me.”

The worst teachers, in Milstein’s opinion, are those who are not performers themselves. “Performers can give students more than any professor who is in the Curtis Institute or the Juilliard School,” he says vehemently. “Because you can only give something to a young person from your own experience. Teachers who don’t perform, who never

studied for a career, how do they know? I know of famous teachers in America that are ruining young people. Ruining!” By contrast, Milstein does not think that a very gifted person will be ruined by not having a teacher.

Using Calvert

Letters from two families:

We did not tell Calvert that we intended to take the children out of public school by enrolling them with Calvert. To subscribe to their Advisory Teaching Service for three children would not only have cost us an additional \$210—but also put a certain amount of pressure on all of us to “perform.” So we did not do that. Also, that might have been a sign to them for exclusive home teaching and they might have asked for papers from the school system. On the enrollment form, we marked the boxes “enrichment,” “travelling with parents,” and “living overseas.” Calvert never asked a question, but sent us the materials upon receipt of the application and our check.

How have things gone with the kids out of school? The Calvert materials were delayed in the post for several weeks. Given the delay required for the Board’s approval as well, the children started the school year a month or more behind schedule. They didn’t mind at all, even relished the formlessness of those weeks.

When the Calvert material arrived, the children plunged in with interest, tenacity—for a week or two. The regimen broke down by bits and pieces. The Calvert curriculum is arranged for a daily lesson which required the child to do some-of-this, some-of-that, and some-of-all-that-dull-stuff-which-can-only-be-tolerated-in-small-doses, e.g. spelling. I could never work that way (still can’t) and the children exploited this “weakness” of mine. “Look, this history is really interesting. Why can’t I read it all now and catch up on the geography later?” Why, indeed? For this best of reasons, the orderliness of the Calvert curriculum broke down in our use.

Every 20th Calvert lesson is a test. This has proven quite useful as a point of review, a time to catch up on that deferred geography—at least those parts that are worth knowing about. In place of a daily scheduling of Calvert lesson, we have put a monthly schedule of Calvert-test-taking. It’s the children’s job to get ready, though we are willing to help as much and when they ask for it; we even remind them it’s coming. They seem to employ a cram-and-scam technique for coping with such demands. (Don’t most adults

do so when they have the choice?) That is, they work hard near a deadline, then goof off as long as they can before the next deadline is on them. “Goof off”—the terminology shows the social prejudice none of us can escape: M has been reading all of Louisa May Alcott’s works; R has been building with his Legos some reasonably complicated machines with some of the great trains he saw in the basement of the Science Museum; my latest “goofing off” was observing him develop a dynamic model of the inner planets on a computer. None of this is serious compared to learning that “alright” is spelled “all right.”

This I suspect will be the steady state of our wary alliance with the Calvert regimen. For general information: when the children did the daily lessons as a whole, each lesson took them between 45 minutes and two hours; a major benefit has been the time left the children to do other things—some of which I approve and others I don’t ... but they have the time and we have the freedom to disagree about how they spend it. I heard from a friend’s wife, a teacher, that third graders rarely do more than 45 minutes actual work in any given day.

The outstanding problem has been writing. My children do not write well, and they were not getting any better at it in school. Their greatest resistance has been to composition. When writing was required, either they refused to do it or did it poorly. It is no wonder that my daughter reports having confronted no writing requirements in her first two years in public school. My friend’s wife, the teacher, advised me that her most constructive activity with third graders was getting them to begin keeping a journal. I now require of my children that they write a page in their journal every day. The practical reason is to justify their unschooling for the coming year—if I am to propose that they stay out of school next year, I must be able to explain to the Board of Education what they did this year and make a case that it was worth doing; for that I need detail what the children did and what they understood, imagined, read.

Thus I ask them to list their activities and what they read, then fill up the rest of the page with a composition about whatever theme they choose. My motive here is two-fold. The obvious one is that they write at all. The deeper one is that they come to write for themselves, to express what they think and feel at this time of their lives so that later, if they choose, they may recapture a sense of the persons they were before. If they get this intellectual habit, one

that deepens their lives in time, they will be providing themselves a stability of personality against a world that is too eager to shape people.

Dominoes

Bill Boerst (NY) writes:

My children and I find dominoes a very enjoyable learning device. A double-six set works fine. For a lot of variety we use *The Domino Book* by Fredrick Barndt (Nashville, TN, 1974). This is an exhaustive explanation of the games origins and possibilities. It includes group games, solitaire games, and puzzles.

Here is one solitaire example that uses rote learning of the twelve sums. (It probably could be adapted to other sums as well.) It is called “Polka Dots.” Turn a double-six set (28 pieces) face down and shuffle. Select any six pieces from this stock-pile and place in a row face up. From the row discard any two pieces that total twelve, and replenish the six-piece supply from the stockpile. Continue doing this until you can go no further. If you can exhaust your stockpile you win. If you are stopped before exhausting it, you lose. Don’t give up!

The book has many other challenges. One is an adaptation of “Concentration,” which uses memory recall. We would like to hear from others who find dominoes helpful with learning.

More Games

A reader in Alberta writes:

A competitive game S (8) enjoys is chess. We both learned at the same time last year using a child's chess set with the moves marked on the pieces. When we play we both play to win but I allow him to change his move if he realizes it was a mistake after removing his fingers. I nearly always win but he makes me think very hard in order to do so. He does not get upset about losing because he is not made to feel inferior because of it—I tell him he played a good game and that I enjoyed it.

Another competitive game S likes is Pick Up Sticks; this game we play on our honor, i.e., the player decides if he has moved a stick, not the opponent. However, if a person is cheating a great deal, the other player may refuse to play any more.

A card game he has enjoyed since the age of 4 is Slap Jack. Although all these games have a winner and a loser, we enjoy them because there isn't a great deal of emphasis placed on whether or not you won—the main thing is playing the game.

A co-operative game we play is what we call tennis, only we don't use a net or court, just a paved area. The object of the game is to see how long we can hit the ball back and forth without missing.

S enjoys mazes and designs his own. I have also taught him how to play Solitaire. A good game book is "Deal Me In" by Margie Golick (Jeffrey Norton Publishers, NY).

One advantage of schooling at home is better health. I feel that this is not only due to non-exposure to infection but also to a higher resistance because of lack of stress caused by tiredness and the stress of the classroom situation.

Another advantage is bedtime hours. S goes to bed when he tires and wakes up when he has had enough sleep. This year we have been going to bed at 2 a.m. and getting up around noon, mainly because we have noisy neighbors and it is hard to get to sleep earlier. Last year we went to bed around 11 p.m. These hours allow us to attend concerts in the evening.

Bedtime

From Susan Ritch (ME):

My husband and I have always been concerned with having “our” time so our son, Jesse’s (4) bedtime was very important to us. Although he was very cooperative, Jesse did not enjoy the limited time he had with his father between his arrival and bedtime. This left everyone frustrated and unhappy.

One evening while I was reading *GWS* it occurred to me that he was perfectly capable of going to bed when he was tired. The next day we talked about being tired, how much sleep he needed, when to go to bed in order to wake up in time for playgroup, and about our need to talk with one another and have quiet times. The tension evaporated with his father, and he immediately assumed responsibility for getting dressed and brushing his teeth. Because of just this one letting go, our time alone and together follow a natural pattern that seems to satisfy everyone.

I can’t help noting that no cultures in the world that I have ever heard of make such a fuss about children’s bedtimes, and no cultures have so many adults who find it so hard either to go to sleep or wake up. Could these social facts be connected? I strongly suspect they are.

Two Newsletters

Many families may be interested in the *New Family Newsletter* (Box 186, Hardwick MA 01037; \$4 for 6 issues). The subtitle says “for parents in central Massachusetts,” but I can imagine parents from all over the Northeast, and perhaps beyond, enjoying it. Each issue is about 8 pages and contains articles on family life, education, health, nutrition, work, and so on. A recent issue was devoted to a thorough survey of the services at major New England hospitals—can fathers be in the delivery room, are there play areas for child patients, etc. We’re reprinting another of their articles, Margaret de Rivera’s description of her home school. The newsletter is attractive and worth investigating.

Mary Bergman (see “*Home School Guides*,” GWS 9), now in Missouri, and Norma Luce in Utah are editing *The Home Educators Newsletter* (PO Box-

623, Logan UT 84321. Monthly, \$17.50 per yr.; single issue \$2.50.) Issues are about 6 pages long. We’re reprinting elsewhere in GWS a marvelous story from a recent issue that Mary wrote about her very capable homeschooled children. Like GWS, the newsletter contains many letters contributed by readers. According to a box on page 2, the newsletter is a publication of the National Association of Home Educators, which also announced an April convention. Whether subscribing to the magazine is the same as belonging to the Association, I don’t know.

High School At Home

From James Augustyn of the Division of Continuing Studies, University of Nebraska, 511 Nebraska Hall, Lincoln NE 68588:

Thank you for your recent request for information describing the University of Nebraska Independent High School. We are proud of the reputation of the program, and we are pleased at your interest.

The Independent Study High School has been in existence since 1929. The program is fully accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and by the Nebraska State Department of Education. This accreditation allows us to grant a high school diploma upon the completion of specific requirements.

Students interested in completing a diploma through the Independent Study High School are asked to have official transcripts of previous high school work sent directly to me. Upon the receipt of such transcripts I will evaluate them and inform the student as to what additional courses would be required in order to earn a diploma.

Courses may also be taken for personal interest or to supplement the local school curriculum. The enclosed "bulletin" lists all courses available (Ed.—there are dozens), along with registration information. Please note that any registration from a student currently enrolled in a local high school, or under the compulsory attendance laws of his or her home state, must carry the signature of a school official approving the courses and the supervision.

Each student that enrolls in one of our courses must have a local supervisor. The supervisor is an important person in the student's relationship with the Independent Study High School. I have enclosed a copy of "The Connecting Link" which outlines the duties of the supervisor. (Ed. note: It says "Special permission must be obtained ... for parents or relatives to serve as supervisors.")

Please be assured that we look forward to working with any student. If there are additional questions concerning any of the information that I have enclosed, please do not hesitate to contact me.

College by Exams

An AP story from Bloomington, IN:

A 7-Month Zoom Through College—Less than seven months after his high school graduation, Anthony L. May, 18, is about to become a college senior.

The 1979 co-valedictorian of Blue River Valley High School in central Indiana has made the three-year jump by testing out in 71 credit hours through the national College Level Examination Program (CLEP), the College Board's Advanced Placement program, and departmental examinations here at Indiana University.

"I'm not smarter than the other students," May said modestly. "It's just that many of them are unaware of the opportunities and the many different ways to earn college credit through testing."

He will have 91 credit hours—only 31 less than he needs to graduate—when he goes home for semester break on Dec. 22. Seventeen credit hours were earned in regular classroom courses since he arrived here last September.

May started accumulating his credits by earning three hours between his junior and senior years in high school through the university's collegiate credit program for high school students.

Then he began taking a battery of tests in English, history, political science, humanities, biology, economics, psychology, Latin, and English composition.

From several pamphlets that the College Entrance Examination Board (Box 1822, Princeton NJ 08541) sent us about their CLEP exams:

No matter where or how you have learned, you can take CLEP tests. If the results are acceptable to your college, you can receive credit.

Colleges and universities that award such credit are listed in "CLEP

Test Centers and Other Participating Institutions” (Ed—a pamphlet they also sent.) Before you take tests for credit consult the college you wish to attend to learn its policy on CLEF scores and its other admissions requirements.

The General Examinations measure achievement in the liberal arts . . . The Subject Examinations measure achievement in specific college-level courses. Most are 90-minute multiple choice tests . . . A booklet of descriptions, with sample questions, of all the examinations (is available.)

CLEP tests are administered during the third week of each month throughout the year at colleges and universities listed. If you live more than 150 miles from the nearest center, you may request a special administration at a more convenient location.

The fee is \$20 per test.

Four states offer external degree programs that enable individuals to earn degrees by passing examinations, including CLEP tests, and demonstrating in other ways that they have satisfied the educational requirements. No classroom attendance is required. Persons who live out-of-state as well as residents of the state are eligible. Prospective candidates should write before taking the examinations to the following addresses:

Board for State Academic Awards, 340 Capitol Av, Hartford CT
06115

Board of Governors BA Program, 544 Iles Park Place, Springfield IL
62706

Thomas A Edison College, Forrestal Center, Forrestal Rd, Princeton
NJ 08540.

Regents External Degrees Program, Cultural Education Center,
Empire

State Plaza, Albany NY 12230.

Goddard College. . .

In “College at Home,” GWS #9, you have Goddard College of Vermont listed. I attend one of its four experimental pilot projects that offers a B.A. degree and/or teacher’s certification. It’s the “Goddard Experimental Program for Further Education” in Washington D. C. There are others—in Plainfield, Vermont, New York, and South Carolina.

We adults go to group studies and community meetings about every 3rd weekend. We talk with an advisor who is also a *friend*—our classes are facilitated (we pick our faculty)—*not* lectured. We do projects on our own at home. Our group studies (classes) are supportive, unique, totally more ideal than other colleges I have experienced, such as Antioch. I know people in the other branches, and the dean and others in Vermont. They are all unique people seeking these ideals: self-direction; supportive resource-sharing; mutual respect and equality; personal growth; various kinds of social change as part of college work; and students and faculty making decisions on college functions and regulations *together*, (whew!) as much as possible.

Write to Goddard Experimental Program for Further Education, 1757 “S” St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009, or Goddard College, Plainfield, VT.

& American U.

From the Washington Post, 8/13/79:

A program at American University (Washington DC) grants up to 30 semester hours (a full year's work) for experience acquired on the job, in community or political activities, travel, hobbies or other learning activities. The program, beginning its fourth semester this fall at AU, is called Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning, or APEL (pronounced apple).

APEL is aimed at the growing number of over-25s who missed out on a college degree the first time around and who have over the years gained expertise in one field or another that relates to the academic world. Washington is full of accomplished people who don't have a degree, says APEL director Lenore Saltman. Her students have included GS-12s and -13s (Ed—civil service ranks), responsible for large budgets and staffs.

“Most of them make more money than I do,” she says.

Around 300 colleges and universities nationwide have similar programs.

Under the AU program, students enroll for two semester-long courses that meet weekly. In the first, they analyze their learning experiences and prepare extensive portfolios, later submitted to faculty members who determine the number of credits to be granted for them.

One student says his portfolio earned him 25 semester hours because of his technical training in electronics and the supervisory skills he developed as a foreman. Another earned the full 30, part for her design artistry and part for her managerial skills with the co-op. She also was advanced into a graduate-degree program, skipping her bachelor's degree.

Of the 142 who enrolled in APEL's first three semesters, 22 percent had no previous college experience and 38 percent had less than 10 semester hours. Only a few have been granted the full 30 hours of

credit, and some, says Saltman, “have been disappointed not to earn what they thought they should.”

Learning about the Sea

From the Calypso Log Dispatch:

Project Ocean Search—Ever since Captain Cousteau began his career exploring the ocean and relating his experiences to the public, we have been barraged with requests from people who wanted to be part of the Cousteau Experience. The most commonly asked questions have been: “May I join a Cousteau expedition?” “Is there a way to learn about the sea directly rather than in a classroom?” In 1973, Dr. Robert Gordon, Richard Murphy and Jean-Michel Cousteau decided to answer these questions and to create a unique educational experience. Our goal was to develop an understanding of the ocean, believing that such an understanding would create the will to fight for the protection of the sea.

Project Ocean Search has programs near civilization and programs far from civilization. It is available to all people above the age of 16. The only criterion for embarking on the adventure is a sincere desire to learn about the sea and to help protect it. We consider the blend of varied backgrounds an essential ingredient to the program. We all learn from one another and within a short time, there is no distinction between participant and staff. We have a very broad range of participants—teenagers, college students, teachers, truck drivers, architects, medical doctors, homemakers, etc. They all have found POS a relevant experience: “All the things I read in books fell into place.” “A fantastic way to learn about so many things.” “The impressions I received on this trip will remain with me forever.” “So far superior to any other method of learning that no comparison can be made.”

For more information, write to The Cousteau Society, 777 Third Ave, New York NY 10017.

Smithsonian

The *Smithsonian* magazine (900 Jefferson Dr., Washington DC 20560; \$12 yr. /US, \$15.50 elsewhere), like National Geographic, is run as a “society” where subscribers are “members.” The fat issues (about 200 pages) cover a wide variety of subjects: history, geography, art, animals, science, and much more. The photographs are excellent. Last year they published a shot of a mother panda holding her cub, the most beguiling such picture I’ve ever seen, and offered it as a poster to members for \$3. A good magazine to have around the house. We have a few copies available for samples; send 60¢ in stamps.

Ohio Victory

Judith Kovacs (OH) sent us this newspaper story:

Judge Rules In Carroll: Home School "Adequate"—The education of seven children at home is "very adequate" and "no neglect exists," said Stark County Family Court Judge W. Don Reader in a possibly precedent-setting ruling today (2/29/80).

Reader ruled in favor of three Kensington families charged here with neglect for not sending their children to public schools.

The charges were brought by Carrollton Exempted Village School District.

The Robert Skaggs, Donald Miller, and Frederick Seikel families, each related by marriage, have educated their own children for the past four years, hiring a state-certified teacher. Classes were conducted in the Magnolia Rd. home of the Millers.

The families maintained that they had constitutional rights to have a hand in the educational process. They also contended that teaching at home also protected the children from "filthy language, drugs and sex" before they were ready and provided them an environment in which there was no pressure to perform.

A licensed psychologist, Mary Villwock, gave achievement tests to the children on July 6, 1979 and the results showed the children were higher in every test from one to three years than children enrolled in the public school.

Her testimony was not rebutted, Reader noted.

Subjects taught included math, English, language, science and history, with the parents being final arbiter of what was taught and book selection.

Reader stated that according to the Ohio code, a neglected child is defined as one whose parents, guardian or custodian neglects or

refuses to provide him with proper or necessary education, necessary for his health, morals or well-being.

Children, he said, can be taught at home if the superintendent grants the parents an exemption, if instruction is provided by a person qualified to teach the branches in which instruction is required and such additional branches as the advancement and needs of the child may require. No exemption was granted.

Reader said the violation of compulsory school laws does not “necessarily constitute neglect per se.

“A neglected child is one whose parents are guilty of fault, unfitness or unsuitability . . .

“If minimal standards are to be construed as being a per se prohibition against the exemption from compulsory school attendance, then the statute is in grave danger of offending the free exercise clause.

“If it is determined that these parents in this particular instance and based upon all of the circumstances have an inherent right to teach their children and provide them with a qualified education, then the statute must be liberally construed so as to afford them this inherent constitutional right.

“Our forefathers in all likelihood never gave thought to the possibility that institutions created by law would pose a threat to the family, even inadvertently, since the family was thought of as being the unwritten law and the basic unit of government.

“Although I may not share their belief to keep the children at home, the parents have gone to great expense and great involvement of their own time and the exhibits and testimony would indicate that their children are receiving a very adequate education.”

Not the Best Way

From the Providence (R.I.) Sunday Journal:

Maynard Campbell says he would rather go to jail than send his three children to public schools. He says they can get a better education through a correspondence course.

Campbell's two youngest children, Chuck, 8, and Becky, 6, have never attended public school. And he said he took Barbara, (now) 12, out of school in the third grade because "she knew nothing" even as a straight-A student.

On May 10 (1979), District Judge William Eakes ordered Campbell to prove that his three children are registered for public school or enrolled in a state-approved home-education course. The judge warned Campbell he would be held in contempt of court if he failed to appear for an Aug. 30 hearing on the matter.

"There is no way I will comply with that order," said Campbell in telephone interviews last week. "I'm ignoring it. Nobody's going to take my kids."

He said that after he took his daughter Barbara out of public schools in Texas, he enrolled her in an accredited national correspondence course operated by the Calvert School of Baltimore.

"It took a year and a half (in the correspondence course) to get her up to the speed of the third grade," said Campbell.

So Campbell did not even bother sending Chuck and Becky to schools and instead enrolled them in the same correspondence course.

Campbell said authorities in New Mexico, where the family lived prior to coming to Colorado about a year ago, also were concerned about the children not going to school.

But when they checked out the correspondence course and found it was "excellent," they gave their permission for the children to get

their education that way, he said.

Campbell said he believes it is a violation of his constitutional rights to require him to prove he is obeying the law.

“The bedrock issue behind all of this is the simple fact that you are not required to prove your innocence, but they’re demanding that we prove our innocence,” he said.

“They’re claiming that we’re not educating our children, but they have not proven that, they cannot prove that.”

I hope Mr. Campbell has been able to unschool his children. But I fear that he did not go about it in quite the best way. My strong hunch is that judges don’t like what we might call “legal primitives,” people who come into court talking about the law without really knowing what it says.

In the first place, judges have spent a great many years studying the law, and people who have worked hard to understand something difficult don’t like to hear other people say that it is really very simple. Beyond this, any intelligent judge knows that to a large degree it is in the complexity of the law and its processes that lie many of the most important protections of our liberties. Many people think that these liberties would be more secure if the law were very simple. This is almost certainly not so.

The point of this is that if we are going to come into courtrooms talking about law, we had better know what the law actually says, both statutes and court rulings. Chances are that judges will be very favorably impressed, and in some cases even helpfully instructed, by parents who are able to cite and quote a great many such rulings. But they are likely to be prejudiced *against* people who say, in effect, “I haven’t got time to mess around with legal technicalities, but I know my rights.” They are likely to be still more prejudiced against people who announce to the newspapers that if they don’t like a court order they are simply going to ignore it. That is not a good way to get favorable rulings from the courts.

GWS and Schools

The head of a small private school has just written me to say that he thinks that we should incorporate *GWS* into a publication that meets the needs of “good school” education (his quotes). In reply I wrote:

Thank you very much for your letter. From the very first issue we have printed in *GWS*, and will continue to print, much information that could be of great interest and value to all concerned with “good school” education. Thus, in *GWS* #1 there was a short piece entitled “A Studying Trick.” It could be used at almost any grade level, under any kind of educational philosophy, in any course in which students had to learn disconnected pieces of information—language, math, science, history, etc. It could even be used to enable students to test themselves in spelling—I enclose a copy of a short piece in *GWS* #13 on that subject. No schools that I know of make use of this simple and inexpensive device, which I invented for myself when I was a student. I predict that any teachers who show their students how to use this study device will find their teaching efficiency greatly increased.

In *GWS* #4 and 6 we printed two short articles about Addition and Multiplication. The gist of them is that students would learn elementary arithmetic much more quickly if it was taught not as a collection of facts to be memorized, but as the study of the elementary properties of numbers. Again, I predict that any teachers or schools, of whatever educational philosophy, that adopt this approach will find that they greatly increase their effectiveness in teaching arithmetic.

This is only a small part of the information that we have already printed in *GWS* that could be profitably used in a school setting. I enclose a copy of the articles mentioned above, in case you don’t have your copies of *GWS* handy. I invite you to try out and put to use any one or all of these ideas. I would like you to tell me if you decide to do so. If you do, please tell me from time to time what results you get, or if you run into any difficulties, what these are. I will be glad to try to help you overcome them. Or, if you decide that none of these ideas are usable in your school, I’d be grateful if you’d tell me why. In either case I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Life-School

A young reader writes:

I started going to public school right into the second grade and in every grade up to the sixth I was a straight A student. All the teachers were nice to me and I was praised and praised again for my work, and I got good grades for it too and that's what kept me going.

When I left school at the end of sixth grade to be out for two years, I learned a new realization. Grades are not what make you a good person. I have a pretty good memory so I remembered all the things I had to, to pass the tests that gave me A's. But I've learned from experience that when I'm not interested in what I am supposed to be learning, I forget everything. Unfortunately, I wasn't interested in anything that I was doing, so my second through sixth grade years of public schooling are pretty much blank.

During the two years without any public school contact, I learned a lot more than I had learned in five years of public school. I met many people, mostly adults, but the kids that we met told us things like "I'm smarter than you are, because I go to school," and "You'll grow up dumb because you don't go to school." It's very hard not to get defensive when people say those kinds of things to you, and besides what are you to say to contradict them? They wouldn't believe or understand (or even want to) if you told them that it wasn't necessarily true. It's just no use to try and convince people that it's OK not to go to school, if their minds have already been programmed to believe that it's not. When I say it's no use, what I mean is that it's a waste of energy. The way I feel is just let them think what they want, I know what I believe and that's what's important to me. I just tried to see why they all thought the way they did and it didn't take me long to figure it out. It is their parents that program it into their minds, because it's programmed into their parents' minds, etc., etc. One goes back to thinking about why and when it all began.

In those two years, I learned how to live without grades and not to need someone to tell me "It's good" every time I did something. It got so that grades didn't mean anything any more. Basically, I learned that grades prove nothing. I also learned a lot of different things that I wouldn't have, if I had been in public schools. Public schools can't offer experience. I learned how

to deal with and relate to adults better because I was around them so much—all the kids were in school! I learned many practical skills that I never would have learned in public school.

At first I wasn't so sure about the idea of not being in school but I soon adjusted and found it fun. When I look at kids my age, it makes me glad that we did what we did. I am capable of doing so many more things it amazes me. And it's all because I had the time to learn, and enjoy while I was learning. So things stuck in my mind and they are still there because I am still doing new things, while these kids are doing things just to "get out" and then forgetting them in the meantime plus not enjoying much of it anyhow. Whew!

At L (Ed—the alternative school she attends now) the thing is that the kids don't think they are learning as much as the kids in public schools because they don't seem to do as much. I think that's rather silly and I proved it to myself, by seeing that after being out of school for two years, I'm not any dumber than any other (supposed) ninth grader.

Now that I'm involved in L, I am running into the same old thing. When I first went there I was so happy that I had finally found a school place where they didn't believe in grades, etc. This was fairly true until the new high school began. They have this thing now about credits. All of the other students are there (at the high school) to get the diploma and get out. I am there to have fun learning and learn about the things that interest me. One of the main reasons I am there is for the social life. But in order to be there for that reason, I feel that I must do some of the things they want me to do.

I am already getting overdosed with "their stuff" and then my teacher says to me, "Your life school is becoming too important to you." My life school should be more important to me than L; my life school is my home and family and if they shouldn't be the most important then what should? But she doesn't see that and one of my problems is not being able to tell them how I really feel. I have, sort of, but I never find the words when I'm faced with the questions directly.

I am caught between schooling and nonschooling. When I'm at home I am usually cheerful and doing things. At the end of the day, I always feel that I have accomplished a comfortable amount of whatever I did or that I did as much as I felt comfortable doing. On the other hand, when I am at school I usually don't feel that I've accomplished much except that I have had fun

with my friends. Then my teacher says to me, “I have no problem with you not coming every day, but you just don’t get anything done.” Oh, if only they knew! I get so much done. And I enjoy almost everything I do. When the teachers tells me that, they mean Algebra or Composition that I’m not getting enough of done. But as they see it, those are the important things.

I have such a neat home and life-school! I consider myself to be very lucky to be who I am and to have the parents I have for believing in non-schooling!

Credential Case: Mich.

Here are excerpts from an important decision on Dec. 12, 1979. If you would like a copy of the complete ruling, try the Allegan County Courthouse, Allegan MI 49010; they sent our copy quickly and at no charge. If for some reason they won't do the same for you, let us know.

*State Of Michigan—In the 57th District Court for the County Of Allegan
People of the State Of Michigan, Plaintiff vs. Peter Nobel and Ruth Nobel,
Defendants*

*Opinion Of The Court—*Mr. Peter Nobel and Mrs. Ruth Nobel are charged with a violation of the Compulsory Education Laws of the State of Michigan pursuant to 1976 Public Act 451, Sec. 1561, MCLA 390.1651; MSA 15.41561, for failure to send their minor children to public school.

At the trial, the Defendants did not dispute the fact that they were not sending their children to public school or to a private school outside the Nobel home. However, the Nobels contend that they are not guilty of the offense charged because they were educating their children at home in a “satellite school” of the Christian Liberty Academy, headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, pursuant to the dictates of their conscience and in furtherance of sincerely held religious beliefs. The Nobels assert for those reasons that the Statute in question as applied to the facts of this particular case is unconstitutional, insofar as it requires certification, for violation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution guaranteeing the free exercise of religious beliefs.

Peter and Ruth Nobel have been educating their children at home utilizing materials and assistance provided to them by the Christian Liberty Academy of Chicago, Illinois. The children had previously attended a private school, but that school no longer meets the religious standards of the Nobels.

Mrs. Nobel received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Calvin College in elementary education. Mrs. Nobel has had several years of teaching experience prior to September 1, 1978 and while she has never applied for a teacher's certificate, did receive a provisional teaching certificate pursuant to her degree in elementary education at the time of her graduation.

Mrs. Nobel refuses to obtain a teaching certificate because of her religious beliefs. Mrs. Nobel testified that her daily life was governed by her

understanding of the world of God as contained in the Bible and it is her firmly held religious belief that parents are responsible for the education and religious training of their children and that the parents must not delegate that role and authority to the government or any State, that for her to accept State certification would, according to her religious beliefs, be placing her responsibilities for education of her children in a position subservient to that of the State in violation of her religious beliefs.

Testimony of Mrs. Nobel at trial indicated that her religious beliefs would prevent her from sending her children to the public schools because public school education directly conflicts with her belief in God and her interpretation of the teachings of the Bible and her religious beliefs in general.

Mrs. Nobel further testified that she could not send her children to any certified private school in the area because they too failed to meet her standards of religious training and education.

Pursuant to her religious beliefs, Mrs. Nobel began a program of home education which consisted of the same basic subject material as is taught in the public schools. No evidence was offered or shown to indicate that this curriculum was deficient in any way.

Dr. George L. Hopkins of Florida, an educational psychologist, administered intelligence and psychological testing of the Nobel children. Dr. Hopkins' qualification as a psychological and educational testing expert was stipulated to by the parties herein as were the findings of the test results.

Dr. Hopkins' evaluations indicated that each of the five Nobel children are above average intelligence, that each has obtained an educational level ahead of other children in their chronological age group. In addition thereto, Mrs. Nobel was tested and found to possess the intelligence as well as the training and appropriate psychological makeup to perform well as a teacher.

The evaluations also indicate that the children were well-socialized and are emotionally and psychologically well adjusted. An "offer of proof" from the Reverend Paul Lindstrom of the Christian Liberty Academy was also read into the record indicating that the course of study which the children were engaged in through the Academy was geared to the religious convictions of the Nobels.

Professor Donald Erickson of the University of San Francisco testified as an expert witness. His testimony indicated that there was no evidence

whatsoever that a teaching certificate proved teacher competence or that it has been empirically shown that a teacher's certificate enhances the quality of the educational process received by the students. He indicated that students in private schools consistently do better on standardized tests than public school students even though many private schools do not require certification of their teachers.

Dr. Erickson indicated that very few parents would choose to educate their children at home and the expense to the State to insure that home education was adequate would not be an undue financial burden or otherwise on the State.

Pursuant to a hypothetical question using the facts of this case, Dr. Erickson was of the opinion that the education the children were receiving was adequate and that in his opinion the "certification" of Mrs. Nobel was unnecessary to meet any State interest in education of the children under the circumstances of this case.

The testimony established that the Nobel home was maintained in a neat and sanitary condition and that there was no objection on the part of the Nobels to any State inspection of the home or to State educational testing of her children.

The Attorney General of the State of Michigan in an Opinion dated September 27, 1979, being Opinion 5579, addressed the following question:

Whether a parent may provide for his or her child's education at home without having a certified teacher present. In his Opinion he recognizes as an exception to the Statute private home schools that have a certified teacher or tutor present and concludes that any private home school must utilize certified teachers and that it is his opinion that a parent may not provide for his or her child's education at home without having a certified teacher providing instruction and courses comparable to those offered in the public school district in which the child resides.

It should be noted, however, that the issue of religious freedom was not addressed by the Attorney General when such exercise of religious beliefs precluded the certification of the parent teacher. This Court must therefore address that issue.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . ." The free exercise clause was made

applicable to the States, through the “concept of liberty” embodied in (the Fourteenth) Amendment. *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296, 303 (1940). The United States Supreme Court has adopted a broad definition of what constitutes “religion” for the purposes of free exercise analysis. In *United States v. Ballard*, 322 U.S. 78 (1944), the Court indicated that proper inquiry is limited to whether or not the adherent was *sincere* in his or her beliefs.

The definition of religion is currently broad enough to include many beliefs which are not conventional, traditional theism. *United States v. Seeger*, 380 U.S. 163, 166 (1965). “Sincere and meaningful belief which occupies a place in the believer’s life parallel to that filled by orthodox belief in God.” *Welsh v. United States*, 398 U.S. 333 (1970). The Court has noted that nontraditional beliefs, including secular humanism, atheism, and nontheistic faiths, are all “religion” for the purpose of free exercise analysis. The Supreme Court in *Fowler v. Rhode Island*, 345 U.S. 67 (1953), held that it was “no business of the courts to say that what is a religious practice or activity for one group is not religion under the protection of the First Amendment.”

Mrs. Nobel refused to be certified even though she is clearly an experienced and otherwise qualified elementary school teacher because it would violate her religious beliefs.

Freedom of religion is, of course, a fundamental constitutional right which occupies a “preferred position” in our constitutional framework. *Murdock v. Pennsylvania*, 319 U.S. 105, 115, (1943).

The government can only punish acts taken pursuant to sincerely held religious beliefs in extraordinary circumstances. Criminal or civil sanction of religious-based action must be based upon a compelling state interest. Furthermore, there must be no “less restrictive means” available to achieve the legitimate State interest while maintaining the integrity of the citizens’ religious beliefs. *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398, 407 (1963); *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 214 (1972).

Therefore, the State must have a compelling State interest, and no narrower alternatives, in applying the teacher certification requirement for home education to the Nobels under the facts of this particular case. The burden of proof in any criminal case is upon the State to demonstrate that there is a compelling State interest, and that no narrower alternative to the government action could be taken. (*Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398, 407

(1963).

No evidence has been introduced in this case that would demonstrate that the State has a compelling interest in applying teacher certification laws to the Nobels or that the education interest of the State could not be achieved by a requirement less restrictive on the religious beliefs of the Nobels. . .

The evidence indicates that the Nobel's educational program is meeting all of the State compulsory education requirements except for the certification of the teacher therein.

The Kentucky Supreme Court in *Hinton v. Kentucky State Board of Education*, No. 70-SC-642-TG (1979) (citation unavailable) stated as follows:

It cannot be said as an absolute that a teacher in a non-public school who is not certified under KRS 161.030 (2) will be unable to instruct children to become intelligent citizens. Certainly, the receipt of a "bachelor's degree from a standard college or university" is an indicator of a level of achievement, but it is not a sine qua non the absence of which establishes that private and parochial school teachers are unable to teach their students to intelligently exercise the elective franchise.

The Supreme Court of Kentucky found the certification procedure unnecessary as the State failed to show that there was any overriding State interest in such uniform requirements being applied without exception.

The State's case here is based solely on the need for uniform application of the certification requirement for home instruction, not lack of teaching ability.

In *State of Ohio v. Whisner*, 47 Ohio St. 2d 181 (1976), the Ohio Supreme Court struck down state promulgated minimum standards relating to the operation of all schools, including church related private schools. Among the standards objected to was the "certification as a qualification for hiring a person as a teacher in one of these schools." The Ohio Court at page 217-18 stated as follows:

The state did not, either in this Court or in the lower courts; attempt to justify its interest in enforcing the "minimum standards" as applied to a non-public religious school. In the face of the record before us, and in the light of the expert testimony ... it is difficult to imagine ... a

state interest of sufficient magnitude to override the interest claiming protection under the Free Exercise Clause....We will not, therefore, attempt to conjure up such an interest in order to sustain the application of the “minimum standards” to these appellants.

The State, in the case before this Court, has failed to produce any evidence whatsoever on the interests served by the requirement of teacher certification, and the Defendants’ experts to the contrary demonstrated there was no rational basis for such requirements . . .

In a New York decision, *People v. Turner*, 98 N.Y.S. 2d 886 (S. Ct.1950), the Court stated as follows in discussing the purpose of a compulsory education statute:

The object of a compulsory education law is to see that children are not left in ignorance, that from some source they will receive instruction that will fit them for their place in society. Provided the instruction given is adequate and the sole purpose of non-attendance at school is not to evade the statute, instruction given to a child at home by its parent, who is competent to teach, should satisfy the requirements of the compulsory education law.

Returning to the Opinion of the Attorney General of the State of Michigan, and quoting from page 4, the Attorney General indicates as follows:

The purposes of the Michigan compulsory education statute are plain. Parents are required to provide an education for their children.

The evidence clearly establishes that the Nobels have met the purpose of the Statute as stated by the Attorney General. For her to accept certification would not make her a better teacher, nor would it make her children learn easier, nor would it make her children more intelligent, nor would it provide any additional benefits for her, her children, or the State, but it would, indeed, interfere with her freedom to exercise her religious beliefs . . .

The Nobel’s have a documented and sincere religious belief and this Court won’t and no Court should interfere with the free exercise of a religious belief on the facts of this case.

The interest of the State in requiring certification on the facts as contained

in this particular case must give way to the free exercise of religious belief.

Therefore, the charges against the Nobels are dismissed and a Judgment of acquittal will enter.

(Signed) Gary Stewart, District Judge.

Homeschool Plans

Last fall we helped a family start their own home school. We incorporated the school, composed the school plan and submitted it to the State Dept. of Education. So far the family has experienced no trouble and the fire dept. chief even established new guidelines for schools with less than 10 students.

Many people are intimidated by the State's minimum standards for elementary schools, and I must admit that the people at the State Dept. are intimidating whenever they answer your questions over the phone. But when you show up in middle-class clothes and submit an intelligent plan, they seem to be quite accommodating. At least, that was our experience.

I should make it clear that the plan our friends submitted was for an actual school, with all the trimmings and no particular mention of homeschooling. They simply neglected to tell anyone that enrollment in the school is limited to their family. So the State is actually left with the impression that this is destined to become a full-fledged school.

My husband and I are in the process of writing our own plan to submit by May. We have decided this is our best option. The home education section in our state law has been twice interpreted by the courts as requiring instruction by a certified teacher, whereas schools (especially Christian schools) have no such requirement imposed on them. Another part of the home education section which makes me cringe is the responsibility of the local supt. and school board to judge and approve (or disapprove) the plan submitted by the parents. I seriously doubt their ability to fulfill this duty fairly without ending up in court to resolve it. In other words, were we to submit a plan to the local supt., we feel sure we would immediately end up in court. We prefer to take our chances with the State because 1) they are too busy to worry about us, and 2) they are more aware of their legal limitations and are basically playing *laissez-faire*.

I would definitely encourage people to consider starting their own school. Should any legal action be taken, I feel (and this may be totally naive) that the judge/jury would be impressed with the fact that parents went to all the trouble of writing up a plan. It's a great document to have on file with the state, and it has also proven to be a good exercise in clarifying and defining the wherefore, the why, and the how of our decision to educate our children

this way. I should also add that we are not writing anything into our plan that we don't intend to live up to or would be unable to stand up behind in court. We'll mail you a copy of our plan as soon as we complete it.

Our religious beliefs are an intricate part of our decisions about our children's education. We have been criticized by some people for "taking that route of escape," since the Christian schools have already "fought for their rights" in court. But we're not interested in going to court to fight or win or prove anything. Of course, we will go to court if we must, but we prefer to avoid it as best we can without being denied our right to teach our kids at home. We prefer to put our energy, time, and money into the kids, not the courts. After we complete our school plan, we're going to seek out an attorney, so that if we are challenged we'll be prepared.

Baby on the Job

The Boston Globe asked mothers who had found jobs that work well with their family's needs to share their experiences. Here is one of the letters, printed 4/2/80:

I enjoyed my years as a secretary at Governor Dummer Academy (a private secondary school in Byfield, Mass.) and felt sad about leaving after my baby was born. I arranged to switch jobs with a part-time worker at the school. My next step was to suggest that my baby would come back to work with me. My husband and everyone at school was very supportive but a bit skeptical. Although she was three weeks late, Meaghan was a good and healthy baby and we were back to work a month after she was born.

My job consists of posting mail, doing banking and errands in town and helping in the bookstore until 1 p.m.

My method was to nurse Meaghan just before I left for work at 9a.m., carry her in a snugli (front or back pack) while I was running errands and banking, and use a good car seat in the van that could also serve as a sleeping bed while was in the bookstore. She naps in the van while I drive to the post office and again on the way into town. As she outgrew the infant stage, she played in a bounce chair and playpen, which I kept in the bookstore, until she was 10 months and walking.

Next week will be her first birthday. She is not shy because the students give her lots of attention. My pediatrician is also the school's doctor so he is very supportive. He sees the experience as a good example for the students also. I feel satisfied because I have the peer contact with my fellow workers. I have my daughter with me, and I have a part-time income. Other mothers could view each prospective job with the possibility of taking their child along. Talk to the employer. I took the initiative to suggest taking my baby with me. Try it. It can work.

—Johanna Lynch, Newburyport.

We'd like to hear more accounts like this, about children of all ages who have fit in at work. Perhaps we can even start a list of workplaces that welcome children.

New Books Available Here

Tomorrow Is Our Permanent Address, by Nancy and John Todd (\$4.50 + postage). This is the story of The New Alchemists, a group of people who, on a few acres of land on Cape Cod, are trying and learning to find how we human beings can get our food from the soil and our energy from the sun and wind, and live in modest but decent comfort in a gentle and stable relationship with the living earth. I don't know any people in the world who are doing more important work—though there are also other groups working on the same problem. A very important and hopeful book, which I hope will inspire many young people (and not so young) to think about how they may become involved in this work themselves.

Born to Love, by Joann S. Grohman (\$5.85 + post). Another very important book about the importance of close contact between babies and infants and their mothers—and also other people. A worthy companion to *The Continuum Concept*. Though it is about the same general idea, it is also very much worth reading, as it comes at the subject in slightly different ways, and also makes some points that *The Continuum Concept* does not make. Ms. Grohman stresses even more than Ms. Liedloff the importance of breastfeeding.

She also talks about the population problem, and insists that people who really love children and want to give them close nurturing should not feel that they have some kind of duty to have no more than two children. As much as the world needs fewer people, it has an even greater need for the kind of strength, kindness, and wisdom that people are likely to have who have had proper nurturing. A very important book.

Before You Were Three, by Robie H. Harris and Elizabeth Levy (\$7.15 + post). This book, illustrated with a great many of the most appealing black-and-white photos of babies that I have ever seen, is about the first three years of life: what babies are like, how they react, what they do. It is simply written—most second or third-graders could easily read it—but I think it would be most fun as a book to read aloud. Most four or five-year-olds will probably love hearing about what they were like when they were little. And the book should be particularly interesting and helpful to children who have or soon will have a baby sister or brother. It will help them understand better that

small and seemingly unreasonable creature, and it may make them a bit more patient to know that they were once just the same.

I note in passing that most of these babies, as nearly as I can tell, are being brought up in “modern” rather than “continuum” ways, so what the authors say about children’s “natural” behavior has to be read with that in mind. In any case, a most charming and informative book.

Lives of a Cell, by Lewis Thomas (\$2.65 + post). These are short, clever, and altogether delightful essays about the mystery of life and living creatures, written for the general reader by a doctor. Dr. Thomas is as much a philosopher as physician. He thinks about the meaning of things, looks at them from unexpected angles. His book makes us laugh as it opens our minds. Even for those (like myself) who are somewhat more skeptical than he is about science and scientists, this is still a delight. And it will surely suggest to many young people that the study of living creatures would be fascinating work.

The Best of Father Brown, by G. K. Chesterton (\$5.40 + post). Some of the new additions to our booklist are hard to classify—they were not written for children, yet any good reader from roughly age 10 or 12 on up can enjoy them. I was about ten when I first read a few of the Father Brown detective stories; I loved them, and in the next few years managed to find and read all of them. Since growing up I’ve read them again many times, always with the greatest pleasure. They are the best short detective stories I know; though I liked Sherlock Holmes when I was young, I liked Father Brown much better, and even more so now.

Chesterton is a wonderful writer, with a vivid sense of atmosphere, a great gift for description, a love of paradox, and a wit as sharp and delightful as G. B. Shaw’s. But the stories are much more than first-rate entertainment. They are not just about crime but about human nature.

Father Brown, the short, dumpy, commonplace-looking English priest, is like Holmes a very clever man, but also much wiser, more understanding, more compassionate. These qualities, more than his sharp eye for clues, enable him to solve the crimes he solves. He understands the mixtures of weakness and temptation that lead people to steal and kill.

The Best of Father Brown is a set of four books (The Incredulity of Father Brown, The Innocence of Father Brown, The Secret of Father Brown,

The Wisdom of Father Brown.) We will sell them as a set only, because we can't get them any other way. You should probably read them in order; to a slight degree later stories depend on knowing the earlier ones. Good books for all ages.

The Best Of Saki (\$2.65 + post). Saki was the pen name of the British writer H. H. Munro, who was killed in World War I. He wrote one quite good novel, but mostly very short stories, ironic, sometimes grim, but always witty. This is a good collection of the best of them, including the famous "The Open Window," and is the only volume of his works now in print in this country. Anyone over twelve or so should enjoy these stories immensely.

The Palm Wine Drinkard, by Amos Tutuola (\$2.20 + post). This is an old favorite of mine, which I discovered when it was first published in the early 50s. I had feared that it might long since have gone out of print, and was delighted to find it still on hand.

Tutuola is a Nigerian who had only six years of schooling, was later trained as a blacksmith, and, until he wrote this book, spent all his adult life doing manual work. At the age of 32 he wrote this extraordinary story, a mixture of fantasy, ghost story, and tale of adventure. The nearest thing I can compare it to is *The Arabian Nights*, for its great richness of invention. Like *The Arabian Nights*, it clearly comes from a culture in which people liked to spend many hours hearing someone tell a good story, and admired and honored those who could tell them best. But *The Palm Wine Drinkard* is as profoundly West African and pagan as *The Arabian Nights* was Middle Eastern and Islamic.

A passage to give you the flavor of the book:

But when it was night we sat down under a tree and laid down our loads; we were sitting down and sleeping under trees whenever it was night as a shelter. As we sat down under this tree and were thinking about that night's danger, there we saw a "Spirit of Prey," he was big as hippopotamus, but he was walking upright as a human-being; his both legs had two feet and tripled his body, his head was just like a lion's head and every part of his body was covered with hard scales, each of these scales was the same in size as a shovel or hoe, and all curved towards his body. If this "Spirit of Prey" wanted to catch his prey, he would simply be looking at it and stand in one place, he was not chasing his prey about, and when he focused the prey well, then he

would close his large eyes, but before he would open his eyes, his prey would be already dead and drag itself to him at the place that he stood. When this “Spirit of Prey” came nearer to the place where we slept on that night, he stood at about 80 yards away from us, and looked at us with his eyes which brought out a floodlight like mercury in colour.

I introduced this book to my ninth grade students in Colorado, and most of them loved it. I think most people of that age or older will feel the same.

The Black Arrow, by Robert Louis Stevenson (\$1.15 + postage). When I was about ten (and a good reader) this was perhaps my favorite of all books. I must have read it a dozen times during that year. Then I put it aside, and never read it again until just a few weeks ago. Late one evening, just before going to bed, I thought I would take a quick look at the first chapter, to see how it began.

Next thing I knew it was 3 a.m. and I had read the whole book.

It is a great tale, set in England during the Wars of the Roses, of treachery and loyalty, pursuit and escape, revenge, intrigue, and war. It is also, in small part, a very moving love story. At one point the hero, facing what looks like sure death, makes a declaration of love to the heroine that is hard to read with dry eye. Older readers may even envy them a little; it is easy to believe that only death will part them.

As in *Treasure Island*, even the villains are real people, worthy opponents, with many real virtues along with their vices. A wonderful book. I will read it again soon.

Otto of the Silver Hand, by Howard Pyle (\$2.50 + post). Another exciting and moving story set in the middle Ages, this time Germany. Otto is the only child of a fierce and cruel robber baron, feuding to the death with another baron much like himself. How the boy becomes caught up in this feud, and escapes it, and finally becomes the means of ending it, is the story of this book. Like *The Black Arrow*, it is full of violence, but also courage, loyalty, and kindness; in the end, much more moral and hopeful than most modern fiction. Beautiful black-and-white illustrations by the author.

Bedtime for Frances, by Russell and Lillian Hoban (\$1.75 + post). This has long been one of my very favorite picture books for young children. Frances is a little badger. Like other little children, she doesn't like going to

bed at night or sleeping alone in her room, and finds all kinds of excuses to go back and bother her parents. Eventually they persuade her to go back to sleep. The illustrations, by Garth Williams, are absolutely charming, enough to make you want to hug the next badger you meet (which would not be a good idea).

The Mysterious Tadpole, by Stephen Kellogg (\$2.25 + post). A delightful picture book for young readers. Louis's uncle in Scotland sends him a birthday gift, a tadpole, for his nature collection. Only it turns out not to be a tadpole. What it turns out to be instead, and what Louis does about it, is the subject of this delightful book. The illustrations will please the children and make grown-ups laugh—Stephen Kellogg has put many little private jokes into them.

Underground, by David Macaulay (\$9.85 + post). I don't remember when a book has told me so many things I didn't know, but had always wondered about. It is about what lies under the ground in our cities—foundations of buildings, subways, sewers, water pipes, steam pipes, gas pipes, electric cables, manholes. What are they for, how do they get there? Macaulay has illustrated the book with large fascinating pen-and-ink illustrations, with which he can do what no photograph could do—show us what we would see below street level if the earth itself were transparent. In some of these drawings we are actually underground, looking-up past the foundations of the buildings, through the sidewalks, and up into the sky. A very beautiful as well as very informative book, as much fun for adults as children.

Castle, by David Macaulay (\$9.85 + post). The form of the book is the same as *Underground*, a short text with many beautiful illustrations. Here Macaulay shows us, from the very beginning in an open field, and in the greatest detail, exactly how people built the castles of the middle Ages, and why they built them that way, and how they used them. It is full of the kind of detail about daily life and work that most history books leave out. Fascinating for all ages.

Charlotte's Web, by E. B. White (\$1 .75 + post). The funny and happy story about an eight-year-old girl, her pet pig Wilbur (a runt whom she saved from being killed), and Charlotte the spider who makes the pig famous. A reader who works in school libraries tells us that over the years, this book has had the steadiest circulation of any on the shelves. Lovely pencil illustrations, again by Garth Williams.

The Secret Garden, by Frances Hodgson Burnett (\$1.60 + post). This may be the best-known and best-loved of Frances H. Burnett's children's books. Chapter one begins, "When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable-looking child ever seen. It was true, too." But slowly, the cheerful Yorkshire characters who surround her, and the coming of spring to the mysterious secret garden, begin to soften Mary and show her new ways of dealing with the world. By the end she even manages to help someone un-happier than she had been.

In some ways this book resembles *Understood Betsy*: a "difficult" child moves to a new place and learns to take care of herself and be happy. (However, Betsy was merely timid, not cross.) I think I liked these books so much when I was younger because I could identify with those negative emotions—anger, loneliness, fear, embarrassment—which most children's books don't even admit exist. Furthermore, the main characters find that they aren't (and by extension, I found I wasn't) doomed forever to feel so awful, that there are ways to perceive and respond that are pleasanter and more effective.—DR

Connie's New Eyes, by Bernard Wolf (\$1.15 + post). A true story about a young blind woman and her Seeing Eye dog. The story begins with

Blythe, a golden retriever, being brought as a tiny puppy to the fifteen-year-old who will bring it up and train it for a year. Then we follow Blythe to the Seeing Eye school, where she meets Connie, her blind mistress. The two begin their training, learning how to work as a team, until they are ready to live and work in the world. A lovely story, not just about a woman and a dog, but about human courage, kindness, and resourcefulness. The many black-and-white photos will melt the hearts of dog-lovers.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and through the Looking Glass, by Lewis Carroll (\$1 .75 + post). It's been many years since I read *Alice*, and I'm glad to find that I enjoy it as much as ever—perhaps a little more, because I understand more of what Carroll put in it. When I first read it, as a small child, I enjoyed it for its adventure, for its foolish nonsense, and for its wonderful poetry—when I was grown up, and had not read *Alice* for many years, I found one day to my surprise that "The Walrus And The Carpenter" had stuck in my memory and could be coaxed to surface, a verse or two at a time. I later saw that Carroll (really the Rev. Dodgson), who as a

mathematician was concerned with precise meanings of words, put into his book a lot of thought and argument about what words really mean—which is very interesting to many children.

Knowing that Dodgson was very sentimental about little girls, I feared I might find on re-reading the book that Alice was a wishy-washy little heroine. Not a bit of it; though only seven, she is cool, collected, and brave, and though always polite, does not let herself be pushed around by the strange and rather quarrelsome characters among whom she finds herself. She cries a Pool of Tears when, early in the story, she thinks she is trapped for life in a narrow corridor, but then, who wouldn't? After that, wherever she is, she is very much in control of the situation. A fine old tale. This edition has all the original Tenniel pen-and-ink illustrations, which are for me an indispensable part of the story.

Latest Arrivals

These additions to our book list have just come in; we'll review them in the next issue. *Five Children and It*, by E. Nesbit, \$1.35. *Pippi Longstocking*, by Astrid Lindgren, \$1.75. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis, \$1.75. *Winnie-The-Pooh*, by A. A. Milne, \$1.15. *The Merry Adventures Of Robin Hood*, by Howard Pyle, \$3.60. *Physics Experiments for Children*, by Muriel Mandell, \$1.80. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, by Walter M. Miller, Jr, \$2.25.

Friendly School Districts

Last issue, we began printing a list of school districts that are willingly and happily cooperating with home schoolers, and who are willing to be listed in GWS as doing so. We will run this list in each issue just before the Directory.

One reason for such a list: I want to encourage and reassure school officials who may be hesitant about approving home schooling, to let them know that there are other districts enjoying good relationships with their home schooling families. Also, families who are willing to move to escape a difficult situation with school officials would have at least some ideas about where to go.

We will only list these school districts under the following conditions:

1) The family has to be not just satisfied but *pleased* with the cooperation the schools are giving to their home schooling efforts. 2) The schools themselves have to be pleased with the relationship with the family. 3) The family has to be happy with the idea of asking the schools whether they want to be included in this list. If they feel that listing the schools, or asking the schools if they want to be listed, may endanger their good present relationship, then they shouldn't ask. 4) The schools themselves have to be happy about being included in the list. If they are uneasy about it, or fear that it may get them in trouble with someone, we'd rather not subject them to that risk.

So—if your district is cooperating with your home schooling, and you would like them to be on this list, ask them, and let us know if they say to go ahead.

By the way, we would also like to hear from schools that would *like* to help home schooling families, but have not been able to do so because no families have yet asked them.

CA—San Juan Ridge Union School District, 18847 Tyler Foote Rd, Nevada City 95959; Marilyn DeVore, Administrator.

MA—Rockland Public Schools, Rockland 02370; Supt. John W. Rogers.

Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257; Director of Guidance, Paul Shafiroff.

VT—Woodbury School, Woodbury; Marilyn Hill, Principal.

Editor—John Holt
Managing Editor—Peg Durkee
Associate Editor—Donna Richoux

Growing Without Schooling 15

July 1980

Lots of news this month. First of all, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Kentucky Supreme Court ruling that the state could not impose regulations about curricula, teacher certification, etc. on private schools. Details this issue.

The July issue of *Mother Earth News*, which will be in their subscribers' hands or on newsstands by the time you read this, has a long interview with me about homeschooling. I saw the copy, and Pat Stone, who interviewed me and prepared and edited the transcript, has done a great job. This is by far the best and most complete article that has yet appeared about our work. I hope you will tell as many people as possible about it—or better yet, show it to them. For those who don't receive *Mother Earth News* or can't find it, we are selling individual copies of that issue here for \$3.00.

Mother (as it's called) has about a million paid subscribers, as well as large newsstand sales. Perhaps as many as two million people will read that issue. Since *Mother* readers believe in and in many ways practice independence and self-reliance, we should find many new friends there.

Psychology Today will soon (probably July issue) have an article written by me about children and work. The article doesn't say much about homeschooling, but the brief biography of me mentions GWS and gives the address, so perhaps we will find some new friends there as well.

Donna and I, after a conference in Keene, N.H., dropped in on the annual meeting of the *National Conference of Alternative Community Schools*. We saw Ed Nagel, Peter Van Daam, and many other friends there, and learned some interesting things. Mr. Gonzalez, executive director of the Pacific Region Assoc. of Alternative Schools (119 Geary Blvd, San Francisco CA 94109), told us that a recent poll of Californians showed that 75% favor some kind of voucher plan. He says the only reason the voucher plan people didn't get enough signatures to put their proposition on the ballot was that they

simply didn't have enough people out with petitions. Next time, which will be soon, they won't make that mistake again, and he feels confident the proposal will get on the ballot and will pass.

Dr. Raymond Moore, author of *Better Late than Early* and *School Can Wait*, told me on the phone the other day that he has recently asked a number of organizations that have home study materials—Calvert, Home Study Institute, U. of Nebraska, U. of Missouri, etc.—how many people are using their materials. On the basis of their replies, he estimates that the number of families using some kind of elementary or secondary home study materials is more than a quarter of a million! Of course, probably not many of these have taken their children out of school altogether. But it is still an impressive and encouraging figure.

Nancy Plent of N.J. will be offering a home-schooling workshop in Addison, N.Y., at the Homesteaders' Festival, July 23–27, organized by Sherrie & Norm Lee, who publish *Homesteaders' News* (see N.Y. Dir.)

Thanks to the more than thirty volunteers who are helping us type names and addresses from letters we've received since the *Phil Donahue Show*. One volunteer, Dana Purser of Charlotte, NC, is 11 years old and taught herself to type only a couple of months ago. (She says, "I have never been to school a day in my life, and don't want to, ever.")

We now have over 100 titles on our booklist. Those of you who have seen our little office may wonder where we put all those books. Well, they are everywhere. The big question is, where will we put the next 100? A year from now we should have that many more. You can get our latest list at any time by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope.

—John Holt

Coming Lectures

Sept. 16, 1980: Rio Grande College, Rio Grande OH 45674; 8 p.m.
Contact Doris Ross, Student Activities, (614) 245-5353.

On Nov. 21-22, I will be at a conference for educational writers in San Francisco, CA, sponsored by the Center for Independent Education. It will not be open to the public, but it could be a good opportunity for others in the area to arrange fee-paying engagements, before or after the conference.

From Barnstable Schools

From Jane Sheckells, Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction, Barnstable Public Schools, 230 South St, Hyannis MA 02601 (see “Good News from Cape Cod,” GWS #13):

We receive approximately one contact a month requesting homeschooling information. They appear to be equally divided between school departments and parents. School departments are concerned with how the Barnstable Schools district is handling requests for such home learning opportunities since they have heard we are cooperating in such a situation. Parents who are in touch with us are ones interested in finding out more about homeschooling; we have Elaine Mahoney’s permission to put them in touch with her.

As a school department, we feel that homeschooling is indeed a two way street; we are gaining information and insights as are the parents and children involved. We respect the honesty and integrity of Mrs. Mahoney as she is searching for what she feels is the best learning opportunities for her two girls. In turn she is most cooperative and willing to discuss with us concerns which we raise. Certainly better attitudes and relationships evolve as parents and schools work in cooperation, with our children being the beneficiaries of such endeavors. The Barnstable Schools district attempts to cooperate with parents in many, many ways; homeschooling is just one specific way.

Young Writers Wanted

Pat Stone, who did the “Plowboy” interview with me, writes from Mother Earth News (PO Box 70, Hendersonville NC 28739):

Being a kid-interested person, I’ve been wanting to make sure *Mother Earth News* continues to run articles aimed towards children (or parents). Generally, we’ve been doing things you can make for your youngster to play with, and those pieces do seem to go over well. What I’d like to do now is see if we can build up some pieces written by children for children. They’d have to be of a practical how-to nature (like the rest of the mag) but could cover things you can make to play with nature or outdoor projects a youngster could do and might be interested in doing perhaps a story of a youth’s livestock raising experiences (and profits)?

I figure that you probably have access to a select group of youngsters who would be most likely to be interested in and capable of this. So if you’re interested in promoting this effort, how about giving it a good plug in GWS as an idea we want to try and telling any kids who think they may have a good idea for such a piece to write me a letter telling me exactly what they’d want to write about (giving me enough details or illustrations so I can make a guess at whether or not to encourage them). I’ll give them feedback, writing guidelines, and we’ll see what happens.

Learning On Tour

From a reader:

As a certified primary teacher (currently on leave from my job) I hold a job teaching an eight-year-old who spends most of her time traveling with her parents. She attended school only three days in October, but, according to current reports from her teachers, is doing a fine job of keeping up with the rest of her third grade class. Her father is a recording star who takes his family with him from city to city on tour, coming home approximately once a week, during which time I work with his daughter.

An Unschooling Family

From Rosalie Megli (IL):

I find GWS extremely helpful in living and growing with my children, ages 10, 12, 14, out of school for over a year now. Because unschoolers are choosing so many modes of living, I am made aware of many avenues of living/growing that I might otherwise fail to consider.

We expected to carry out a program of “academics” and presented a comprehensive educational plan to our Regional Superintendent, which gained approval. Though in the plan we stated that we would follow a loosely structured schedule and study largely areas of interest to the children, we did list many textbooks we have and gave the impression we would cover basics as defined by public schools, which we in fact planned to do. I was unprepared for my children’s lack of cooperation in my plans for them. They resist being taught and do not like to have activities turned into “learning experiences.” My 12 year old is teaching herself to play the piano and I have hindered her by offering help when it wasn’t asked for. Now that I have learned to leave her alone, she occasionally asks for help figuring out a rough spot. I am slowly developing trust in the children’s ability to choose for themselves how to conduct their lives. After all, one cannot separate living and being from learning, so “education” takes place every day of our lives.

It came to me recently that we are no longer homeschoolers, but unschoolers. Not only are we not trying to duplicate a school education, we are not interested in education per se, at all. We are interested in finding significance in our lives each day, in setting goals and working toward them, in developing ways to live responsibly in our world.

Our ten year old said, “No one can say I haven’t learned lots this year; my head’s always getting full of stuff!” He then enumerated some of his recent involvements: helping a friend in his produce store; traveling south for the first time with that same friend; doing farm chores; gardening; helping build our own solar house; accompanying his father on trips to haul food, a family business; going on weekly trips to the library; reading many books. I am confident that all my children are preparing themselves adequately to live meaningful lives in the future, and more importantly, they are living meaningfully now.

I appreciate the low cost of books offered by Holt Associates. They are to find their way into homes of many of our friends and relatives this year as gifts.

We hope many other readers will follow this good example. Buying our books to give to friends gives pleasure to the friends, helps us, and helps keep good books alive. Many of the books that are now on our list, or that I plan to add, are not even in any of the biggest bookstores here. Good books are only going to be kept alive by the people who know and love them, which is one reason I like being, even in a very small way, in the book business.

Live-In Teenagers

From Sandy Sapello (NJ):

Several people have written you with the problem of what to do with their young child at home—especially single parents. I found a solution to this problem which might help some of these people. I advertised in the newspaper for a live-in babysitter and I now have two teenage (19) girls living with me. I have been very lucky that they get along very well with the children and with me and they are both trustworthy (although I find most people can be when treated with respect). One girl is working and pays for her room and board; the other just had a baby boy and she babysits for me for her room and board. It solved my problem also of how to keep a house that was much too large and expensive just for my two boys (who did not want to move) and me. It has had many side benefits and few real problems.

Underground

A reader writes:

How about an “underground” of interested families who may take a child to live with them while the “heat’s on”? The family could say to trouble-making authorities, “Our child doesn’t live with us.” If pressed, then say, “He/she lives with his/her aunt.” I actually lived with my grandparents for ten years and my parents were never even asked where I was, even at the time my parents were enrolling my brother and sister in the local school.

To make this arrangement easy for the child, unschooling families should know each other (by meetings, visits, phone calls) and become friends. In our case, we have become friends with a nearby unschooling family whom we met through the *GWS Directory*.

Helpful Prof in Action

From the bulletin of the University of Pittsburgh School of Education, Pittsburgh PA 15260:

Dr. David Campbell, associate professor in Foundations of Education, has been acting as consultant in the Pittsburgh area to the alternative program started approximately two years ago by the noted educator and author, John Holt.

In spite of compulsory school attendance laws, parents in many areas throughout the country are fighting in courts and winning the right to teach their children at home." I get two to three inquiries a week from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia," said Campbell. He has already advised some 20 sets of parents regarding the alternative home study program. Most programs range from kindergarten through sixth grade.

At the parents' request, Campbell sets up a curriculum that will meet state requirements, or evaluates a home study plan. The curricula are prepared, according to Campbell, in line with Pennsylvania guidelines for teaching in private elementary schools. Many school districts have accepted Campbell's suggestion that home study students keep a portfolio of all their work to be used for evaluation rather than being given standardized tests.

Dr. Campbell has given court testimony as to the validity of curricula and at times has acted as evaluator. He testified in the precedent setting Amherst, Mass. case which allowed home study with the school's right to examine the program.

At Home in Illinois

Valerie Hilligan (IL) writes: I want to tell you a little about our motivation for teaching three of our four children at home. We came to the decision painfully after much soul-searching and research (your books were one source) and viewing of the classrooms our children attended last year. We had discussions with administrators in which we candidly expressed our views as to the unreasonable and destructive pressures the teachers were laying upon the students. Finally we saw that, although sympathetic, the superintendent either could not or would not control the actions of his teachers regarding excessive work loads put upon first and second graders, humiliation and punishment for busywork incompletes and of course the general atmosphere of impatience and intolerance in the classroom.

My husband then wrote the superintendent a rather official but brief letter stating that the children were hereby withdrawn and would be taught at home by us according to our views. Simultaneously, I called the children's principal and said the same thing. The superintendent then wrote us back assigning a teacher/liaison between us and promising us any assistance he could offer. I should say that my husband's letter had prudently asked for their assistance in materials, though we rarely use them up to this point. The liaison person has only been out to the house two or three times in a year and is very non-pressuring. At her request, we submitted a two-page report on our goals for the children and current evaluation of their progress, which she keeps on file should legal problems arise. When the children had been out of school only three months I refused to have them take standardized tests in spite of the liaison's strong suggestion. She did not force the issue. In all, our relationship with the superintendent's office is cordial though a bit uneasy on both sides. I believe we are the only ones doing this in the district and I suspect he is cooperating quietly to avoid publicity. I doubt he would like to be known for this. An influence and inspiration to me was and is the work of Roy Masters of *The Foundation of Human Understanding*. I know very well that if I hadn't begun his twice daily meditation technique five years ago, I would not today have the inner strength to deal with my own and others' conditioning which screams so insistently that the status quo must be right because everybody does it. His meditation and teaching also was the prime

thrust in helping me realize the great harm my own “well motivated” (I thought) impatient ambitions were doing to my children’s characters, not to mention their happiness.

The children (13, 9, and 7) are literally becoming smarter, funnier, happier and healthier before our eyes since they left school. They are showing interests and initiatives we never knew they had. When at school they came home so tired, drained and upset, all they could do was fight together or conk out in front of the TV. The first year hasn’t been easy, however. And I would counsel any parent taking this on to seriously consider the state of his/her own equilibrium and the depth of his patience. Non-pressuring but attentive, loving patience is the number one prerequisite for educating one’s own or anyone’s children. I feel this is the essential quality most lacking in the teachers and parents I meet. Of course, this is a quality we all need to improve upon. I don’t know of any way to do that except to learn to be still and calmly look inside oneself regularly, i.e., Masters’ meditation.

My oldest daughter still goes to school, 8th grade. She is handling the pressures from both teachers and peers nicely and so is gaining from the varied experience this school offers. I don’t hesitate to step in when she seems to be overwhelmed. She knows that and understands that she cannot blindly conform to teacher or friend just because others do it. She reads your books on her own initiative, with great interest and indignation at recognizing her own and other children’s outrageous predicaments under the guise of institutionalized “learning.”

Left Out

A parent wrote that her unschooled child who loves home study feels somewhat left out in spite of going to Sunday school, choir, piano lessons, soccer, swimming, theatre group, etc. I wrote in reply:

Homeschooled children are certainly, by definition, out of the main stream of their culture, no two ways about it. This will still be true a generation from now, even if my prediction that 10% of children will be home schooled comes true.

I can see how your child would feel left out, but I do want to say that from the age of 11 I felt left out, and never more so than when I was in school. I think that for most children in our society the experience of growing up is an experience of being left out, partly because of our worship of beauty, wealth, power, athletic skill, etc.

Being an outsider was somewhat tough on me during my growing up, and I think I would have been better off if I had felt, and been, somewhat less left out than I was. But it gave me the independence and moral courage I needed to do things in my adult life that most people weren't doing, to follow work that seemed important.

My point, then, is not only that children would not escape the feeling of being left out even if they went to school, but that if children operate, as yours seem to, from a base of love and support, it doesn't do them any harm to feel a little unusual and may indeed prove to be an asset.

I think that many of the children at the Ny Lille Skole (see *Instead of Education*) feel left out some or much of the time. That school, or club, also had its leaders and its followers, its stars and its minor part players, its extroverts and introverts. The school did not cure the ordinary and difficult problems of growing up and getting a sense of one's own identity and worth. All we could say is that it didn't make this difficult problem any worse. I would say the same of unschooling. It isn't and can't be a solution for many of the problems of being young, or growing up in an anxious and confused world, or in a society that generally has no use for young people. But at least homeschooling doesn't make those problems worse.

School Life

A mother recently called me from Bloomington, Indiana (seat of the main campus of the Indiana University) to say that she had just found out that the school her children attend, and several others, have for some years now had a policy of no recess. Her child leaves home at 7 a.m. and does not get back until after 4 p.m., totally exhausted. She tells me that she knows of other schools in the state, and other states, that have also cut out recess. It is apparently a growing trend in schools. So where and when in such schools does all that great social life take place?

If any *GWS* readers know of other schools that have cut out recess, please let us know.

The Boston Globe, 5/20/80:

Despite stereotypes depicting the homes of delinquent children as broken, uncaring places dominated by marital stress, child psychologists and police say there is another profile of the parents of delinquents. These are people who try to do everything right in raising their children, who care and get involved with schools and sports and still lose control. Bewildered, they too wind up in a court, asking that the child be barred from their home.

While there is no single cause or easy solution, parents and counselors interviewed by *The Globe* say the general pattern shows problems evolve slowly and explode all at once, generally triggered by drug abuse and peer pressure.

In Massachusetts courts during 1979, 1664 children were taken out of their homes and placed in foster care, drug rehabilitation programs or, in some cases, a series of temporary housing arrangements. The number of youths in the program now exceeds 2000.

A common thread among several parents who have gone through the wrenching process of legally removing their child from the family is the suddenness with which “bad things” happen.

One day it's a child who can be comforted and then, seemingly overnight, it's an adolescent who won't listen. The drift apart, parents say, is nearly imperceptible and clearly evident only when it may be too late.

Counselors say the children usually share certain similarities:

Their behavior gradually becomes dominated by alcohol or drug use.

They drift into anti-authority peer groups at school who become a self-proclaimed band of outlaws abusing drugs and alcohol.

Newsweek, 5/26/80:

The growing problem of cheating exists on almost every campus. —“Cheating on tests and papers . . . appears to involve a substantial minority of undergraduates,” observed a recent Carnegie Council report on higher education. In anonymous campus surveys, one-third of the students at Princeton, Dartmouth, Amherst and Johns Hopkins admitted to cheating at least once. Two-thirds of the undergraduates at Stanford confessed to plagiarizing papers or padding bibliographies.

Not content with old-fashioned methods, like peeking at a neighbor's paper, modern cheaters have adopted sophisticated techniques. One Maryland student jiggered the university's computer cards and changed the grades of 40 fraternity brothers from B to A. His brothers gave him a set of ski equipment as a thank-you gift—just before he was expelled. Companies selling pre-written term papers operate openly around many campuses and even advertise in student newspapers. “Many professors here have stopped assigning term papers because they can't tell who writes them,” says University of Missouri sociologist John Galliher.

Colleges are beginning to take serious steps to curb cheating. Johns Hopkins, Notre Dame and the University of Illinois have reluctantly abandoned their honor codes and monitor exams with proctors.

British Unschoolers

*From Resurgence, the magazine of the E. F. Schumacher Society in England
(Address: Ford House, Hartland, Bideford, Devon):*

Geoffrey and Iris Harrison, who quit the business world to live on a small-holding, were taken to court by Hereford and Worcester County Council for allegedly refusing to send their three children to school.

They have defied attendance orders served by the county council and on Jan. 14 pleaded not guilty at Great Witley magistrates' court to three charges of refusing to ensure the attendance at school of their daughter Andrea, 15, and their sons Grant, 14, and Newall, 10.

Magistrates were told by Mr. Roland Meighan (lecturer in education at Birmingham University and editor of two national educational magazines) in his evidence for Harrison that he had spent two days assessing the children at the family small holding and found they were being taught under a system where the priorities were instilling confidence, the ability to solve problems, arousing intellectual curiosity, imparting self reliance and the use of first-hand learning experience.

Earlier, Andrea Harrison told the court she had taught herself to read music and to play the violin to orchestral standard and hopes to become professional. She had also taught herself shorthand and touch typing.

However, the Harrisons were convicted by magistrates at Great Witley for failing to comply with school attendance orders in respect of three of their children. They were granted an absolute discharge.

Mrs. Harrison, who has been leading a campaign for the right to educate children without interference from the local authority, said she would appeal.

(From an interview with Mrs. Harrison:)

Wanda (the oldest daughter) is planning a trip alone to Denmark to see

the Peoples College. She will take her bicycle and possibly her tent. It is her intention to become a student at this college. Andrea has become a member of Ludlow Orchestra. She plans to go on to Dartington to study music when she is 18. Until recently she has run a small business from one of the buildings. She obtained organic whole wheat from a neighbor friend, made bread and sold it from her little shop, but has now found that the demands were too great on her energy and time for her to do justice to her musical study. Some days this can be in the region of 8 to 10 hours of intensive study.

Grant—well, he is a tremendous person. He has a small business running 100 head of poultry, selling the eggs to callers who come to his egg-grading room. Surplus cocks, etc., he will calculate to the last pence for their rearing costs and add his percentage for his time, and these are sold to the house. He has 10 different pure breeds. He experiments with cross breeding. He is in need of a metal turning lathe which we will help him obtain. He wants to make parts for the clocks which he mends, make a steam engine, parts for spinning wheels, etc. Already he has shown that he has tremendous aptitude in wood turning.

Newall—the best way I can explain where he is, is from a question made by him to me last November. He asked me to help him find out who the monarch and Prime Minister were at the time of Guy Fawkes as he wanted to know what had inspired Guy Fawkes to try and destroy the Houses of Parliament. He felt that he could understand it more if he knew what kind of people were governing at that time.

I had been teaching a gypsy girl to read by tape recorder and she phoned to say “Me Dad has got some second-hand wood block flooring.” The children and Geoff went to see this. It consisted of two floors, both used as car show rooms. They brought some of the wood blocks back with them but previously had measured the area of flooring to be lifted. They weighed a wood block and set about working out the total number that would be lifted, then found the total weight. We then owned an old lorry with a certain capacity both for weight and height. The children worked out how many blocks per load could be carried, the number of trips, etc., and also the area of storage

space needed in the barn. They then calculated how many we would need for our own use and then the price that they would have to sell the remainder in order to cover the total cost and give themselves something for their work. I would like to stress that although I did maths at grammar school I was totally out of my depth to do these calculations. The whole project worked out to their calculations. They have not been withdrawn from the world. They are very aware of the problems of our world today and realise that it is the responsibility of each one of us to create meaningful lives not dependent upon old ideals.

On one occasion Grant was assessed by the educational psychiatrist. He was then 10. Although he has had a great desire to learn to read and write, because of inherited tendencies this has been a very slow, but on the other hand sure, procedure. Because of this he was allocated to an Educational Sub-normal School. We did not take up this offer. At the time of this assessment Grant showed his ability to be far from sub-normal. He had taken clocks apart when a very small boy and these had been put into a box. At 10 years old he went off to a room alone and reassembled three clocks, two chiming, which all worked by the end of that day.

Learning From Life

A former teacher writes:

We live in a house with other single parents and children, so I've had a chance to experience children "in the wild" and see what happens then. A lot, and it's very sustaining to me that this is so. I've had a much more exciting and satisfying experience living with children than I ever had in any school setting. It works. It really works! I love it. Very clear to me now that Life is the only teacher we really need, and all the people, circumstances, events, accidents, places, etc. that Life brings our way. And most of the children I know are more open to what their life teaches, what their genuine needs are, and what other children need too, than most of the adults I know. Maybe that's why they are locked up in such deadening environments.

Two Year Old At Work

From the Boston Herald, 8/25/79:

The chair at Silverglate, Shapiro, and Gertner is such a departure from the old leather lounge that it makes you wonder what kind of law gets practiced in these Broad Street offices. It's blond, and stepped to two levels, so that someone very, very small can sit on the upper level and rest his feet on what will someday be the seat.

And under a small oak desk is a toy box, filled with stuffed animals, blocks and the other usual paraphernalia that you would find in a . . . law office?

The chair belongs to Mr. Silverglate: Isaac Dorfman Silverglate, ½ years old who comes to work every Friday with his father from their Cambridge home.

When Harvey Silverglate and his wife, photographer Elsa Dorfman, decided to have a child, they also decided they would share their time with him. Silverglate took four months off when Isaac was born and soon afterward began carrying the infant, in his little sleeping "pouch," to the office. "It was easier then," he recalled.

Ms. Dorfman (author of *Elsa's Housebook*, published in Boston by David R. Godine) who works mainly at home, cares for Isaac the other four week days, but this summer she has spent more time in her darkroom and Isaac has been coming to work with Dad for as much as a whole week at a time. The couple has hired a male babysitter ("He drives a cab, takes courses, and is writing a novel, too," Silverglate said) to care for Isaac for three hours every morning. And sometimes their teen-age babysitter from Cambridge, Kelly Williams, will come to the office with Isaac.

But most of the time, the father-son partners go it alone, and that includes changing diapers.

Silverglate's office is notably different from his partners. When the 13-person law firm moved to an office on Broad Street in February,

they had a whole floor with which to work. Silverglate hired Fort Hill Contractors, a combination architectural firm and commune in Roxbury, to design his office. A long skinny oak desk runs almost the whole length of one wall. Part of it is cut so that it is even narrower, and this is Isaac's desk. The desk is divided by only a large stack of papers, but Silverglate said that Isaac has never crossed over this "wall" and disturbed anything on his side of the desk.

Like Dad, Isaac has his own phone, a Sesame Street model. Crayons fill Isaac's pencil holder and toys stack up in the open shelves under the desk. Beside it is a blackboard with plenty of chalk. A stack of old IBM copy rolls, some with and without paper, provide Isaac with cubbyholes, bracelets or telescopes according to his mood. *Babar and His Travels* is lined up next to West's *Federal Annual Rules Handbook*.

Isaac, who has no typewriter, uses his father's, a monstrous electric hulk on a rolling table that can block off another section of the office. In this section is a big, comfortable, Army green, cotton couch—Isaac's napping place. Isaac has never caused the typewriter any harm; in fact, the only visible sign that the child has overstepped his boundaries is the lawyer's daily calendar, which has been stamped "Important" on many pages. Isaac likes rubber stamps.

Isaac looks forward to his "work" days, packing his tote bag eagerly and getting up extra early to be ready. Silverglate enjoys the company, although his own business life has changed considerably.

"I used to work 18-hour days for sometimes seven days at a time," he said. "Now, I take more cases that involve more research outside the courtroom, more writing and less trial work. Isaac has come to court with me only once, and that was for a 15- minute period."

"I'm glad we had a child later in life. If I'd had a young child around when I was just starting a law practice, it would have been much more difficult," Silverglate said. "You need a very flexible life to do what we're doing. The world isn't set up for it."

"I don't think Americans like children as much as other cultures do.

They certainly make fewer allowances for them during the work day. I do notice, though, on the subway now, people here and there who look like they're going to work with a child in tow. I hope it changes that way."

Jean Liedloff Writes

Carolyn Dixon (AK), the reader who first told me about The Continuum Concept, wrote to its author, Jean Liedloff, and sent me a copy of Ms. Liedloff's reply. Part of it reads:

Since the book first appeared in 1975, an increasing number of parents have used it, not, I hope, as yet another guide to child care by yet another "expert," but as a way of finding and recognizing their own innate expertise and gaining confidence through experience of it.

I have no idea, even approximately, of the numbers of continuum babies, as they tend to be called, that there are in the Commonwealth market area which includes the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and some other countries. But I have had enough reports from individuals and groups to know that, for example, every baby who has been slept with until it is ready to leave voluntarily, and carried about all the time until it begins to crawl, and even some who have not been in arms the whole time, but far more than "normal" babies, are all distinguished by a complete lack of aggressive behavior. Most of them have never screamed and their body tone is far softer than their deprived counterparts. They also do not suffer from "colic," which is a word for acute indigestion caused by stress, but considered normal, as I'm sure you know.

Naturally, some parents have understood the principles better than others and some have been better able because of their own backgrounds to identify and adopt an attitude of respect toward their own continuum sense. Two difficulties have been encountered by many parents because, I think, I did not emphasize those aspects strongly enough.

The most prevalent mistake has been child-centering, giving the child the impression that he is the constant center of attention of his caretaker and/or others. This comes about when people regard baby care as a full time occupation. It is at this time that children get the feeling of how things are and if "how things are" is misrepresented, they will be at a disadvantage, perhaps for the rest of their lives. A caretaker who is busy doing some other activity like working, playing, cleaning, shopping, gardening, or anything else, but in the company of others who are suitable companions for her intellectual age group, should be carrying the baby with her with a minimum

of attention, which is all that is needed when it is done right.

The other problem I've seen a lot is insufficient discharging of the baby's excess energy because the man, woman, or child who is carrying him is not active enough. It has become clearer than ever that the caretaker shares an energy field with the baby, and in civilized life a great many of us are not physically active enough to keep our own and a baby's energy at a comfortable level, so babies "fuss," flex their muscles and make signals, by bouncing and waving their arms, that they want more action. Once this is understood, many parents have quickly resolved the problem by dancing while holding the baby, giving the baby to the busiest person around, not the one who has nothing else to do, or simply running around with the baby when it signals for action or throwing it up in the air or rough-housing until it signals "all-clear."

In no case has anyone with one continuum baby ever been sorry or brought subsequent babies up in any other way, because problems notwithstanding, their children are incomparably more independent, happier, and healthier than non-continuum children.

Reactions To *Continuum*

Letters from two readers:

I was interested of late to read in *GWS* #13 your review of *The Continuum Concept*, (and also to learn of the availability of *Born to Love* and *The Facts of Life*), especially your comments about the profound significance of “the way we treat children, and above all babies.”

Many of us, at least those of us *GWS* readers in this city, do not have children old enough yet to be of age for compulsory public schooling, but we are looking ahead to the time when we will. What has happened to us is that we’ve seen unschooling as a natural (and perhaps inevitable?) outgrowth of an interest in the family, in natural childbirth and natural “mothering” (parenting), etc. Many of us have delivered our children at alternative birthing centers and/or at home, have breastfed our babies and toddlers, and have been strongly influenced by the type of child-rearing practices Liedloff describes.

One resource that may be of interest to other *GWS* readers (indeed, to anyone interested in children) is *Imprints*, PO Box 70625, Seattle WA 98107, Lynn Moin, president. *Imprints* is the review newsletter and catalogue of the Birth and Life Bookstore, Inc. The Bookstore is a service, only recently begun, but with a remarkable selection of the best books on the subjects of pregnancy, childbirth, childcare, breastfeeding, family living, and related subjects (e.g. parenthood, food and nutrition books for children, women and health, texts and reference books related to obstetrics, child growth and development).

I am excited to see you writing about *The Continuum Concept*. I care about how babies are born in this country. Because of dependence on the medical profession, so many babies, mothers, fathers, and families are torn violently from the normal, safe, everyday, miraculous birthing process. There is so much terrible brainwashing of people in the United States about birth.

I work with couples prenatally and attend their births at home. These people have taken the responsibility for their pregnancies and births. There is quiet, respect, privacy, and happiness at these births. Bonding takes place . . . These babies are connected with their mothers. The fathers are there. The babies are breastfed. Their siblings share in the birth or are there within

minutes.

I am a mother and wife and I am a self-educated (always in the process) lay midwife. I think home birth people are special. Many are also prime candidates for unschooling. It just naturally follows.

PS—My children, ages 5 and 2, really like coming to births with me.

Dealing With Hospitals

From a reader in New Jersey:

I recently learned of several organizations you may or may not know about, and I hope you will get the word out about them. These are organizations made up of parents and concerned health professionals to deal with the problem of children who must stay for any length of time in a hospital.

My son will undergo minor surgery in a few months (he's 15 months old) and I am currently in a process of requesting permission (you know that's how you have to phrase things sometimes when talking to institutions about one's rights) to stay with my son at all times when he is awake, including during the administration of anesthesia and going to him in the recovery room directly after surgery, so he will see me upon awakening. This may sound reasonable to you, but many hospitals do not permit it.

At Rainbow Babies' and Children's Hospital in Cleveland where Drs. Kennell and Klaus, authors of "Maternal-Infant Bonding" practice and have had influences, it is routine for parents to participate closely in this way, in fact, encouraged.

Many people whose children must go in the hospital are not aware that they can be in control to a large extent, if they prepare ahead of time—rather than be swept uncontrollably into a maze of bureaucratic snangles (that's a combination of "snare" and "tangle") by doctors, nurses, and other hospital personnel who often don't realize how terrifying the whole experience can be for the parents and the child.

I have written to the two organizations below in the hopes that they can help me—I have not heard from them yet:

Association for the Care of Children in Hospitals, 3615 Wisconsin Av NW, Washington DC 20016. Children in Hospitals, Inc, 31 Wilshire Park, Needham MA 02192.

Charity By Children

From New Age, May 1980:

CHILDREN'S CRUSADE—In Great Britain an appeal was made recently during a popular children "s TV program, *Blue Peter*, asking children to take unwanted toys and books to be sold at their local Oxfam charity shop and to spend their pocket money on items from the same shop in order to raise money for the Cambodian refugees.

Blue Peter had set the target for the appeal at 100,000 pounds (about \$220,000).

Great Britain's World Goodwill organization reports that the day after the appeal was made, Oxfam shops were crowded with children all intent on the same mission.

Within two days the children, by their own efforts, had raised 100,000 pounds. Within three weeks of the appeal, the children of England had raised 1,049,831 pounds for the starving Cambodians.

Appeal

From Janine Beichman in Japan (see Dir.):

I work as a volunteer “native speaker” at an informal library that is open once a week for 3 hours. Members of the library are Japanese elementary school children (age 5-12, as some are actually in kindergarten) who have lived in English-speaking countries and speak English fluently as well as Japanese. Most also read and write English. There are about 25 children in our library (there are 4 or 5 other such libraries in the Tokyo area, each with about the same number of kids). The idea behind the library is that if a child continues to read in English, their mastery of the language will continue to grow.

However, it is difficult and expensive for most Japanese people to obtain English books in Tokyo (public libraries have no children’s books in English). So, our library’s primary function is to lend books. Initial donations of books have been made by the British Council . . . but we need more.

Five Japanese women and three American and British ones work for the library (it gives us a terrific adult-child ratio’) but all of us are volunteer workers. The children pay a small membership fee—about \$10 a year—so there isn’t an awful lot of money for books after money for snacks, rental of a room (we use government facilities and rent is minimal) and various other costs are deducted.

So—if you know of any person or company that would donate storybooks, reading workbooks, or other books and materials, we’d be most grateful. They could be sent to my address and I would bring them to the library.

And, if you know of any kids who might want to exchange letters, I think some of our kids might be interested in that . . . According to the latest U.S. Postal Service information, the rate to send books overseas is relatively cheap: 59¢ for 1 lb, 81¢ for 2 lbs, \$1.25 for 4, \$1. 69 for 6, \$2.02 for 8, \$2.52 for 10, \$3.02 for 11 (limit).

“Whistle”

Nancy Raymer (OH), who writes the “Children at Home” column of OCEAN’s newsletter, printed this poem, Whistle, by her daughter Sarah (age 7):

The tongue
goes back
The lips make a kiss
blow easy
and the Whistle
comes out
I can Whistle
like a thistle
in the wind
I can Whistle
Like a bird
I can.

Jazz Whistling

I wrote in Never Too Late (available here, \$4. 50 + postage):

Sometime during my third year at school I began a new part of my musical life. One day, as I was whistling one of the many swing records I had learned by heart, the thought came to me, “Why not make up some jazz solos of your own?” I decided to try it. I may have thought it would be easy. It turned out not to be. The first results were terrible. I could whistle only a few notes of the simplest, most banal kind of blues. But I kept at it, and the solos slowly became better. They tended (and still tend) to stay within the basic metrical and harmonic pattern of blues and swing that I was used to: eight bars of solo in a given key, eight more bars, a variation of the first but in the same key, an eight-bar bridge passage in a different key, and then eight closing bars in the original key. Most jazz arrangements and solos, and most of the popular songs of the times, were in this pattern. The harmonic pattern, too, was simple, though I still don’t know enough musical theory to say what it was. But within those simple patterns the great musicians of the thirties did some wonderful things.

Inspired by them, my own jazz whistling became freer, more melodic and inventive. Some of the time it was still rather labored and predictable, but every now and then I would surprise myself. I would hear in my mind, or whistle soundlessly or even out loud, a solo so varied, unexpected and just all-around right that it was as if I had not “thought of it” at all, but it had been made somewhere else and just happened to come out through me. This sometimes happened when I had been listening to a lot of good jazz and swing and had been inspired by it. But it quite often happened when I had not been whistling jazz for some time, or even hearing it or thinking about it. It was as if the sub- or unconscious creative music-making part of my mind had been busy for some time making something good, and was now ready to show it to me.

One winter evening around 1948, when I had not heard any jazz or swing, live or recorded, in some time, I was going with my sister and her husband to a little night spot in Poughkeepsie. As we went in, a

jazz trio—piano, drums, and bass—were playing. Even though we could hardly hear them over the din of voices in the packed little room, I could tell they were good. Something in the lightness and crispness of their rhythm touched a musical button in me, and as we stood in the lobby taking off and checking coats, hats, boots, etc., and waiting for a table, I began to whistle a long solo that absolutely amazed me. To the critical mind inside me it seemed the best I had ever done, and a very good solo even by the standards of the music I listened to. Another voice inside was saying, “Holy Smoke! Where in the world is this coming from?” For two full choruses, sixty-four bars’ worth, the music poured out of me. Then it was over, and I could not remember a note of it. But it was a fine moment.

Family Economics

When we were growing up, one of the things my father used to say with real conviction was, “The most important thing in the world is the business of earning a living.” Except for that, money was never mentioned in our family. I didn’t know then, and don’t know to this day, how much my father earned, or what other income he may have had, or what taxes we paid, or what rent, or how much my schooling cost, or what our medical bills were, or insurance, or anything. I don’t remember that I was particularly curious about these matters, but even if I had been, I would never have dared to ask about them.

I now feel strongly that children should know, or be able to know, the facts about their families’ finances—how much money there is, how it is earned or otherwise received, and how it is spent or saved. Children are interested in these things. Money is one of the most mysterious and attractive parts of the adult world they live in and want to find out about. It is obviously important—the grown-ups talk about it all the time.

For another thing, the family finances, the economics of the family, are a small and simple version of the economics of the town, state, country, or world. The more you understand about the economics of your own family, the more you are likely to understand about the economics of larger places.

Also, family economics is a way of talking about numbers and arithmetic in a real context. Instead of learning to use numbers in the abstract, in a kind of vacuum, so that later (at least in theory) they can use them to think about something real, children can begin to think and talk right now about what is real, and as they do it learn to use numbers. Family economics will bring in such ideas as interest, percentage, loans, mortgages, installments, insurance, and so on, that children learning math in school would not meet for years. And in talking about money we can use different kinds of graphs—bar graphs or circle graphs, to show how income and expenses are divided up, or graphs of various quantities against time, to show how various expenses vary through the year (more heat in the winter), or from year to year.

Families with little money—certainly many families that read *GWS*—often find it hard to explain to their children why they don’t have or can’t have something they want. One family wrote that they were having a terrible time convincing their child that at that moment they couldn’t get him a ten-

speed bike. I suggested that they show him exactly how much money the family earned, what it had to spend money on, what it had to save money for, and let the child see for himself that the bicycle money wasn't there. They said they would. How this worked out, they never told me. At any rate, the child learned something worth knowing.

The Ny Lille Skole near Copenhagen (see *Instead of Education*) used to make money decisions in general meetings, at which all the children (aged 7 thru 14) had a vote. Even the youngest children took an active and informed part in these discussions. They soon learned that if you spend money for one thing you can't spend it on another, and so, learned to make serious choices. Though the average age of these children was not much over 10, I never heard that either the children or the teachers thought later that they had made any really bad choices.

As in everything else, some children will be much more interested in these money matters than others. If children are not interested, let it go, and just keep the information where they can get it if they want to. But some other children may even want, at least for a while, to keep the family books, records of all the money that comes in and goes out. Here again, I wouldn't turn such a project into a compulsory chore. Some quite young children might well start such a project, only to lose interest in it after a while. Let them drop it. Others would be willing and even eager to do the project over a long period of time. In that case, offer them even more responsibility, let them write checks and pay bills, balance the checkbook, and so on.

We might even introduce these children to simple double-entry bookkeeping. Knowing at least the basics of double-entry bookkeeping seems to me as valuable a life-skill as knowing how to type. One of the reasons why almost all small businesses fail, and why so many families make a mess of their own finances, is that they don't understand bookkeeping and the economic ideas behind it. Double-entry bookkeeping is a very good way to learn much more about economics—indeed, I think that any formal study of economics might well begin there. Aside from that, like skill in typing, it is a very valuable skill in the job market.

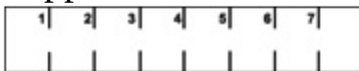
In later issues of *GWS* I will talk more about double-entry bookkeeping. Meanwhile, I will look for a good simple text about it. If any readers know of one, or a good book for children about economics, please let me know.

Simple Adding Machine

For about fifteen years now I have been saying to teachers that they would help their students more, and save themselves much time and trouble, if instead of correcting arithmetic papers (and any others where for each question there is only one right answer) they would give their students the answer sheets and let them correct their papers themselves. No teachers that I actually know of ever took this suggestion, which I now offer to home schoolers. With calculators so cheap, we don't even need answer sheets, for arithmetic at least. Just show children how to do problems on the calculator, and then let them check their own answers. Even better if they make up their own problems.

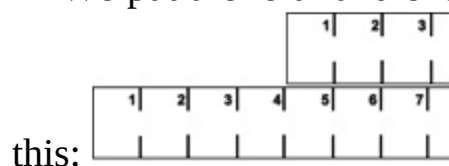
For addition and subtraction, we don't need anything even as fancy as a calculator. We can make for children, or show them how to make, a simple adding and subtracting "machine" out of two rulers, or even out of two pieces of paper marked off like rulers.

Suppose we have two rulers or pieces of paper like this:



Here's how we use them to add $4 + 3$.

We put the left hand end of one ruler against the 4 mark on the other, like



Then we look at the 3 mark on the second ruler, and we see that it is against the mark on the first ruler. This shows us that $4 + 3 = 7$. Though not all children might see this at first, it is clear that by using our rulers this way we have added a 4 unit length to a 3 unit length to make a unit length. If our rulers are long enough, we can do this with any two numbers.

Children using this cheap adding machine may soon notice some things that flash cards might never reveal to them. One would be that when, as in our figure, the left end of one ruler is against the 4 on the other, we can see just by looking at the ruler that

$$4 + 1 = 5$$

$$4 + 2 = 6$$

$$4 + 3 = 7$$

$$4 + 4 = 8 \text{ and so on.}$$

In other words, each time we increase by 1 the number we are adding to 4, our answer increases by 1. This may seem simple enough to those of us who know it. But it isn't simple to a lot of school-taught children, even those who "know their addition facts." Many of these children might know very well, for example, that $6 + 6 = 12$, but might have to struggle hard to "remember" what $6 + 7$ equaled. Plenty of them would get it wrong—I have seen it myself many times.

Anyway, the first time a child discovers that when you add 1 to one of two numbers that you are adding together, you make your answer 1 bigger, it is an exciting discovery, and no less important just because many people know it already. Later on the child might discover that when you add 2 to one of two numbers you are adding together, it makes your answer 2 bigger. More excitement. And the same is true for 3, or 4, and so on.

In algebra, we would write this discovery like this:

$$x + (y + a) = (x + y) + a$$

But I don't think I would tell this to a young child, unless s/he was already familiar with the idea that x or y could stand for any number. This, by the way, is probably an idea that most six-year-olds can grasp faster than most ninth graders—at least, ninth graders who have had eight years of school math. But I am going to save talk about Algebra for later articles.

If we use yardsticks (get them from hardware stores) or meter sticks, or simply make our paper or cardboard rules 40 or 50 units long, or longer, children may notice many more things, such as this sequence and others like it:

$$4 + 3 = 7$$

$$14 + 3 = 17$$

$$24 + 3 = 27$$

$$34 + 3 = 37 \text{ and so on.}$$

Again, I have known plenty of school taught children for whom $4 + 3$, $14 + 3$, $24 + 3$, $34 + 3$, etc. were completely different problems. They might say that $4 + 3 = 7$ and then turn around and say that $24 + 3 = 29$, or something even more ridiculous. This is what happens when people teach arithmetic as a pile of disconnected facts to be memorized. Children have no sense of the logic or order of numbers against which they can check their

memory, or which they can use if memory is uncertain. Let's not repeat the mistakes of the schools in our homes.

A Sensible School

Many parents of children who learned to read before they went to school have written that the schools and teachers were angered and threatened by this. Happily, there are some exceptions to this don't-let-your children-learn-to-read, it-will-only confuse-them rule. From Voorhees, NJ comes a school newsletter in which the superintendent, LeRoy Swoyer, gives this sensible advice:

Preschool children should be talked to, read to, listened to and their questions should be answered . . . Do not discourage spontaneous attempts at learning to read. It will not harm vision nor cause confusion later.

If children write spontaneously with non-standard spelling, encourage them by reading their stories and messages. It will not make standard spelling any more difficult for them to learn later.

Advice On Reading

Dean Schneider (NJ), who runs a “Kids School Literacy Project” in Newark, wrote about his experiences teaching reading:

This is a weird little article, but it will show you how to teach someone to read. You’ll need three books to supplement this outline: James Herndon “s *How To Survive in Your Native Land*, John Holt’s *How Children Learn*, and Herb Kohl’s *Reading How To*

Rather than write a scholarly, well-footnoted thesis on reading, I’ll outline how I teach reading and refer you as often as possible to specific spots in the above books—no sense in me rehashing what’s already been said better elsewhere. So, here goes:

1) I work with kids who are 6–13 years old, so I assume they have some prior knowledge of print. See Kohl, pp. 24–27; Holt, 83–84.

2) Beginning Reading: See Herndon, 143–144; Holt, 81–87. Whether in a classroom or in tutoring, I simply read with kids one-to-one. With beginners who are ready to get into books, I mostly just read to them—lots of Seuss, Berenstain, Eastman (books that have a few easy words per page). Gradually, kids begin to know these books and begin to focus on words, and become able to read all or parts of the books. Gradually, kids get into other books and just start reading more and more. When a child comes to an unknown word, I usually just tell her the word so she’ll keep going. But occasionally I’ll encourage her to figure it out for herself. I say things like “It’s the same as this word here,” or “It rhymes with CAT,” or “You know this part of it,” (such as GO in GOES), or “Skip it and see if you can figure it out later,” (through context), or “Take a guess” (kids often guess correctly when they see it’s OK to guess), or “Nope, try again” or “You’re close” or I’ll just say to skip the word altogether (there’s no need to get every word right). I say whatever seems appropriate, and I try not to say too much; I don’t want to detract from her just getting on with the story.

Some other, very minimal work may be done here, if necessary. See Kohl, 41–42, 47–48.

3) Readers with a little more experience: Later, when a reader has a large number of books he or she can read, you can do two main things:

—Continue the same minimal input as described above;

—Help the reader develop the skill of relating an unknown word to a known word in order to figure it out.

For example, if she doesn't know the word "cheat," she may know the word "eat" if you point it out; then she can figure out the whole word. I either cover parts of words with my finger to leave the known part showing, or I'll write the known part on paper and expand it till the whole word is figured out. More examples:

<u>Unknown word</u>	<u>Known parts</u>
bleacher	each – bleach
appear	ear – pear
traffic	af – traf

This should be done very quickly, and not become a formal exercise. In addition, see Kohl, 178 (#24).

4) Phonics: I believe phonics can be a useful tool in reading, but I don't make a big deal out of it. Most kids pick up a good sense of phonics simply by reading. On the occasions where some attention to phonics seems necessary, I've developed a simple, quick, direct way to give kids a good base in phonics. This is a variation on an idea in Kohl's *Reading, How To* (p. 54). I make up a chart of sounds like this:

ab	eb	ib	ob	ub
ac	ec	ic	oc	uc
ad	ed	id	od	ud
af	ef	if	of	uf

etc., etc., etc.—a vowel with a consonant.

I spend a few minutes a day working on these sounds, many of which are nonsense sounds. As the child gets good at saying these sounds, I show how these sounds make up lots of other words. For example, ac/back, en/ten, tent, tender; el/fell, elbow; il/pill; ef/left:" Despite the many exceptions to phonic rules, the few variations on the above list can be used to create thousands of words. A similar chart might be created for the "silent e" rule:

abe	ete	ile	ole	ule
ale	eke	ine	ope	une

But I stress that any phonics work, including the above and things like vowel combinations (house, jail, noise) and compound words (hot/dog, mail/man) is picked up pretty well through just reading. When phonics work does seem called for, the above stuff as well as quick games or Kohl, p. 178,

can help.

I don't think phonics should be done at all until kids are already reading fairly well. For example, if you have grade levels in your school, the whole first grade reading program should include little if any phonics; students should spend their time simply learning to read lots of books they like. I can teach kids everything they need to know about phonics in about ten hours total teaching time, so this is *a very minimal thing* despite all the fuss about it (and this whole page devoted to it!)

5) Other skills: If you think you have to work on “comprehension skills,” just read together as described in section 2. And just discuss the story as you go along; that's all there is to it. If a child's reading is choppy, or he or she is reading one word at a time with no rhythm, simply read to the child more often as a model of how to read with flow and expression. If he or she gets lost in the middle of a complicated sentence, re-read that sentence to model how it should be read. You don't even have to explain what you're doing; kids have a good ear and will pick up fluency in reading from a good model. And, even when children read in a monotone, they often do understand what they're reading.

I do very little questioning for comprehension; I've found that if children are reading without too much faltering, the chances are they are also understanding what's happening. If not, simply discuss things a little bit as you go along. I won't discuss test-taking skills here; I consider them to be a separate set of skills that should not be confused with real reading.

6) Summary: See Herndon, 143–144; Holt, 81–87. From experience, I know it's easier to teach someone how to read than it is to write an article on how easy it is to teach reading. What I've tried to do is give a sense of how I have taught children to read; I've tried to do this through this outline that refers you to the sources I owe the greatest debt to.

Kids learn to read by reading. There are a few ways an experienced reader can lend a helping hand; but there are also many ways to discourage and frustrate kids. Basically, if kids learn to use context and look for meaning, to relate unknown words to known words, to “sound out” words, to skip words rather than get hung up on them, and most of all to love reading, they will become good readers. And you will have offered the best thing a teacher can offer—the tools learners can use to teach themselves further. I can't emphasize enough the importance of what Herndon talks about (pages 143-

144).

In addition to everything I've said here, if you want your children to read well, have good books around, don't let standardized tests rule the way your child learns to read, and unplug the TV set!

Tutoring Drop-Outs

From Bob Sessions (IA):

I work with high school drop outs, the “bad kids” of their schools and communities.

Usually, contrary to how our program is done in other places, we encourage the youths to “shop around” in the job market for a while. The majority of our youths have chosen to upgrade their abilities—most of them have chosen to study for the high school equivalency (GED) degree, several of them are going to college, and many of them either are seeking on-the-job training or vocational school training.

Our experience with tutoring has been most striking. To a person, our clients have been failures in school. Initially, most of them are very uninterested in studying for the GED (not a fun process by any stretch of the imagination—very tedious review of grammar, basic math, science, etc.), and of course, most of them have not learned their “basics” in school. Typically, it takes from four to six weeks to tutor these “chronic failures “ to where they can pass the tests (which 1/3 of high school graduates would fail); four to six weeks of one-on-one, one hour per day, four days per week. That’s all! Sixteen to twenty-four hours of tutoring. Abilities which had seemed impossible after 9, 10, or 11 years of schooling usually are achieved in a month of personalized, concentrated learning.

The Right Path

Manfred Smith (MD) writes:

Even though I am very aware of the way children grow and learn (I have considered myself a “Summerhillian” since 1968), it was not until reading GWS that I consciously observed children (including my own). The difference is great, because now I am able to stop myself from trying to “teach,” and instead allow children the opportunity to discover the world on their own terms.

But there is more. The best way I can describe what has happened to me is by saying that the huge chunk of ice, accumulated over years of schooling, is melting. I mean in my mind, of course. Recently I came across an old discarded algebra book. Having understood little of it when I was taking the course in school (I received a “D”), I decided to take it home with me and give it a try. Within three hours of work, which I LOVED, I covered 70 pages of that text. Being a very old book, it was all “business”: few diagrams and pictures, very few examples, no answers. I had to do all the work myself. And it was EASY!

A whole new world has opened to me because of my different attitude towards the world. Talk about MOTIVATION! Every step I take convinces me that you, we, us, are taking the right path.

Printing

From Jean Leonard, who runs a small school in Frankfort, Germany (see Directory):

Many parents here take their children to the Gutenberg museum to see the first book ever printed and the first printing machine. After that they ask lots of questions about how, why, and when, so we discuss creative invention and we print and print and print. The children like to roll snakes out of clay, form them into letters, place them on the table, paint them with acrylic paint, then print them on paper towels. From just this limited experience they often discover writing but we print in other ways too, so much so often that I call the children “my little Gutenbergs.”

I have some kind of hang-up regarding neatness and “ordnung,” maybe I have been in Germany too long. Anyhow in order to do a beautiful neat job when exposing the children to letters I always used a stencil. One day the children saw me and asked “May we try that?” So I bought a lot of stencils. Not a day goes by without someone asking to use a stencil. I tape it onto their paper with masking tape and they go to work with magic markers. They all love to use the stencils. The result is that when they discover writing it is unusually neat and uniform.

Owning A Press

Carol Kent (VA) writes:

Recently we bought a hand printing press. I cannot imagine a more suitable acquisition for unschoolers of any age. We have had it in operation one month, and it is a great excitement and pleasure for the whole family.

We began by reading a couple of library books and ordering catalogs from type companies listed in *Popular Mechanics*. Then we dealt with the Kelsey Company, PO Box 491, Meriden CT 06450, and bought our entire outfit from them. They provide information and supplies for even the rawest novice and are very efficient. Our total expenditure was about \$1000, though we could have economized, made or made-do in many ways. The smallest presses start at \$130 (shipping weight 35 lbs.), and most type is available in small, medium or large fonts. We selected one of the larger presses, and another major portion of our investment was in a type stand and type cases. Small fonts of type would easily fit in milk cartons, for instance. There is no quality difference among Kelsey products—prices are based entirely on size. Printing takes very little space. Our whole operation is contained in about four square feet.

We take the press seriously. We are meticulous about spelling, grammar, punctuation, and design. Our four year old (the oldest) is archivist for the press. He gathers all the test impressions after we have printed, punches holes, and files them in a loose-leaf binder. He is just beginning to read, and has been acutely interested in reading the galleys with a mirror and finding out what everything says even before it is printed up.

Printing does require discipline: type is made of lead and cleaners are toxic. Printing procedures are simple but essential. A slight oversight can severely damage the press or type. Yet young children can print and learn that the reward comes growing without schooling #15 not from larking around, but from doing a careful, responsible job.

As a bonus, we've already found the press handy for making "official" forms, such as this letterhead for our unschool. Some of the more interesting book and school supplies catalogs (e. g., Platt & Munk, Sargent-Welch) are available only to requesters using organization or institution letterhead.

The Kents also printed handsome birth announcements for their new baby

and sent us one. The text reads:

KNOW That by His first Act of Will

Zachary Miller Kent

Joined His Mother Carol in Life

At twelve fifty-four by Moonlight

On the sixteenth Day of April

In this eightieth Year

Of the twentieth Century

Being attended on His Journey

By His Father David

And welcomed by His Brother Robert

And His Sister Susannah

Carol added in a note, “As to the birth, we’ve learned in three tries to do it all by ourselves. Anyone interested in free-lance birthing is welcome to contact us. Like unschooling, it’s the only rational approach.”

Buying Texts

To a mother who asked how to buy textbooks, Donna wrote:

From my experience as a classroom teacher, it is not particularly easy to find textbooks; there certainly isn't any friendly neighborhood textbook store where you can pick out what you want and pay for it. Regular bookstores don't want to touch textbooks, except for a few of the self-help kind, and even the few "teacher stores" I have seen carry a lot more games and gadgets than texts. If teachers are really determined to investigate new textbooks, they usually have to write and ask for samples. This takes a lot of time and energy and usually teachers just make do with whatever their schools give them.

First, I would suggest looking for a place that actually has different textbooks on hand, so you can browse through them a bit. Places where you might do this: (1) a school, especially if you are on good terms with a teacher or staff person (2) a public library—they often have at least a shelf of textbooks (3) a college library, or their department of education (4) the curriculum department of your school district central offices. Make a note of titles, publishers, and addresses.

Next (or do this directly, if you haven't been able to locate any texts to look at), write to publishers, describing what you're looking for, and asking for catalogs and prices. Almost any publisher you can think of sells textbooks—McGraw Hill, Holt Rinehart Winston, Prentice Hall, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Houghton Mifflin, etc. There are a few that specialize in texts like Allyn & Bacon, Charles E. Merrill, Addison Wesley. For a little less traditional texts, try SRA (Science Research Associates), and CEMREL. You can find addresses for all these from your librarian or in the back of the *Books in Print* catalog. Most publishers seem quite willing to handle small orders by mail, if they get *Growing Without Schooling* #15 your check first.

By the way, the big publishers are usually generous in sending free samples to schools if they think it might bring on a large order. If you word your letter right and maybe have some kind of letter-head stationery, you might be able to take advantage of this. But only as far as your own scruples allow, of course.

Another idea: there are a few catalogs of educational materials. Personally, I think much of the stuff in these catalogs is useful only to a classroom

teacher trying to pacify the kids, reward them for having done the textbook assignment, and maybe keep them from jumping out the windows. But there are some really great gems scattered among the junk, and these catalogs are worth looking at. Try: (1) *SEE* (story following); (2) Creative Publications, PO Box 10328, Palo Alto, CA 94303; (3) EDUCAT, PO Box 2158, Berkeley CA 94702 (\$2 per catalog).

Two months later the mother wrote with thanks for the advice. “ Because of your help, I was able to locate publishers, order textbooks, and investigate correspondence schools.”

We’d like to hear from anyone else who tries these ideas, or has other suggestions to offer.

S.E.E. Catalog

One of the best catalogs of educational equipment I have seen is put out by *SEE (Selective Educational Equipment)*, 3 Bridge St., Newton MA 02195. Most of the materials are about math, but some are about other kinds of science.

Some particularly useful items include:

Set of 74 plastic Cuisenaire rods, \$3.50.

Transparent SEE calculator—you can actually see how this simple calculating machine works. \$3.25.

Some calculators, including Data-Man (made by Texas Instruments, \$24.95, a very good gadget, fun to use).

A variety of Tangram puzzles. In these you put together seven shapes—a square, a parallelogram, and five triangles—to make other shapes. Almost infinite variety here.

An inexpensive stopwatch, \$13.50. A stopwatch is a fine measuring instrument and learning tool (see *What Do I Do Monday?*), and you probably won't find a cheaper one.

Rulers and measuring tapes, including a very useful 30 meter/100 foot tape for \$10.75.

A 50X elementary microscope for \$4.50 (Wonderful buy!). Also a hand lens for 20¢.

A simple camera (uses 120 film) for \$3.75. Also, simple developing and enlarging kits.

All in all, an interesting catalog, well worth having.

Battling in Ga.

The Atlanta, Ga., Constitution, 4/3/80:

Patty Blankenship's children are right at home in school. That's the problem.

At least, DeKalb County school authorities see it as a problem. They believe her children ought to be present and accounted for in the classroom when the morning school bells ring.

Hoping for stern disciplinary action, the authorities took the stalemate to DeKalb State Court last week, but in a landmark indecision, the jury of one man and five women split right down the middle. It was justice at its most ironic: the defendant went free; the jury was hung.

There's a possibility the case will be retried. But hold on there. What is a nice woman like Patty Blankenship doing in a story like this in the first place? Does the state have nothing better to do than haul before the bar of justice—on criminal charges, no less—a 39 year old mother of two, a deeply religious woman who takes in sewing to support herself and her fatherless children? Holy corpus delecti.

It's not as one-sided as it seems, though. Mrs. Blankenship's prosecutors found out in a hurry that their adversary was far from meek and defenseless. She's not only tough as tarpaper, she's an amateur political scientist who studies the U.S. Constitution for fun and can cite you chapter and verse as to why the state can take its case against her and put it where the moon don't shine.

Last week in court, she gave Assistant Solicitor William E. Mumford and Judge J. Oscar Mitchell a refresher course in law, showing from the witness stand that the Fifth Amendment is not a cubbyhole for the cornered and desperate but a many chambered mansion of individual liberty.

"They thought the Fifth Amendment says a person can't be compelled to testify against himself," she explained. What it says is that you can't be compelled to be a witness against yourself." Blankenship 1,

State 0.

As for her clash with the law, that was inevitable, given her early predilection and later circumstances.

“I never wanted to send my children to public schools,” she said. “I went to public school myself and hated it.” She hated public school even more when her first son, Mark, now 14, trooped off to the first grade. As soon as she could afford it, she enrolled him in a private school, but she wasn’t happy with that arrangement, either.

“There are some good private schools,” she said. “I’m not totally against them. I just feel that I have the full right and responsibility to choose what’s best for my children, and what’s best for them is for me to teach them at home.”

Also a factor in her decision was the expense of sending two children to private school. “I couldn’t afford it,” she said. “Then I heard this man on the radio. He ran a correspondence school in Prospect Heights, Ill., for teaching at home. I said to myself: ‘That’s just what I want for my children.’”

Next day, she called the DeKalb Board of Education for the law pertaining to private schools.

“There were only two requirements: a vending license and approval of the building by the state fire marshal,” she said. “I knew from having read the Georgia Code that the second requirement had been repealed. As for the first requirement, I wasn’t selling anything, so I figured I didn’t need a vending license.”

At the time, Mrs. Blankenship was living in Cobb County . . . Her new venture “went along fine” for about three months, she said. “But then a Cobb County juvenile probation officer, the police and a school principal came to my door and threatened to put me in jail, take away my children and fine me \$100 a day for every day they were not in school.”

Georgia law says only that every child between the ages of 7 and 16 must be enrolled in a public or private school, she explained. “Well, I

was a private school.”

Mrs. Blankenship apparently solved that problem with the law by moving to DeKalb County, though she says she moved to get nearer to her son’s hospital, not to elude the authorities. No matter. She soon ran afoul of DeKalb officials for the same reason—alleged failure to comply with the compulsory attendance law.

But DeKalb authorities found her just as elusive a quarry as their Cobb counterparts had. She spirited her children out of the county and went into hiding herself, emerging only when her case went to court.

That was October 1979, but the case was heaved out of Magistrate’s Court when Magistrate Hopkins Kidd ruled that her children could not give testimony about their schooling because it could incriminate them. Since they were the only witnesses Mumford could call, their mother went free, sprung by the Fabulous Fifth.

DeKalb officials . . . went after her with renewed vigor.

Ever resourceful, Mrs. Blankenship hid her boys again and dropped from public view. They were reunited at home after last week’s legal episode ended in a mistrial.

There very well might be another episode to this seemingly interminable sequel. Following the mistrial, Mumford said the case would be back in court within 30 days.

There are some, however, who believe that heads more temperate might prevail, reasoning that the case has become a political hot potato and that the state has also begun to appear vindictive rather than conscientious.

But a more compelling reason perhaps for dropping the charges is that there is legal precedent for what Mrs. Blankenship is doing and that airing her case points up, not a defective parent, but defective laws—to say nothing of aggravating widespread suspicion that the public school systems are just as bad as Patty Blankenship and other private school advocates contend.

At the trial, Mrs. Blankenship's lawyer (Teddy Ray Price) spoke of those "paganistic public schools" and depicted them as infested with Quaaludes and marijuana in a climate where lax morals are tolerated and teen-age girls often get pregnant. Price also hammered at the state law, saying it does not define a private school. "That's the state's fault," he said. "It's not her fault. She complies with the law because the law is silent."

Liedloff On Communes

More from Jean Liedloff's letter:

I feel very wary of “communes” because the little that I know of them seems pretty unsatisfactory, because, I think, although the clan, or extended family, or tribal form is certainly correct for our species, we as individuals are so far off our continuum trollies that they do not work.

For example, the first thing one might see in a commune is a list on the kitchen wall saying who has to wash the dishes on Tuesday, cook lunch on Wednesday, etc, with perhaps weekly meetings to “discuss” frictions that have arisen out of someone thought not to be doing his or her share, or imposing one way or another on someone else. The whole secret of success of the evolved community, as opposed to an intellectually initiated one superimposed upon a group of intellectually motivated seekers for change from their unsatisfactory lives, is that all work and cooperation are 100% emotionally voluntary. I don't see how one can possibly expect people brought up as we are to attain the easy, happy, utterly unforced feeling of being at home together that people like the Yequana have, even with the best of intentions and years of effort. However, a group of continuum- minded people, perhaps with separate houses so that a cooperation could grow with experience without being burdensome at any stage, might be a good breeding ground for useful research into “putting continuum principles back to work.”

I think it's important to avoid the hippie, or drop-out, image if our message is to be effective to others, but I can see the value, for example, if there were enough people without normal jobs, of starting a business which would be run efficiently and at a good profit without distorting the personalities of the people working in it (by boredom, competitiveness, requirements to conform to a company policy of petty dishonesty, making low-quality products or services in which one cannot take pride, etc.) and showing how babies, toddlers, and school children after school hours can be present without disturbing anyone, from the earliest days, and positively helpful from the age of about three or four years.

Exploiting College

From Adam Levine (PA):

Here at the University of Pennsylvania I've molded the school to fit my own education. In other words, I'm doing what interests me and getting credit for it.

Example 1: I became interested in photography in high school, when I put together a slide show about the history of my home town, Stamford CT. This was part of an "independent study" project that the school allowed qualified seniors to undertake instead of a regular course in the second half of the year. By that time I was sick of high school, having been accepted into college early, and I had been bitten by the Bicentennial Bug, which infected me with an interest in America's past. When I got into college I wanted to learn more about photography—printing, developing, composition, etc. Luckily, I heard through word of mouth about a photography course the University offered for credit. The course is not listed in any catalogs or course guides because the lone instructor would be swamped with people. As it was, she already had a waiting list in the hundreds.

I got into the course, took the beginning and advanced classes, and have just finished my third semester in the advanced class. The teacher is now one of my closest friends, and photography has become part of my future plans.

Few if any courses in this University offer any practical skills. This photography class is a fluke, and I would not be surprised if it is discontinued in the future. I was lucky to find it. I can't even remember the names of most of my other courses, let alone anything that I learned from them. But this course gave me something more than brainy busywork for a grade: it gave me something tangible, a skill. I have become a very competent photographer, and nothing I have ever done in any school has been so good for my self-esteem as having been recognized and praised for what I've created with the skills I learned in this course.

Example 2: I became interested in solar energy when I was a freshman here, and this interest (through my own efforts, not coursework) has expanded into a general environmental awareness, so I decided to add to my American Civilization major one in Environmental Studies.

Example 3: As another part of the high school independent study project I

mentioned before, I interviewed an old Stamford resident (now 94) about the history of the town. In the four years since then I have done a lot of thinking about this woman, re-interviewed her several times, and I now am working on a book of words and pictures about her life, the life of the town, and the problems of old people. And in the past four semesters here, I have used various aspects of this project, one that originated in my head and one that I really want to do, to meet the requirements of four separate courses.

Which brings me to the point of this letter. By working my interests into my coursework, and thereby getting credit for them, and by worrying only about passing courses instead of getting A's, I have learned more from school and I'm happier here. The courses that I have a real interest in I do well in grade-wise; the others I devote only enough time to get a passing mark. I've learned more this way because I spend most of my time doing what I'm interested in, and I'm happier because I'm finally educating myself, instead of being educated.

Getting Recertified

Last summer after profuse study, GWS included, we made the decision to educate our three children at home (7th grade boy, 5th grade boy, 3rd grade girl). My husband and I are ex-teachers, four years each in the early 1960s. (We hesitate to add that fact as we don't feel being a teacher is necessary. In this state it helps.)

We approached the administration with our plan—Calvert Home Study. According to the state's definition, Calvert isn't a school. Administration suggested we become a school by becoming recertified teachers. Then as we travel about (which we do a lot) our school could go with us.

Thankful to have the chance to educate our own children without legal hassle, we decided one of us would take classes (6 hours) for re certification.

Desiring to be consistent in our philosophy of education, we wanted to be able to have some choices in what we studied. We feel you can educate yourself better than any institution but I (not my husband) would have been willing to be led back into the herd to avoid hassles and just take standard courses.

I was told to take "800s" courses as these would qualify for recertification. Among these classes we found Independent Study Courses. I was excited. I could decide what I really wanted to learn, get a faculty member to guide me and allow me to pick his or her brain, and become legal, all at once!

It all worked out beautifully except for a slight problem. When I went to register, I found Independent Study Classes wouldn't be acceptable for recertification.

At the onset of our inquiries we had already spoken with the Dean of the Teachers College and he supported our ideas by sending us to like-minded faculty members. (Note: we have often found the people at the top to be very open and understanding. Don't overlook them if you have a problem with an institution or the like.) A phone call to the Dean at this time resulted in settling the problem of having independent study accepted for recertification.

I am now registered to take six hours of Ind. Study with two professors. My areas are adolescent development with a reading course set up to develop as we go along. My second area is computer use in education. My goals at this time are to become computer-literate and determine the strengths and

weaknesses of computers for educating our three children at home.

Right now, I truly feel “This is the first day of the best of our lives.”

Vt Homeschoolers

From the Rutland (VT) Herald, 3/30/80:

HOMESCHOOLING, A FAMILY CHOICE—Like many girls her age, Krystal Lytton, 11, of Concord, takes ballet lessons, attends class in weaving and likes to meet people. She is different from most girls her age in one important respect: she does not go to school. Krystal, like several dozen other Vermont children, studies at home.

“We’ve always been hesitant about sending her to public school,” said Barbara Lytton, Krystal’s mother. We feel we can do a better job.”

Lytton’s neighbors’, Joseph and Julie Riggie also decided to keep their 8-year-old daughter Kyra at home.

“We had mixed feelings about keeping her home,” said Julie, “but once you start doing it, it seems so right.”

Vermont law, compared to many other states, is fairly liberal concerning home teaching.

Parents who wish to teach their children at home must first present a home education plan to the district superintendent of schools. They must then fill out a two-page form that outlines the planned course of study. A committee of the Department of Education reviews the proposal and rules on the application.

Last year 72 families submitted applications for home teaching certificates. Fifty got approval, according to Dr. Karlene Russell, director of elementary and secondary education in the state Department of Education.

The final decision, according to Russell, is based on an assessment by the committee of whether a home education plan meets minimum state education requirements. Basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, history, government and natural sciences are included.

The school day for Rowan and Ami Price usually starts with a social

studies lesson and a geography check with a small blue globe. Reading, spelling, mathematics and science follow, although not necessarily in the same order every day.

The subjects the two boys study are about all their school day has in common with children who attend public school. The two boys study at home with their parents, Truman and Suzi Price.

Rowan, 6, Ami, 5, and their step-sister Deirdre Buchanan, 13, study at home instead of attending public school in Saxton's River. Another sister, Jessie Buchanan, 12, does attend public school in town because she wants to be with her friends. Truman and Suzi Price decided not to send their children to school because they think, at least for the elementary grades, that they can do a better job.

"I have nothing against the schools here. In fact, Saxton's River has a very good school," Suzi said, "We just feel we can do a better job at home. Besides, I just like being with my children."

Suzi handles most of the teaching in the living room around their wood stove. The family lives in a big house in the center of town that they bought three years ago when they moved to Vermont from Minnesota.

Suzi has a teaching degree and attends an Antioch College branch in Keene, NH, one day each week.

School officials in Saxton's River were very helpful helping her set up her home teaching program, Suzi says, and continue to provide materials and assistance . . .

Suzi, who has worked for the Head Start and the 5-C Child Care program, has a variety of materials in her home, including a complete beginning reading series, an individualized science program, art materials, and hundreds of books.

Although she has plenty of materials, Suzi says prepackaged teaching materials are not as important as working one on one with the children: "The only thing you really need is lots of paper and pencils."

Books can always be borrowed from town libraries, and school officials, at least in Saxton's River, helped Price develop a home program by assisting with equipment and advice.

Back To School

Susan Dickey ("Access to DC," GWS #5), who during several years of "home tutoring" was able to take advantage of Washington's museums and activities, is now back in school. From a Washington Post story last fall on her unschooling:

Susan's parents . . . value homeschooling as an option they may use again.

"She reached the psychological stage where she wanted to be part of a group," says Susan's mother. "She loves school now, but that is because her three years out allowed her to develop her individuality. She has the maturity to keep her own style and still follow the group's rules."

Susan's transition into the public school system, reports her mother, has been smooth except for a spelling problem. "Socially she is doing fine. I see children who are shuffling around in groups and are clannish among strangers. But Susan is open with people."

"School for most children is mandatory," she adds. "But for Susan it is a privilege, because she knows that anytime she needs to be out, I will help her stay out."

And from June Sanders, PO Box 193, Central Valley CA 96019:

"Since we moved to California, Michelle, 13, has started back to school, her own decision and insistence. I enrolled her in seventh grade, without having to give any explanation of her last few years—the only information they wanted about previous schooling was the name and address of last school attended. She started right in making A's and B's, apparently didn't miss anything the last two years. She confided in her home room teacher—a man—that she had been out of school since '77. He said, "It doesn't show"

And Back Home

Spencer and Eileen Trombly (CT) wrote earlier this year:

Well, after five years of homeschooling and three months in a private, Christian school, we are back to square one. We are once again involved with our home program after withdrawing our three girls only last week.

We did have high hopes concerning this newly developing school and their ideas were, indeed, great. However, the enthusiasm the girls all showed back in September quickly diminished and finally died shortly thereafter. We heard the same old tapes playing as they once did back when they attended public school.

Once again, they were caught up in and extremely offended by the viciousness of their peers . . . in the form of malicious gossip, cliques, deliberate meanness, etc., etc. Both of the older girls are well-adjusted and have always been able to relate to and converse easily with people of all ages. During the last three months we have once again seen a good deal of irritability, tears (a rarity for our second child), and just plain discontentment and unhappiness. They have been unaccepted by their peers because of their unwillingness to participate in the gossip and other things I have mentioned above.

Supreme Court Action

From the Louisville, KY Courier Journal:

The U.S. Supreme Court declined yesterday (5/12/80) to review a Kentucky Supreme Court decision prohibiting state regulation of private schools, an action that came as no surprise to officials of Christian schools.

Without comment, the justices left intact the state court's October ruling relieving private schools of the obligation of gaining state accreditation.

State education officials are upset. "I'm very disappointed," said the Rev. Bob Brown, vice chairman of the state Board for Elementary and Secondary Education . . . "It seems that anybody can teach anything any place and call it a school." He added that he has "carried on a one-man campaign to raise standards. Now they said in effect there can be no standards."

Brown believes that the state's compulsory attendance law, requiring children to attend school 185 days a year, is now unenforceable.

Brown said that under the ruling, parents who claimed to have a disagreement over a matter of conscience with a local public school teacher or system could remove their child from school and teach the child at home without violating the attendance law.

However, Robert Chenoweth, assistant attorney general, said the question of what a school is must still be resolved. Can a family, he asked, declare itself a religious body and restrict education of its children to the home? "No one has the answer," Chenoweth said. "There are a lot of loose ends."

But William Ball, the Harrisburg, Pa., lawyer who represented the Christian schools, said "This is the absolute end of the road for state molestation of these schools."

The attorneys for the plaintiffs in the suit argued that the ruling of

Kentucky's high court was based on the state constitution, which gave the U.S. Supreme Court justices no authority to review it.

A Good Teacher

More from Adam Levine:

The head of the department is one of the best teachers I've ever met. His motto is, "Once you get to college I figure you're an adult, and you'll get things done when you're ready." He goes by this motto to the point of avoiding or flaunting (in legal ways, of course) any school rules that get in its way. In this vein he has a corollary to the main motto: "I'll sign anything!"

He goes out of his way to be helpful, and he lets people learn what they want at their speed, because he knows they will learn more that way.

He always has time to sit and talk, if you can find him, which is not always an easy task. When I went to talk to him about a paper I'm going to write, he made three phone calls for me (two long distance) and later that day left a message at my house (because he had gotten more info after I left him) and left his home phone number in case I had any questions!

He has given me an extra six months to finish the paper. It's nice to have a professor who does not make you worry about artificial school rules and deadlines.

And Another

I wrote in *Instead of Education* (available here, \$3.50 + postage):

The man who taught me to drive was an old man, unschooled, not a good driver himself, and with no other great talent or skill that I knew of. But he was a great teacher of driving, and ordered the task perfectly. He had seen that many drivers, particularly beginners, were nervous and prone to panic because they did not understand the relationship between engine, gears, clutch, the nature of the road, and the acceleration or speed of the car. He decided that before he would let me on the road I must master these relationships. Master them in action, that is; he probably could not have put them into words, and I would not have understood if he had. He drove the car up a little-used road on a quite steep hill, pulled it to the side, put on the hand brake, and told me to get in the driver's seat and drive away, slowly, smoothly, with no jerks and no slipping back. He showed me once or twice how to do this; then it was my turn. After many hours on that hill I was eventually able to pull away smoothly every time, as often as he wanted. Clutch, gears, and throttle have never troubled me since; indeed, using the gears well is one of the things I enjoy most about driving.

The task was ideal for still another reason. The car itself gave me the feedback and correction I needed. For a few times he had to say, "You gave it too much (or not enough) gas," or "You let the clutch pedal out too fast." After that I could tell from what the car did what I had done wrong and how I needed to change. I had the criteria I needed to correct my actions. He had no need to say anything, and left me to do the task without interference. Later, on the highway, when seeing other cars coming I began like all beginners to twitch the wheel this way and that, he would say in a deep slow voice, "Just stay on your side, and don't pay any attention to them." This is another task of the teacher, to give the student moral support until his new-found skills become automatic and he no longer has to think or worry about them. All in all he was a splendid teacher.

Outdoor School

The Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center, PO Box 67, Breckenridge CO 80424, sent us this newspaper story on its program. Teachers who cannot stand the schools any longer, or young people looking for work worth doing, might be interested in it.

He has never spent a night away from home. Tonight, he will sleep in the wilderness in a tent he put up himself.

He stares in awe at the tall pine trees that surround him.

He is a special child. He is developmentally disabled, and, since birth, his environment has been limited to the indoors.

He is now enrolled in the Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center program, a program founded by Gene Dayton, for physically and developmentally disabled persons, the only program of its kind in the country.

BOEC makes available to the disabled person outdoor activities that focus on building confidence and independence. Bruce Werber, executive director of BOEC, says they don't just try to teach outdoor skills and techniques, but the theory behind the whole process is therapeutic.

They learn a facet of independence outdoors. They learn by having immediate consequences," said Werber. An example he uses is if a student builds a tent, and the tent falls down, he learns by immediate consequences that he did something wrong. He doesn't have to wait for an adult to tell him.

A student gains confidence when he has made personal accomplishments, such as if the tent doesn't fall," said Werber. He says that, through the program, the student is also exposed to peer interaction. He learns cooperation as a means of getting a job done.

The BOEC cabin is surrounded by beautiful mountain scenery, which is new to many of the students. A cabin, built by Gene Dayton and

Karl Mohr, has a lake for a front yard and a stream in the back. In the cabin, materials represent the activities offered in the program. A guitar hangs on the wall, canoes are strapped to the ceiling, backpacks line the corners, and snowshoes are stuffed in a closet. Other activities not represented in the cabin are horseback riding, desert hiking, fishing, ski touring, and rafting.

The ages of the students range anywhere from 4 to 74 years. The summer programs have been averaging eight students per course. All outdoor gear is provided by BOEC. Werber says they don't feel it would be right to limit the program only to the students who can afford expensive equipment.

In most cases, there is one staff member to every three students, sometimes one staff to one student, depending on the extent of the students' handicaps. All of the staff members are trained in the field of special education, and all have at least some type of experience in first aid. Werber says they are more interested in the staff having more "people skills" than outdoor skills. And understandably so. Special people need special people

The Breckenridge Center also offers professional training courses. From the 1980 announcement:

A seven-day introduction to outdoor skills, hiking, backpacking, wheelchair camping, "New Games," emergency care and safety, and low impact wilderness travel for men and women working with physically and developmentally disabled young people or adults. Emphasis is on specific techniques for teaching the handicapped in the wilderness. College credit available. Fee: 7 Days—\$235. Starting dates: July 19, Aug. 2, Aug. 16, Sept. 13.

Swimming Story

Susan Price (FL) wrote:

Today we went swimming and the craziest thing happened. Matt wears his orange things all the time. Before today he would never go in the deep end. I thought that it was just some irrational fear that I wouldn't be able to talk him out of, but today I said, "Why don't you go out in the deep end—the orange things will hold you up just as well out there as here. It doesn't matter how deep the water is. "I thought this would just be some typical parent—explaining that goes in one ear and out the other, but it wasn't at all. He actually had thought that because it was deeper it was harder for the orange things to hold him up, and after I said that he went right out with me. I told them they'd hold him up even if it were 2000 feet deep and he thought that was neat and funny.

Reminds me of an experience I had about twenty-five years ago, on a boat returning from Europe, coming into Puerto Rico. We stopped and took a swim in the ocean right over the Puerto Rican Trench which is about 30,000 feet deep, and I had the oddest feeling that all that water was going to pull me down, that somehow I was more likely to sink than if the depth were only a few feet. I was amused at this superstitious feeling but I couldn't shake it. So I think I know how Matt felt.

“Dantes” Unavailable

From Barbara Lafferty (NJ):

I wrote to the Dept. of Defense requesting the *Dantes’ Guide to External Degree Programs* as you suggested (GWS # 13, p. 7) because we have a 14 and a 15 year old. Guess what? This is the answer I received:

“The distribution of the *DANTES Guide* is limited to military education centers and the participating colleges and universities because of budgetary restraints. However, the American Council on Education, Office on Educational Credit and Credentials, 1 Dupont Circle, Washington DC 20036, is in the process of publishing the *1980 Guide to Undergraduate External Degree Programs in the United States* which may be of interest to you. Also the National University Extension Association, 1 Dupont Circle, Suite 360, Washington DC 20036, publishes a book entitled *On-Campus Off—Campus Degree Programs for Part-Time Students* which is available for \$4.00 per copy.”

Ed. note: I suggested that she ask her U.S. Representatives or Senators to try to get the *DANTES* guide for her. We’ll see if that works.

Another Guide

The 1977-70 Guide to Independent Study Through Correspondence Instruction (Nat'l University Extension Association, PO Box 2123, Princeton NJ 08540) says that there are high school extension courses and/or college courses for "gifted" high school students at the Universities of: AL, AK, AZ, AR, CA, CO, FL, GA, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, MI, MN, MS, MO, NV, NM, ND, OH, OK, OR, SC, SD, TN, TX (Austin), WA, WI, WY; also at Ariz. State, Cal State Sacramento, Colo State, Northern Colo, Ball State IN, Northern IA, Murray State KY, Western KY, LA State, Miss State, Southern Miss, SUNY Brockport, OK State, Penn State, Texas Tech, Brigham Young UT, UT State, WA State, Western WA State.

The 1980 issue of this Guide (\$4) gives the names and addresses to write to about these courses, which may help unschoolers learn what is taught in school without having to go there.

Magazines

We have back issues of *National Geographic*, *Audubon*, *Natural History*, and *Smithsonian* we would be happy to send to anyone who pays for the postage. All of these have great photos and lots of information on the sciences. Send 60¢ (preferably in stamps) for one, and 30¢ for each additional issue. If we're out of the magazine that you request, we'll use one stamp to return the rest.

Renewal Bonus

The same early renewal bonus we offered in the past is still available. If you renew your subscription any time before we send the final issue of your sub to the mailing house, we'll extend your subscription for one free issue. Many subs now expire with #18 and we'd like to see a lot of those renewed early. It would help us a great deal.

Change of Address

Please remember to notify us of a change of address as soon as possible. We send *GWS* by third class mail, which the Post Office does not forward, even if you've told them to forward magazines. They don't return the issues to us, either, but simply throw them away. This makes it very important to have the correct address on your label.

National Velvet

National Velvet, by Enid Bagnold (\$1. 60 + post). We had this book at home when I was little. It was not one of “our” books; it had not been given to us, and no one mentioned it to us or urged us to read it; there were no pictures in it; it did not seem—to us, anyway—to have been written for children at all. I skimmed enough of it to know that it was about a girl who pretends to be a boy so that she can ride in a big horse race. Not caring much about either girls or horses, I let it drop. Years later I suggested it to one of my fifth-grade students, even at that age an expert horsewoman, but I never thought to read it myself.

The other day I began to read it, thinking perhaps to add it to our list. Before I had read twenty pages, I was caught. In my whole life I have never been more captured, delighted, and moved by a book. It is not mainly a book about horses, but about people—mostly the Brown family, father (butcher/slaughterer by trade), mother (who at nineteen swam the English Channel), four teen-age girls (Velvet the youngest), one small boy, and friend and helper Mi Taylor, living in a small village in the south of England. By the end of the first chapter that close and loving family and its daily life was as real and as dear to me as the world I live in. I felt, and as I write still feel very much a part of its cozy, protected, peaceful world. Finishing the book was like saying good-bye to dear friends that I might never see again, and indeed I had no sooner finished it than I started to read it all over again, just to be back with them.

Many younger children will like the book just as a good story; somewhat older children (I hope boys as well as girls) may see in it a portrait of a secret and treasured part of themselves; anyone who loves language will have the added pleasure of Enid Bagnold’s beautiful writing. Here is Velvet, whose “horses” are pictures of horses cut out of newspapers and magazines and fitted with tiny reins made of thread, who “gallops” on her own thin legs up and down the lanes of her village, imagining that the paper horse she holds in front of her is a real horse she is riding, who has never ridden any horse except an old fat pony, and is now for the first time in her life riding a well-bred and well-trained horse:

She had never felt reins that had a trained mouth at the end of them,

and as she cantered up the slope of the sunny field with the brow of the hill and the height of the sky in front of her, Sir Pericles taught her in three minutes what she had not known existed. Her scraggy, childish fingers obtained results at a pressure. The living canter bent to right or left at her touch. He handed her the glory of command.

Later she imagines herself riding Sir Pericles in a country horse show:

It was not the silver cup standing above the wind-blown tablecloth that Velvet saw—but the perfection of accomplishment, the silken cooperation between two actors, the horse and the human, the sense of the lifting of the horse-soul into the sphere of human obedience, human effort, and the offering to it of the taste of human applause. All this she had learnt already from the trained mouth and the kneeling will of Sir Pericles.

Though I have known well some expert riders and lovers of horses, I have never really understood the horse-passion. When I finally first rode a horse, at the age of fifty, I found to my surprise that I liked riding (and the horse) very much. But I could not see how people with other choices could choose to spend most of their lives riding and taking care of horses. These two paragraphs about Velvet and Sir Pericles made it seem possible and even reasonable. It does not seem strange at all that some people might love horses as deeply as I love music, or that a girl like Velvet might even risk her life, as she knew very well she was doing, only so that her horse might be forever famous, might have the kind of glory that the ancient Greeks risked or gave their lives to get for themselves.

It is above all the purity of Velvet's ambition that makes this fairy-tale, this day-dream to end all day-dreams, so believable. If something like this could be done, and we can't help believing (and hoping) that it could, then it would take someone like Velvet to do it. No selfishly ambitious or greedy person would have ever taken the gamble and the risks that she and her friend Mi took. Perhaps this is only to say that if you can believe that there could be a person like Velvet, then you can believe in this story. The author makes it easy for us to believe, because she creates for us exactly the kind of world, of life, and of family, above all Velvet's mother, that could have produced a Velvet.

After the race she comes home, utterly exhausted, and happy to be back. Before she goes to bed she wants to see her four-year-old brother Donald asleep, and to kiss him in his bed. She had been aware that he was a beautiful child, and had been eager to teach him to ride, but otherwise had not paid great attention to him. But when, as she sat alone at night in a hotel room and tried to prepare herself to ride the great race, the thought came to her that she might be killed, what seemed most terrible about it was that she would not see Donald again. So she goes in to look at him:

Donald lay flung out in an abandoned and charming attitude. His eyelashes were tender, bronze and shadowy; his hair a touch damp. The strangeness of his youth and exposed face, his battle for power by day and his abdication by night were something that Velvet had hardly expected. A gateway drew open within her and the misery and wild alarm of life rushed in.

“Velvet’s crying over Donald!” said Mally aghast, running down to the living room. “Carry her to her bed, father,” said Mrs. Brown calmly. “It’s to be expected.”

As foolish as this may seem, since it is, after all, “only” a book, I cannot put out of my mind the question, “What happened to Velvet, what did she do, when she grew up?” If I knew the author, I would say to her, “Please, even if you have to make it up right here on the spot, tell me about Velvet’s later life.” Like a child, I want to be told, I want to know, that she lived happily ever after.

Meanwhile, please don’t think that you have to be a child, or like horses, to read this book.

Books Of Facts And Science

Scott Foresman Beginning Dictionary, by E.L. Thorndike and Clarence Barnhart (\$12. 00 +post). This is the latest and much improved edition of what has long been the best dictionary for children. I like everything about it. It is handsome, clear, easy to use, and fun to read. There are enough entries in it so that by the time children outgrow it they will be ready for any “adult” dictionary. The definitions are clear and up-to-date, and each is used in a phrase or sentence. Definitions are numbered, and illustrations are also numbered, to show which definition they refer to. On most facing pages (what you see when you open the book) there are two or three illustrations. Many of these are in beautiful color, all really make the definition clearer, and many of them are very funny. I might not have noticed if a review hadn’t pointed it out, but the dictionary is much less sexist than others; thus, a soldier is a person who serves in an army, a pilot a person who steers a ship or boat, etc. And the illustrations are very often of girls or women. The typefaces and page headings are bold, legible, and handsome. Every page has its own vowel pronouncing guide, so that you can find out quickly how a word is pronounced, and the full pronouncing guides are on the inside front and back covers, where you don’t have to hunt for them. In the front of the book are forty-nine pages of helpful ideas about how to use it. All in all, a joy to use or just to browse through, a wonderful piece of work. I recommend it highly.

The Merriam-Webster Book of Word Histories (\$1.75 +post). This book lists over 600 English words and tells us where they came from and how they changed over many years. It tells us more about many words than even the biggest dictionaries. Children and adults who are interested in words will find this handy little book fun to browse through. Would you have guessed that the word “dunce” first came from the name of a great scholar, or that “coward” comes from an old word for an animal’s tail, or that the word “porcelain” comes from the word for pig, or that “bug” first meant a scarecrow, or . . .

P.S. from Donna: School people, and also writers of self-help books, worry a lot about “building vocabularies,” and devise many drills, tricks, tests, etc., as if the only way to learn new words was through repetition and

sheer memory. But I think that being curious about where words come from, learning to notice the root parts of a word, and getting a sense that words have histories and logical developments, can do much more for building vocabularies.

For example, the book shows the relationship, derived from the Latin *volvere* (to roll), among “volume” (books used to be on rolls of papyrus), “voluminous,” “voluble” (a tongue that rolls easily), “convoluted,” “evolve,” “involve,” “revolve,” “devolve,” and “volute.” That last word happens to be strange to me, but if I saw it being used, I’m sure that the context plus the knowledge that the “vol-“ root implies “roll” or “turn” would allow me to guess its meaning with little trouble.

Arithmetic Made Simple, by Sperling and Levison (\$3.15 + postage). This book is neither beautiful nor very exciting, but it is exceedingly useful, and will be very helpful to many parents. What it is, to quote from the back cover, is “a step-by-step presentation of all the arithmetic material traditionally covered in eight school years—now in one convenient volume. Addition, subtraction, multiplication, long division; fractions, decimals, percentage and interest; measurement of time, distance, and weight: measurement of lines, angles, and perimeter of plane figures, area, and volume; ratios and proportions; graphs; signed numbers.”

The book is not written for young children to read, but for adults (or older children) to use with younger ones. It is, however, well and simply written. The authors’ explanations are short and clear, certainly as good as, and probably better than, the explanations that most children will hear in most classrooms or read in most textbooks. The few black-and-white illustrations are helpful. For each new idea taught, the authors give a few problems (answers given at the end of the book), just enough to illustrate the idea. But they don’t clutter up the book with pages of busywork problems.

One of the many ways in which this book can help parents is this. Parents who are writing up a home education plan for their local schools can simply copy the table of contents of the book. It will be very impressive, certainly to a judge if the schools push things that far.

I don’t particularly recommend using this book slavishly as a textbook, going through a page at a time. As I wrote in earlier issues of *GWS*, there are better ways of introducing children to numbers and their properties and operations than the ways used in schools and in this book. But if you want to

know what the schools are doing, or want to be sure from time to time that your children can do what they are doing in schools, this book will help you do that. In other words, it will do everything that a correspondence course in arithmetic will do, and for much less money.

Though the book is too hard for beginning readers, most homeschooled children of eight or older will be able to read it themselves, with perhaps an occasional question. I would recommend letting such children browse through the book in any order they like. I would guess that any confident children, working through the book as a kind of challenge, would be able to cover all the material in a year and perhaps much less. (I'd like to hear about any such experiences.)

The beginning of the book is nice; the first three paragraphs:

From the very beginning of time man has been in need of a method of expressing "how many," whether it be sheep, plants, fish, etc. At first man needed only a few ways to express small quantities. But as time went on, his requirements increased and a system of numbers became essential.

Did you ever stop to wonder how the cave men indicated that they wanted or needed one, two, or three items? Judging from what we have observed among uncivilized tribes in recent times, we know that they used parts of their bodies to indicate quantities. For example, they indicated the number one by pointing to their noses, the number two by pointing to their eyes, and as time went on they learned to use their fingers to express amounts up to ten.

When primitive men wanted to describe the number of sheep in a large herd, they found it difficult to do so because they lacked a number system such as we have today. Their methods were simple but intelligent, since they had no system for counting above ten. As the flock passed by they placed one stone or stick in a pile for each sheep as it passed. The number of stones or sticks in the pile then indicated the number of sheep in the flock. This was inadequate since there was no way of telling anyone else how large the flock was or for writing it on paper.

The book was written in 1960, so it doesn't contain any New Math

(“greater than,” “less than,” “commutative property,” etc.) However, one of the many other textbooks in this series is *New Math Made Simple*. We will be looking at that, and some of the others, to see if they may be useful to parents. Meanwhile, I strongly recommend this one.

Physics Experiments for Children, by Muriel Mandell (\$1.80 + post). This is a book of simple physics experiments that can be done by children, using materials that are either already in most homes or that are inexpensive and easy to get. They are grouped under seven headings: 1) Matter: Air 2) Matter: Water 3) Mechanical Energy and Machines 4) Heat 5) Sound 6) Light 7) Magnetism and Electricity. The experiments are clearly described and illustrated, and Ms. Mandell’s explanations of what happens are also clear.

Here is one of the simpler experiments:

How To Compress Air

Hold a glass with its mouth down and push it into a deep bowl of water.

You will see that: The water enters the glass a little way. No bubbles of air escape.

Explanation: The water forces the air into a smaller space. The small particles of air—the air molecules—are forced closer together, or compressed. Releasing compressed air furnishes power, and many machines work on this principle.

A useful little book. It may help you and your children to think of other simple physics experiments using things found at home. If you do think of some, please let us know. We can put them in *GWS*, and someday we might have enough to publish another collection of them.

Other New Books Here

Helen Keller, by Stewart and Polly Anne Graff (85¢ + post). This book for young children is about a child, blind and deaf from birth, without words to talk to others or to understand their talk, and the teacher who gave her those words. It is one of the most exciting and inspiring stories in the whole history of the human race, and the Graffs tell it simply and well. Here they write about the great turning point in Helen's life.

Whatever they did Annie spelled letters into Helen's hand. When they petted the cat Annie spelled "C-A-T." Helen quickly learned to imitate Annie's fingers. She could make the letters for "C-A-K-E" when she wanted a treat, and "M-I-L-K" when she was thirsty.

"Helen is like a clever little monkey," Annie wrote. "She has learned the signs to ask for what she wants but she has no idea that she is spelling words."

One morning during her lesson Helen was especially bad. She slammed her new doll on the floor and broke it. Annie was too tired to go on with the lesson. Her eyes ached. She took Helen by the hand and led her outdoors. They stopped at the pump for a drink.

Then something happened that changed Helen's whole life.

Helen held her hand under the spout while Annie pumped. As cold water poured over Helen's hand, Annie spelled in her other hand "W-A-T-E-R." A new expression came into Helen's face. She spelled water several times herself. Then she pointed to the ground. Annie quickly spelled "G-R-O-U-N-D."

Helen jumped up. She suddenly realized that she was understanding words. She pointed to Annie, and Annie spelled "T-E-A-C-H-E-R." Helen never called Annie by any other name.

Then Helen pointed to herself and Annie slowly spelled out "H-E-L-E-N K-E-L-L-E-R." Helen's face broke into a wide smile. It was the first time she knew that she had a name.

All I can say is, if you can read that with dry eye, you're made of sterner stuff than I am. The book tells the story of Annie's and Helen's lives—how Helen learned to read Braille, eventually went to college, and in time became famous and helped blind people all over the world. There are many lovely

pencil illustrations by Paul Frame, who has drawn Helen as she was, not pretty but full of intelligence, excitement, and energy. A beautiful book for any age. And it makes me wonder, in passing, what Helen and Annie Sullivan would have said if anyone had ever told them that millions of children could not learn to read because they had “learning disabilities.”

Winnie-The-Pooh, by A. A. Milne (\$1.15 + post.) This is a collection of stories that Milne made up for his five-year-old son, Christopher Robin, in which the principal characters are the boy’s stuffed teddy bear Pooh, some of his other toy animals, and the boy himself. These stories have been favorites of young children ever since they were written, with good reason—Pooh, and his close friend the timid Piglet, are very comic and appealing figures. I can remember, when little, laughing myself almost sick at the story of their trying to trap a heffalump. This edition has the lovely original illustrations.

Pippi Longstocking, by Astrid Lindgren, translated from Swedish (\$1. 75 +post). These are perhaps the most popular of all children’s books in Sweden, and it is easy to see why. Pippi is a nine-year-old Swedish supergirl. Her mother died when she was little, her father, a sea captain, was lost in the South Seas, and Pippi lives by herself in an old house, with a pet monkey and horse for companions, and does exactly as she likes. Since she is so strong that she can—as she does in one story—lift large policemen up by the belt with one hand, who is to stop her? The book tells of her adventures with two friends, both very proper and respectable Swedish children, who are awed, fascinated, horrified, and delighted by the free-spirited Pippi. I should add that Pippi is very capable and self-sufficient, as well as very generous, kindly, and happy. She never abuses her great power, but only uses it to foil bad people, or to prevent well-meaning busybodies from interfering with her life. A delightful and subversive book, sure to please many children, who know all too well they are not like Pippi.

Five Children and It, by E. Nesbit (\$1.35 +post.) Two boys and two girls, while spending the summer in the countryside of turn-of-the century England, meet a sand-fairy, a strange creature who has the power to grant them one wish a day. They are naturally excited and overjoyed by what this seems to promise. But they soon find that none of these wishes, even the ones they plan most carefully, turn out the way they had hoped and expected. Far from bringing blessings, the wishes almost instantly bring serious problems, which the children must solve as best they can, for once the sand-fairy has granted

their day's wish (which lasts until sundown), it can give them no further help.

A rule of all the best fantasy or science fiction is that once you have put into the story your fantastic idea—invisibility, or immortality, or in this case the daily wish—you must make the rest of the story as true-to-life as possible. Nesbit does this, and it makes these good stories exciting and believable. A minor false note is the baby talk of the family's two-year-old; apparently when these stories were written, adults never really heard what two year-olds said. But since the baby hardly ever speaks in these stories, this is not important. The four older children are very well drawn—lively, energetic, imaginative, adventurous, brothers and sisters who are good friends and good companions. Very nice illustrations.

The Adventures of Robin Hood, by Howard Pyle (\$3. 60 + post). This was the version of these fine old tales that I read as a child, and it is still by far the best, full of unashamedly poetic language and much fine talk about “Thou saucy varlet” and the like. Although they were robbers, Robin and his fellow outlaws were in most ways honorable and admirable men. They stole only from the rich, who themselves had grown rich by stealing from the poor. Most of what they stole, Robin and his friends gave back to the poor. They rarely killed, and then only in defense of their lives. They never killed a captured or defeated enemy; even the Sheriff of Nottingham, who had sworn to hang them all if he could, was safe in their hands. Though they were in effect immune from the law, and could have stolen enough to live in luxury, they lived simply. In short, they were not a bad example for our time. But the main reason for reading these old stories is that they are full of courage, energy, exuberance, and joy in living. This edition has Pyle's original black-and-white illustrations.

The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe, by C. S. Lewis (\$1.75 + post). In this, the first of a series of seven books (we plan to add the others later), two brothers and two sisters slip through a wardrobe (British closet) into an ancient and magical country called Narnia, full of dwarves, giants, fairies, witches, and talking animals, where they have exciting and dangerous adventures, and finally free the land from the rule of a cruel witch. A wonderful story, with many levels of meaning—for younger children, a good adventure; for older children, something more than that. A modern classic.

Dune, by Frank Herbert (\$2.45 + post). Readers of science fiction and fantasy think this is one of the greatest books of that kind ever written, and I

agree. For sheer power of invention, it equals any tale I have ever read. It is partly an old-fashioned Three Musketeers type swashbuckling, sword-fighting adventure and romance, and partly science fiction—a serious attempt to imagine how human beings might live under certain conditions. In other words, it is both a very old-fashioned and very modern book. The author has created a huge and complicated civilization, in the most elaborate detail, and he achieves what has been called “the suspension of disbelief”—we accept his world as possible and fall into his story without resistance.

The science part of the story would have stood on its own. Out of his imagination Herbert has created a planet and an environment so harsh and hostile that one would say that human beings could not live in it for more than a few minutes. Part of this environment is a monster to end all monsters—it makes Godzilla, King Kong, and all other monsters of fiction look like fluffy Pekinese pups. Then he shows us a civilization of human beings living in that environment, mastering it, thriving in it, 16 and with enormous effort, discipline, and patience (unlike us humans on Earth) slowly changing it to make it more favorable. The ultimate Space Western, a whole week of *Star Wars*—a huge, fascinating, can’t-put-it down book.

A Canticle for Leibowitz, by Walter Miller, Jr. (\$2.25 + post). This is a science fiction novel that can be read and enjoyed as serious fiction, and not just a clever-gimmick story. It is set in a monastery in desert country in Utah. The first part of the novel takes place six hundred years after World War III, when the few survivors are still sunk in the savagery and barbarism that followed the destruction of all civilization. The main work of the monastery is to find and keep alive such fragments of knowledge, whether in the form of artifacts, tools, or books or other writings, as survived the war. They haven’t the faintest idea of what any of this stuff means. They only hope that if they can find and preserve enough of it, someone, someday, may be able to use it to recreate what was destroyed.

The next part of the novel begins many hundreds of years later, when humanity has moved from its long Dark Age into the rough beginnings of organized society. The monastery is now surrounded by small and fierce kingdoms (the ruler of one of these calls himself Mayor), fighting to see who will control the country. Meanwhile, people are slowly beginning to put together and re-create the knowledge destroyed by the nuclear war. One monk has even made a simple dynamo (driven by human leg power) and with

it given the monastery electric light, in the form of a crude arc lamp. In the Mayor's city or kingdom, another scholar has unearthed some of the equations of Einstein, and is struggling to make some kind of sense of them.

The final section of the novel takes place long afterwards. Humanity has created a new technological society, complete with nuclear power and nuclear weapons, and has once again found the way into space. But, in spite of knowing what nuclear war meant before and will surely mean again, it stands once more at the brink of war. What happens then, you must read to find out.

When I call this a serious work of fiction, I mean that as in all serious fiction the characters are not just cardboard figures, moved this way and that by the machinery of the plot, or preaching whatever sermons the author wants to preach. They are real people, with lives of their own. The book is very much about a monastery and its monks, what kind of people they are, how they live and work, how they see the world, what problems and conflicts arise among them, what it means to rule and run a monastery, how such an organization lives and protects itself in a hostile world. Miller makes a very strong case that only such organizations will have the courage, the resolve, the discipline, the patience, and the endurance, to bring humanity back from an atomic holocaust, if we should be stupid and wicked enough to let such a thing happen.

In a sense this is a historical novel. Only, it is about a history that has not yet happened, and that we must do all we can to keep from happening. All in all, a fascinating story, hard to put down once you have started reading it.

A Man for All Seasons, by Robert Bolt (\$1.75 + post). This play, published in 1960, and the first of many we will add to our list, is about Thomas More, who was executed by King Henry the Eighth of England because he would not sign an oath saying that the King's marriage to Anne Boleyn was legal. It is a witty, eloquent, moving play, certainly one of the finest of this or any generation. Not all plays that stage well, read well, and vice versa; this is equally good to stage or to read. It is about a man, no single-minded and bitter fanatic, but happy, well-adjusted, and brilliantly successful, who was perfectly willing to bend his principles to the realities of politics, and in particular the whims of his king—up to a point. Beyond that point he would not budge, at the cost of his life.

This play might be great fun for a group of people to read aloud together

(with some taking several minor parts). As in Shaw's plays, all the minor characters have good lines—indeed, there are no bad lines, no dull pages where the play chugs along, so to speak, gathering up energy for the next big scene. Every word spoken leads us further into the play and its people, and closer to its final point. It remains exciting even when we know how it will end.

There have been many good plays written in the past thirty years, but most have in one way or another been about corruption, evil, defeat, and despair. There is plenty of that here. The young man Rich is corrupted by weakness and greed; the handsome and talented King Harry is corrupted by frivolousness and vanity; while Cromwell is the kind of amoral, “practical,” coldly evil man so common in our times, all the more frightening because so common. But this is one of the few plays I know that also, and convincingly, shows us courage, kindness, steadfastness, and virtue, that makes the good men and women at least as believable as the bad. A wonderful play.

A Zoo in My Luggage, by Gerald Durrell (\$1. 75 +post). The author says, “This is the chronicle of a six- month trip that my wife and I made (in 1948) to Bafut, a mountain grassland kingdom in the British Cameroons in West Africa. Our reason for going there was, to say the least, a trifle unusual. We wanted to collect our own zoo.” It is a most interesting and amusing story. Durrell, a scientist and naturalist, has a keen eye, is a very clear, vivid, and comic writer, and loves animals, human beings, his work, adventure, a good party, and life in general. He makes us wish we could go with him on an expedition, or at the very least, have him show us around his zoo. One of the extra pleasures of this s particular trip would have been meeting the Fon of Bafut, six feet four inches tall and surely the most jolly, hospitable, and fun-loving monarch on the face of the earth. There are many beautiful pen-and-ink illustrations by Ralph Thompson. For all people who like animals, a real treat.

Parkinson's Law, by C. N. Parkinson (\$2.00 + post). This book, quite serious and even scholarly in tone, is an extremely funny and terrifyingly accurate description of how administration works (or rather, does not work), in business, government, or whatever. It begins with the sentence, “Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion,” and goes on to state many other pointed truths.

At one point Parkinson is discussing how to word announcements of job

openings so that only one person, and the right person, will apply. He offers this example:

“Wanted—An archaeologist with high-academic qualifications willing to spend fifteen years in excavating the Inca tombs at Helsdump on the Alligator River. Knighthood or equivalent honor guaranteed. Pension payable but never yet claimed. Salary of \$10,000 a year. Apply in triplicate to the Director of the Grubbenburrow Institute, Sickdale, Ill., U. S.A.”

Here the advantages and drawbacks are neatly balanced. There is no need to insist that candidates must be patient, tough, intrepid, and single. The terms of the advertisement have eliminated all who are not. It is unnecessary to require that candidates be mad on excavating tombs. Mad is just what they will certainly be. The result is a single candidate. He is off his head but that does not matter. He is the man we want.

A very funny book, and a very true statement about why big organizations don't work. Wonderful pen-and-ink illustrations by Robert Osborn.

One Man's Meat, by E. B. White (\$ 1. 75 + post). This is a collection of short essays or articles about White's life and work on a small farm on the Maine coast, in the late 30s and early 40s. Though White is best known for his writing—he is one of the great American essayists of modern times, or any time—he was a serious farmer; after 1938, when he left the city and a full-time job as writer and editor, farming became his principal work, and writing his part time job.

His essays are personal, informal, light in tone though often profound in meaning, and often very funny. Almost all of them begin with something that happened or was about to happen (lambing, buying a cow) on the farm. They may stay there—some essays are entirely about farming and Maine life and people. Or, they may move on to other things—liberty, or democratic government, or the coming second World War. Like all great essayists, White could without strain connect little things to big things. Not that he used little events as an excuse to preach sermons, for he never preached; reading him is not like hearing an editorial or a political speech, but like hearing the talk of an old friend. I mean that since he saw life as a connected whole, he could not help seeing the larger meanings of small things.

Though he never wrote like or pretended to be a prophet, he saw far and clearly. He saw, for example, that television, which was then just starting, would be enormously important, and he very correctly guessed and feared

that for many or most people the world of the TV screen would come to seem more real than the actual world around them. At one point he says:

When I was a child people simply looked about them and were moderately happy; today they peer beyond the seven seas, bury themselves waste deep in tidings, and by and large what they see and hear makes *Growing Without Schooling* #15 them unutterably sad.

And how much more true now than then. In these essays he points out, just in passing, what Ivan Illich and Wendell Berry (then young boys) were to say a more than a generation later, that speed of movement does not lessen but increases the distances between people, does not draw a society together but blows it apart; and that in both the physical and spiritual sense our country would be in very serious trouble unless many people learned to see farming, not simply as a way to make money, but as a way to live. We did not learn these lessons, and we are indeed in serious trouble, with more to come.

But this is the furthest thing in the world from a gloomy, doom-laden book. White loved his Maine farm and his life there, and the book shows us why. Some of the nicest things in it are his quick, affectionate, and very true portraits of his eight-year-old boy. All in all, and in many ways, a delightful book.

Book Order Info

Postage charge: for 1 or 2 books, 60¢; for 3 or more books, 25¢ per book (75¢ for 3 books, \$1 for 4 books, etc.)

Make check (US bank) or money order for book orders only payable to HOLT ASSOCIATES, INC. Address: 308 Boylston St, Boston MA 02116.

These additions to our booklist have just come in; we'll review them in the next issue. *Kidnapped*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, \$1.75. *The Time Machine*, by H. G. Wells, 70¢. *Best Science Fiction Stories of H.G. Wells* \$2.70. *Ghost Stories of an Antiquary*, M. R. James, \$1.80. *Robert Frost's Poems*, \$2.00.

Editor—John Holt

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September 1980

The Mother Earth News article appeared on schedule, and as I write this we have had over 600 responses: more than 400 with subscriptions, and most of the rest with orders for books or samples. My article *Psychology Today* has brought in several telephone radio interviews. We've also had some nice response to Louise Andrieshyn's fine article in the latest issue of *Mothering*, some of which we quote in this issue.

We have just sent out a follow-up mailing, including the front page of GWS #15 and our latest booklist, to all the thousands of people who expressed interest after the Donahue show. We thank the many volunteers all over the country who helped us with this mailing, which the three of us in the office could never have done ourselves. And to those volunteers who worked long hours with us in the office or in their homes nearby, folding, stapling, labeling, sorting—Karen Kimball, Jane O'Brien, Sylvia Pigors, Rachel Solem, and Sharon Winfield—our very special thanks.

Many of you will remember that in May, 1979, the CBS one-hour TV show "Magazine" did a program on home schooling, featuring the Turano and Van Daam families and the U.S. Commissioner of Education. Not long ago, CBS called up to say they would be running that show again in early September. This GWS will probably not reach you before the show is aired, but I thought you might like to know about it anyway.

Nancy Wallace (NH) has an article on home schooling coming out in the Sept. issue of *Blair and Ketchum's Country Journal*. There will be a short interview with me in the Sept. issue of *Boston* magazine. And *US News and World Report* plans to have a section on home education in their Fall Education issue.

My editor (and neighbor) and I are working hard on my unschooling book. It is too long—I have to cut 25% out. But every day's mail brings new material that I want to put *in*. Frustrating! We still don't have a definite title

yet; when we do we'll let you know.

News in this issue: two important court cases, one in Minnesota and one in Missouri; success stories from Pa., Kansas, NY, and elsewhere; and *GWS* readers in Va. and Pa. are preparing for legislative action on home education.

Hope you folks around the country have been surviving the heat.

—John Holt

GWS Learning Exchange?

From two readers:

Maybe some of your readers who have specific knowledge or skills would consider listing their names in *GWS* so others could write to them with any questions they might have in that particular area. We, for instance, recently purchased a rock tumbler and would be interested in locating someone who knows something of lapidary. It seems like there may be a large untapped resource potential available through *GWS* which could be developed.

I am a computer programmer/ designer by profession and am interested in contacting other homeschoolers who are using personal computers as a resource for their children's learning.

These readers are, in effect, suggesting a Learning Exchange by mail. As I guess most *GWS* readers know, a Learning Exchange (L.E.) is basically (1) a list of people who have ideas and skills that they are willing to share (2) another list of people who want to learn about various ideas and skills. Someone, A, knows about car repair, so that name goes in the Sharers file under Car Repair. Someone else, B, wants to learn about car repair, so that name goes in the Seekers file under Car Repair.

Every so often someone matches the lists, tells the A's who know things and the B's who want to find out about those things how to get in touch with each other. It then is up to the individual people to find ways to get together.

Most of these L.E.s are locally based and work mainly by phone. The original and probably still largest L.E. is in Evanston IL—we have mentioned it once or twice in *GWS*. I asked them a few years ago if they would be interested in listing people from outside Evanston, who could then get in touch with each other by mail. They said No, perhaps because they had all they could do just to keep up with the demand in their own town.

But the idea of a mail L.E. is still a good one. Unfortunately, this is not a project that we can take on here at *GWS*. To keep up to date and publish the kind of skills directory described above would take more time and *GWS*

space than we have. But it would be a wonderful project for one or more volunteers—perhaps a group of homeschoolers in one area—to take up. We could publish their address in every *GWS*, and people wanting to share or seek out skills could write directly to them. The group might someday publish their own L.E. directory, which people could order from them.

If any people or groups of people around the country are interested in taking on such a project, please let us know. I think it ought to be a small group of people; it could become too big a job for one person. But in any case, we hope someone will have arranged to handle this project by the next issue of *GWS*.

Christian Schools

From Phi Delta Kappan, June 1980:

Registrar Willard French of the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) movement in Lewisville, Texas, said his organization will help launch 800 to 1,000 schools this year. Consultant Connie Blanton of PCC (Pensacola Christian Correspondence School, 5409 Rawson Ln, Pensacola FL 32503) said that as many as 2,000 schools may be started with her organization's support.

Both groups use mail-order "purchase agreements" and ship materials and start-up guidelines to fundamentalist churches and individuals wishing to open schools. Blanton said more than 500 of the 8,000-odd PCC schools are simply parents teaching their kids at home.

News From N.C.

A North Carolina reader wrote:

A friend of ours who is a teacher's aide with the Charlotte school system was attending a school meeting where someone from the District Attorney's office was the speaker. He noted that there were over 3000 truancy cases waiting to go to court. Since there is not space on the docket to deal with all these cases, they have simply been dropped! The Charlotte court system is only dealing with serious crimes as far as I know: murder, rape, burglary. Pornography is not considered a serious crime and has also been dropped, unfortunately. The city police, according to the official, are told that they can arrest truants if they wish, but they must understand they will never go to court in the Mecklenburg County courts.

Textbooks—Cheap

From Deborah Schwaback, Box 136, Gilbertsville NY 13776:

I think I can offer to help you out with one problem people seem to be having. I started a RIF Project in our school and was sold (for \$1) the complete school textbook depository. This includes used textbooks on almost every subject (two or three thousand of them) which I would be happy to dispense to interested parties who want to send me a list of their requirements by subject and level. I would like to charge 75¢ per book to cover shipping, and the residue would go into the RIF funds.

A Good Resource

From Barbara Lafferty (GWS #15):

As you suggested, I finally wrote to our N.J. Congressman requesting his assistance in obtaining the *Dantes Guide To External Degree Programs* and received my copy yesterday. It took less than two weeks to obtain the Guide.

Within the past year I have requested and received from the Congressman the following: (1) The 1978 Agriculture Yearbook "Living on a Few Acres" (2) The 1979 Agriculture Yearbook "What's to Eat? And Other Questions Kids Ask About Food" (3) The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (a 37+ page booklet) and (4) the Dantes Guide.

All the above were obtained free of charge. Apparently our U.S. Representatives and Senators are an excellent source for some otherwise unavailable materials.

Helpful School

James Salisbury, 9748 Yorkshire, S. Jordan UT 84065, writes:

Please list us (under my name for the time being) as a private school “that would like to cooperate with homeschoolers, if any were to ask them” according to your *GWS* mailing. We are a totally non-profit organization (legally under the Universal Life Church—our own charter—to give us the advantages of a parochial school) and we actually encourage people to study at home even in favor of coming to our school. *Our teachers are state certified* and the school will be accredited in the fall by the state. We will gladly help people get through the legal hassles of getting out of school and help them find materials to study at home. These services are free of charge. We also have a tutoring service whereby they pay a tiny monthly fee to check in with our teachers once a month and they can get bona-fide diplomas, etc. We like to think of ourselves as a referral service for de-schooling society.

American School

From Grace Trudel (WV):

We have decided on the American School, 850 E 58th St, Chicago IL 60637. It is accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. It costs \$519 for four years of high school and all textbooks, with very reasonable payment plans—the down payment can be as low as \$29, with monthly payments of \$20.

We have chosen the American School because it does *not* require a supervisor for examinations. Going purely on intuition, I feel that the tests will have to be more creative, more like open-book tests, if there is no supervisor. I think tests that depend on how many facts you've been able to memorize are the stupidest kind, and it seems ugly to me to have a policeman-type supervisor watching to be sure you don't cheat.

We'll let you know more about it next year after we've had some practical experience with American School.

News from Kansas

From the Lawrence (KS) Journal–World, 6/15/80:

Rural Lawrence Couple Educating Their Daughter At Home—Caught up in daily red tape and paperwork, sometimes Donna Mae Flory probably thinks things would be a lot easier if she let her 15-year-old daughter Janice return to Lawrence High School. But the rural Lawrence woman's convictions about the "immorality of the teen society of high schools" has kept her knee-deep in paperwork to legally keep her daughter out of school.

"They try to make it hard on you," Mrs. Flory said in a recent interview. "But it's better than having her around all the sex and drugs at the high school. Four of her girlfriends who are only 14 years old have already had babies."

Since December, Mrs. Flory and her husband, Ivan, Rt. 5, have received permission from the Kansas Board of Education to instruct their daughter at home despite a state law that mandates compulsory public school attendance until age 16.

The Florys' case first came to light last November when a truancy review hearing was scheduled in Douglas County Juvenile Court when the family decided not to send Janice to high school at the start of the 1979–80 school year.

Mrs. Flory said at the time that she had applied for and been denied a waiver of the Kansas Compulsory School Act. Such a waiver allows persons with certain religious convictions to provide private education for their children.

As a result of the truancy hearing in November, Janice was ordered back to school by Douglas County Associate District Judge Mike Elwell. When her parents refused to send her, she was issued a contempt of court citation and sent to a juvenile detention center in McPherson. But Janice returned to Lawrence the following day when an appeal of the citation was made by the Florys' attorney.

Charges of truancy were dropped by authorities after the state board okayed the exemption. The board's ruling was based on an April 1979 opinion by Atty. Gen. Robert Stephan that said two sections of the state law mandating school attendance until the age of 16 were unconstitutional.

The sections in question state anyone providing home instruction must be certified by the state board of education and that a minimum of 15 hours a week be spent in academic classroom activities.

According to Stephan's opinion, those requirements are unconstitutional. No alternative requirements have been adopted by the board and state legislators have not acted to change the law. Under conditions set by the state, the Florys must provide Janice with at least 25 hours a week of instruction in math, sewing, homemaking and English.

Janice takes an accredited high school correspondence course from the Chicago-based American School. The girl's daily activities must be logged so state and Lawrence School District 497 auditors can be sure she is complying with state law, Mrs. Flory said.

This means keeping track of what activities Janice does every day, from getting up at 4:30 a.m., to fixing breakfast, to babysitting, to studying, to working with her mother in a house-cleaning business to working in a garden at night.

"I'm the teacher. I have to keep down where she is at every hour," Mrs. Flory said, noting the state board of education has audited her records and confirmed that Janice is meeting state requirements. "She's getting more out of it here than she would at high school smoking pot."

Janice is now finishing her spring correspondence classwork and will return to her studies in the fall. However, Janice plans to drop all the state required classes except mathematics when she turns 16 in October.

Although Janice says that she is "a little tired" of all the publicity she

has been getting, she said all the red tape was worth it. “This is better,” she said. “I can go on with my life and do my work.”

Reading at Three

Prem Freeman (NJ) writes:

Aram (almost six) has been reading more than half his life. Really reading!

We read. Books and games are around. The library is often visited. Since he was a baby he would be read to before naps and night time sleeps. Just when I had decided not to encourage reading at an early age (at least 3 years ago) he approached me very earnestly, asking help to learn how.

Believing in him, we began quite casually playing with magnetic letters and word cards. Spotting words all around his world was fun for him too. Slowly, definitely, he began to read at what most people thought was an astonishing speed. The real wonder happened last year though.

We were on a three month trip requiring much waiting in airports, train stations, etc, as well as spending much time in transit and together when we got places. Some Disney comics were with us. Maybe a third of the words in them were known from past reading.

“Mickey and the Beanstalk,” a forty-page epic complete with giant thrills, got to be a worn favorite. We read it every day for a couple of weeks. Then Aram told us he would read it to us. Expecting to be asked a lot of words we were shocked when he carried on frame after frame perfectly, and in his usual captivating way he has when telling stories. He had memorized word for word over ten pages! In a matter of days he had put to memory the entire book. Now he had something precious and he began “reading” to anybody who would listen. How many friends we made over “Mickey and the Beanstalk!”

He knew that we knew he had memorized and wasn’t *reading*, but somehow after he had mastered more comics we saw one day that he was slowly *matching the memorized words with the lettered words*. This is when the real spurt took place. In his own way he really taught himself. He must have figured out that memorizing words was more to his benefit than whole books.

Now he picks up virtually anything—be it an encyclopedia or an adventure comic (the kind with four-syllable adjectives) and contents himself with the sheer joy of reading. He is a continuous reminder of how unplanned

natural evolvment takes care of everything, when we let it.

More Children at Work

Molly Farquaharson (OR) wrote:

I was interested to read in GWS #14 about the woman who took her baby to work with her. I took my 2-year-old daughter Meadow to work with me for six months last fall and winter while I worked in a natural foods store. I wasn't being paid very much so financially it worked out very well not to have to pay a babysitter, plus I don't like to leave my kids anywhere very long.

I think Meadow learned a lot about stores by spending a lot of time in one. She saw a lot of the money and goods exchange, so learned a little bit about money. She would watch while I would count the money at the end of the day and would play with the pennies and "count" them too. Sometimes friendly customers would give her a penny of their change. Money still doesn't mean very much to her but she does have an idea what it's for.

Another thing she learned: what a scale was for. A lot of the products were in bulk, so I had to weigh them. She watched and one day she started using an egg scale to weigh pieces of her puzzle or a cookie or a book or whatever she had on hand. She also liked to scoop out beans or flour or whatever into bags for me to weigh out. I discouraged that a bit except when it was something we needed. Occasionally one of the customers would let her help fill up their bags, which she enjoyed. I think an older child would learn a lot about density of things—a scoop of raisins is heavier than sunflower seeds, for example. I know I learned a lot of stuff like that!

And of course she met a lot of people. She's still pretty shy with people at first, but she did learn about dealing with other adults and especially other little kids. Sometimes she would share her toys, sometimes she would give him/her an apricot from the bucket (chalk it up to overhead). We both met quite a cross-section of interesting people.

During the times there were no customers, I would read to Meadow or help her draw or play with her puzzle. If she could help me put things away I would get her to do that, especially after a delivery.

I would think that an older child would really profit from being in a work situation like that. There is a lot of math involved including fractions, measurements in pounds, ounces, pints, etc, noting the different densities of

various foods, pricing the food at whatever percentage mark-up, making change, and so on. Not to mention the interaction between people, customer and worker, student and teacher (going both ways across the counter).

People were usually pretty understanding if I had to deal with taking Meadow to the bathroom or calming down her crankiness or soothing a hurt. It gave the regular customers pleasure to see this little girl helping or just keeping me company. Natural food stores that are pretty casual lend themselves to having moms or dads and kids working together, for what is more natural? That particular store has since closed due to about eight food buying clubs starting in the area (another great opportunity for learning a lot of things), and I've just had a baby, so I'm being a full time mom again. I'm hoping to find another job though that would allow me to take both my kids to work. I may have to make my own job opportunities.

Some people seem to think it looks "unprofessional" to have kids along at the job, but I don't see anything wrong with it. I remember walking past a lawyer's office pretty regularly a few years ago and seeing the secretary with her small child in the office. She did her job and was a mom too, no problem. Of course it helped that the lawyer was the dad! I guess he didn't worry much about the "unprofessional" look.

I have a friend who also took her two-year-old son to work while she drove the pickup that took Christmas trees from the field to the landing to be measured and shipped. He learned a lot about where Christmas trees come from! His dad was one of the cutters.

Mostly I think it is a question of finding the job that would lend itself to kids being there or of pushing to have one's present job be that flexible if it is a remote possibility. There was a recent article in *Mothering* about a woman who had her children with her at her health food store.

Anyway, I hope this is useful to you or someone. I'd like to see more of us working with kids along if it is appropriate. There is a great deal to learn on all sides.

From a Tennessee reader: In regard to "Baby on the Job," my husband and I are able to keep our son with us.

My husband is a cabinetmaker. He spends time teaching this skill to Kish. But about six months ago he took a job as a truck driver. This enables us to

travel a lot. We feel this will be a valuable tool in unschooling.

I am an Instructor of Cosmetology. Five years ago at the birth of Kish, I started working as a fill-in. There are several schools around town that call me when someone needs a day off. I always take my boy with me. He enjoys the people. We have time to read, play, or talk. He goes out with students to lunch or on an errand. We believe it is great for all of us. And both can be continued when we finally get to the farm.

Working at Home

Peggy O'Mara McMahon, who is now editing Mothering magazine writes:

I was pleased to see that you also are encouraging a combination of work and real life and including children in the work experience. What better way than through a family business? Already Lally (6) and Finnie (4½) help to open the mail with us and sort the appropriate letters into the appropriate boxes. The women who work with the magazine all work at home. I have divided the jobs of the magazine to small ones that can be done at home in about 10 hours a week. We meet once a week when each comes separately to our home (where the office is) to get her mail and talk over any questions or problems. Being that we are all busy mothers, we don't waste much time with small talk. We have a staff meeting after each issue goes out and try to have some social events together occasionally.

Meet J. P.

From Kathy Mingl (IL):

My husband and I are very interested in your “unschooling” ideas. We had been leaning in that direction already, but didn’t know that other people had gotten so far along with it. We have a little boy, now 27 months old—our first child—who is as bright and independent a little person as you could ever meet. I gave birth to him at home (doctor-supervised) because I had heard bad things about hospitals and didn’t want to subject a poor, helpless little guy—or me, either, for that matter—to an experience like that. I had a bad time at school, and I’ve had my doubts about subjecting an innocent kid to that sort of thing, too.

Through some sort of sloppy planning we found ourselves having a baby and remodeling a house at the same time. I helped my husband with everything—painting, plastering, roofing, cement work—the whole bit. Part of the time I was pregnant out to here and holding up my end of things with my fingertips (all I could reach the thing with, without sitting it on the baby’s head), and the other part I was working one-handed, holding our son in the other arm. From the very first, he hated to be left out. We couldn’t leave him with someone else, even if we had wanted to, because I was nursing him. I couldn’t take time off to raise him because my husband had quit his job to work on the house full time (as an investment) and needed my help—I work cheap. Jason Peter Joseph (also known as J.P., or sometimes the Twerp) was part of the deal, like it or not.

Even before he could get around by himself he wanted to be in on everything. If we left him in another room while we worked he had a fit. As soon as he was mobile he moved right in on the action, grabbing tools out of our hands and applying them determinedly to whatever project we had been working on. He was impossible to divert; in self-defense we had to show him how to use them or we would never have gotten anything done. (We tell people there isn’t a thing in that house that we could have done without his help.) We found that only way we could keep him safe was to show him how to use the tools and machines properly, and he’s become remarkably competent with them. He used to terrify relatives and old ladies at garage sales by zeroing in on any screwdriver he could get his chubby little hands on

—his favorite toy—and he never hurt himself with one that I can recall, which is more than I can say for his mother.

We’ve finished and sold the house now, but we’ve taken him to machinery auctions with us, and people have been amazed at how at home he is with machines and tools. He really freaked out one guy when we picked up a machine. J.P., age 1½ or so, insisted on being in on the action, and when he was finally allowed to, settled down to remove all the bolts he could reach in such a businesslike way that the former owner, watching him, was moved to exclaim, “My gawd, the guy’s a machinist!”

J.P. is also interested in art, writing, and music. He is a sturdy, self-determined little man. I’ve been amazed at all the things a baby can do for himself if he’s allowed to. I never saw myself as a mother-type person, and I don’t think J.P. sees himself as a baby-type person, either. The only ideas I had about raising a child are that (1) he should learn to respect other people’s rights as well as uphold his own, and (2) he shouldn’t be afraid to *use* things—only to accept responsibility for the consequences and clean up his own messes.

I think it’s working out all right. Even formerly doubtful and horrified relatives (does *everyone* have those?) have had to say that we must be doing something right with this kid—they’ve never seen one so young who can *understand* so much.

We’re kind of proud of him—not that we’ve had all that much to do with it. When he yells “J.P. do it!” at me when I start to help him with something, I wouldn’t presume to interfere.

When I was in first grade, I attended what must have been about the last two-room schoolhouse in existence, and my teacher was a warm, wonderful, motherly lady who had taught retarded children and knew that little kids need a lap once in a while. They closed that school down the next year and shipped me off to 2nd grade in a bus (I remember being terribly concerned that I had no way of getting home by myself if I needed to—they could at least have told me about taxis.) This new school was *huge* and there were about a million kids, all of whom seemed to know all sorts of things that I had missed, somehow—you know, I’ve felt that all my life—and no one was interested in *me* at all. The teacher was young, fresh from college, and bursting with theories about how to mold young minds. She did not like me—I guess I didn’t mold properly. I liked her at first, but I didn’t like what she

wanted me to do. I won't go into the bewilderment and humiliation of that episode. When I asked my parents if I could stay home and not go to school anymore, I was told that if I didn't go to school I'd be taken away and my parents put in jail. I was 7 years old.

Do you know, I'm 30 years old, I've been out of school for 12 years, and I *still* have nightmares about being in school? I had one just last night, as a matter of fact.

Most adults treat children with the most appalling lack of respect! I may yell at J.P. when he makes off with my tools or leaves me a mess to clean up, or I may get angry and impatient with him when he's irrational and tell him to go take a nap and come back when he's fit to live with, but I sure as heck don't patronize him.

Two is a difficult age. I was interested in the account in *GWS #11* of the two year old violinist who took off if *one more second* of correction was offered than she was ready to accept. That's J.P., all right. You can help him—he's basically a pretty reasonable person—but you have to be awfully diplomatic about it. I always ask if he needs help, even when it's obvious, and I make it a point to mention that adults run into the very same sort of problems.

J.P. is a bright kid—not in the sense of being brilliant—that's a different sort of thing—but competent and aware. He follows verbal instructions as well as most adults. He has a firm grip on the "how" and "why" of things. He often has trouble because he can see the difference between adult activities and what his body is capable of, and it frustrates him terribly. He started trying to walk at some ridiculously early age—2 months or 2 weeks or something, long before his muscles could possibly cooperate. By the time he was ready to walk he didn't believe it. He held on to my hand long after I knew he could walk alone if he tried. When he finally suddenly realized he could do it, he was at it all day long, with or without an audience (although J.P. *always* prefers an audience).

We're always impressed with his efforts, because we compare them to that of other 2 year olds (or 3 or 4 year olds.) *He* compares them with adults' efforts, and his standard is perfection. Now, what could you *teach* somebody like that, beyond (eventually, I hope) not being so hard on himself?

I've always found that J.P. listens best when I explain something from the standpoint of being interested in the thing *with* him, instead of putting the

spotlight on *him* and his performance. When he paints I ask if I can watch, and make interested comments. In exchange, J.P. graciously allows me to assist in the creative process in small ways—keeping the wash-water clean, removing completed artwork, wiping out sullied colors, etc. And I really do find it interesting to watch him.

We do have to insist on order and using tools correctly, because he is only interested in *our* tools. I said to Tony just yesterday that I think J.P. only learned to talk in order to be able to talk us out of our stuff. Why does it always have to be the very tool you're *using* at the moment?

J.P. also keeps his crayons, paper, and paint in good order. He washes his hands for supper and takes a bath himself. I just adjust the water and lift him in and out. He doesn't do all these things willingly all the time, you understand, just competently. He's generally *filthy*. He also knows just about every ploy for getting adult cooperation there is.

Another Helper

This story unfortunately got separated from any name or address. Thanks to whoever sent it!

We had had dinner on the coffee table—after dinner my friend’s husband volunteered to do the dishes so we could talk. Aaron, the 20 month old baby, was asked to clear the table. Fascinated, I watched him as, piece by piece, he carried silver, glasses, containers for food, butter, salt, pepper, etc. to his father in the kitchen (a short way from the living room and not closed off). During this process his mother started to hand him a large plate filled with bones and table scraps, but inadvertently she showed him her fear that he wouldn’t be able to handle the plate—so he refused to take it. She put it back on the table and continued to hand him other, smaller dishes and objects. Finally he had carried everything to his father except my glass (from which I was still sipping) and the big plate.

Aaron walked back to the table, pointed to my glass and when I indicated that I wasn’t finished and would keep it, he realized that he would now have to deal with “The Plate.”

It was beautiful to watch this child struggle with himself. He’d touch the edges of the plate, then let go—draw back, come forward, grasp it—let go, then finally he placed his tiny hands firmly on the edges of the plate, gingerly lifted it—and so, so carefully, a step at a time, carried it to his father.

His mother and I watched silently as he did this wonderful feat and as he handed the plate to his father, unable to contain our joy, we gave him a big hurrah!

Crime In School

From Family Circle:

School Crime—*Crime Stopper Fact:* Help your children plot a direct route to school that lessens their chance of being bothered. Streets with the heaviest pedestrian and auto traffic are safest. Identify businesses or “block mother” homes where they can take refuge. Tell them to avoid shortcuts through alleys, parks, vacant lots and other isolated spots. If they ride the bus, advise them to sit as near the driver as possible.

Few schools today are the havens of safety most older adults probably remember from their childhoods. Your children’s chances of encountering crime are greatest when they’re en route to, at, or coming home from school.

According to one Government study, at least 282,000 of the nation’s 21 million secondary-school students are physically attacked each month, and 2.4 million have something stolen. A quarter of the nation’s grammar-school children report being afraid that “somebody might hurt them,” and one-third of seventh graders surveyed at a typical metropolitan school say they are fearful of being hurt or bothered in school.

Teach them to conceal valuables. They can carry money in their shoes; pack lunches with books in a small backpack. If lunch is served at school, see if you can pay for it a week or month in advance by check so they needn’t carry cash. Don’t let them wear expensive jewelry or clothes to school as they’re bound to attract the notice of thieves.

Be cautious in warning your children “never” to fight back. If they’re outnumbered with no chance of successfully resisting, that’s probably good advice. But a child who meekly caves in to any affront is only asking to be a victim again and again. Knowing some principles of self-defense and fighting to win can sometimes discourage bullies.

If you are away after school, arrange to call your children at the time

they should arrive home. If they're not there, know the names and phone numbers of the friends they walk home with so that you can contact them immediately for information on where your children are.

What to do if your child becomes a victim of a school crime:

1. Press your school administrator for immediate action. In some jurisdictions, school officials are responsible for a child's safety getting to and from school, as well as on the premises. Administrators are often reluctant to act decisively, especially when an offender is a student. The best way to keep a problem from escalating is to indicate forcefully at the outset that repetition won't be tolerated.

2. You have a right to call the police if your child is robbed, beaten, threatened, molested or otherwise harassed, even in the school building. School administrators rarely involve the police voluntarily and may try to discourage you from doing so because of concern about their school's image. But schools are public property and your child is entitled to the same police protection there as elsewhere. The theft of lunch money, for example, may in fact constitute strong-arm robbery and may most effectively be dealt with as such.

VA Legislative Study

From the Roanoke Times, 6/80:

This month, a committee of Virginia legislators will begin studying ways to clarify the state's school laws. They will try to define a private school. They also will try to set guidelines for homeschooling. Under Virginia law, private schools not accredited by the state are not required to have certified teachers and state-approved curriculum. But parents who teach their children at home must be certified by the state as a qualified teacher or tutor.

Here's the loophole that Virginia legislators want to close: Since the state doesn't define a private school, a homeschool without qualified teachers could be declared a private school and thus be exempt from state regulation of curriculum and personnel.

Fredericksburg Delegate Lewis P. Fickett Jr., a member of the study committee ... and some other lawmakers say the state should not prohibit parents from teaching their children at home just because they don't hold state certificates. "We should protect the right of parents to give their children private or individualized tutorial education ... pretty much on their own terms," Fickett said. "A well-educated person should have the right to educate his child at home."

Several Virginia legislators say they are looking toward some form of registration for non-public schools, while others are asking for minimum academic standards.

Yet other states have had trouble even registering private schools. In Michigan, for instance, more than 60 private schools, mostly Christian-oriented with as few as seven students, refused to comply this year with the state's routine request for basic information. A few years ago, only a handful refused, says Ralph Turnbull, a consultant with the Michigan Department of Education. Michigan law does not define a private school.

Kentucky attempted to impose minimal regulations on private schools, and was resisted in the Kentucky Supreme Court by a group of

parents. “We lost badly,” says Edward Fossett, an attorney for the Kentucky Department of Education, of the court’s decision last September. The state lost any right to set minimum requirements on non-public schools, which the court declared were exempt from compulsory attendance laws. Now the state is trying for some form of basic registration.

(Virginia) educators and legislators involved in an upcoming study of the compulsory attendance laws appear firm about ensuring the state’s interest in educating all children as they clarify the statutes, but want to avoid a fight with religious groups.

So the school people are now trying to “clarify” the law in Virginia. Of course, what they really want is not to “clarify” home schooling but to forbid it, or surround it with restrictions that make it virtually impossible. Same with laws about private schools, of which Virginia is full. They will try to make private schools so expensive—elaborate facilities, minimum numbers of students, etc.—that only people with a lot of money can start them. To most people, they will give no choice but to send their children to the local public schools, however bad they may be. They will, in short, try to do indirectly what *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* forbade them to do directly, i.e. make the public schools an effective monopoly.

We must not be too surprised by this. Education in the U.S. is a \$150+ billion a year business, and most school administrators are simply businessmen whose chief concern is to protect their businesses, and so their own jobs and careers, any way that they can. They are not going to let any of their conscripted customers escape without a struggle.

Abbey Lawrence (VA) writes:

I am composing a lengthy letter to send to my state legislators, the State Board of Education, the joint committee mentioned in the article, and anyone else I can think of. Please urge your Virginia readers to do so. In separate articles recently I read that 1) the Virginia Education Association is urging compulsory kindergarten; children “do better” in later grades if they’ve learned to be obedient little robots in kindergarten, and 2) the VEA last year spent more money than any other group lobbying the state legislature. Our

so-called “educators” are a deeply entrenched bureaucracy whose primary interest is in enlarging and strengthening itself. As parents and taxpayers we *must* exert strong pressure on the powers that be if our rights and options are not to be further eroded. An index of bills, resolutions, etc. can be obtained on request from the state legislature; this includes actions taken or under consideration on any given issue. Also ask for a list of the members of the State Board of Education, standing committees, and members of the joint committee studying HJR #94. *Write letters.* It is a rare politician that won’t be influenced by a barrage of mail.

Another VA reader, Rose Jones (see Directory), who has been teaching her boys at home for a year, sent us more information on the legislative study, and also wrote to the other families in the Directory. She says:

It seems to me to be a rare opportunity for home schoolers and unschoolers to have substantive input into Virginia’s legislative stance on this issue. My own feeling is that I wish they’d leave the law alone as it stands. I don’t see how we could have it any better than it is: i.e., call one’s home a private school and be left alone, as has happened in my own case.

I plan to go to Richmond for the hearings, if at all possible, and if I cannot, I will submit written comments. I hope some of the others I have written to can go, too.

To be notified of the meeting dates or to attend the sessions or submit comments in writing, you can get on the mailing list by writing to: Robin Whitaker, Division of Legislative Services, PO Box 3AG, Richmond VA 23208. There is a six-page memorandum which you can request from Robin in summarizing “the background of the study, the competing interests involved, various suggestions for standards governing private schools, issues involved in prescribing standards for public schools, some statutory options and some interested organizations.” I learned Friday that the first meeting of the committee is planned for Sept. 16.

More from VA

The Washington Post, 7/6/80:

Vicki and Ronald Painter converted the family den into a classroom and use it to teach their 6-year-old son Edward—a public school dropout. “I’m not saying this is for everyone, but we believe it is best for Edward,” said Suffolk’s Mrs. Painter, who began her home school last year after her son went to kindergarten in public school. “It’s a lot of hard work for me,” she said. “You must be dedicated. But we think it is worth it. Our son is benefiting.”

The Painters had to fight no legal battles. The Suffolk school board gave them permission to teach Edward at home, provided he had home instruction 180 days a year.

“Compulsory school attendance is important, but before it can be enforced, someone must define what a school is and what a public school is,” said Superintendent Forrest Frazier. “We feel we have an obligation to the taxpayers that until it is defined, we’re not going to waste their money with court fights,” he said.

Thomas Watkins, a Hampton attorney and a member of the State Board of Education, would like some guidelines spelled out. But he says it could be difficult and points to a major problem. In setting specific standards for a private school, the state could be intruding in the affairs of private religious schools—a step legislators are reluctant to take and one some say the state’s courts would likely block.

Carl Rheim, assistant state superintendent for curriculum and instruction ... is particularly worried about a lack of safeguards that (homeschooled) children are being adequately educated. “What happens if these children decide they want to go back to public school or college? How are they to be judged for the A’s and B’s they were given by their mothers?”

Rheim said he respected the parents’ motives, but questioned their chances for long-term success. “They may begin with the greatest of intentions, but after a while, what’s going to happen?” he said. “I

think it would be very difficult to set up five hours of daily instruction at home and maintain it.”

State Del. Howard Copeland (D—Norfolk), a member of the joint legislative committee formed last winter to examine the matter, says “the religious aspects can be resolved,” by the legislature. “But I’m not sure we can accommodate those who simply don’t want to participate in public schools and reject traditional private schools.”

He said, “What we have to do is assure that all children are receiving quality education. I think a parent should teach their child at home, but the child should also attend school.”

Carl Rheim’s questions have of course been answered many times in the pages of *GWS*. Many children, taught at home for many years, have been able to get into colleges, often very “selective” ones, and have done well there. No one has yet, to my knowledge, produced any evidence that learning at home has prevented any children from going to college, or has in any other way caused them academic harm. The evidence is quite to the contrary. And the article quoted in this issue of *GWS* shows that in spite of current attacks against standardized tests colleges are more and more admitting students primarily on the basis of their SAT (college entrance exam) scores, feeling apparently that the A’s and B’s given by most high schools are unreliable as an indicator of students’ ability.

As for the five hours of teaching a day, we have pointed out several times that school systems in many areas, when providing home tutors for children who because of sickness or injury can’t come to school, know that it only takes a few hours of tutoring a week to keep them up with their classmates. It might be well for homeschoolers in Virginia to find out very specifically what these tutoring practices are in their own districts, and to pass this information along to their legislators—and perhaps also to Carl Rheim, other leading educational officials, and the editors of Virginia newspapers.

A final thought. It may well be a good idea for homeschoolers to start their own schools on a religious basis, and with a religious label, insofar as they possibly can. After all, one does not have to be a fundamentalist, or even

believe in a personal God, as many Quakers do not, to be legally recognized as a Christian. As I point out in the Minnesota story elsewhere in this issue, many court decisions have said that the state may not question very deeply into the religious beliefs of its citizens. If it strengthens our legal position to put in these terms our reasons for wanting homeschooling, we ought not to hesitate to do so.

News from PA

Janet Williams (PA) writes:

Our children are free ... Our very conservative, small, rural school district just let us go. Since our special circumstances might help other people, I'll try to explain it to you.

Jenny, Matt, and Amy have all been evaluated as gifted. At our January conference with the gifted teacher, I told her that the 2½ hour seminar per week which she had was insufficient for our children. The regular classroom was too slow, repetitious, teacher-controlled, disjointed, etc., to be appropriate. Yet our children spent Monday to Friday in that confine.

On Tuesdays, the gifted teacher had 2½ hours to let them think, explore, question, and create. But those 2½ hours were no longer enough to balance the hell of the remaining 28 hours. I told her we had decided to get information on how to have home education in Pennsylvania.

While doing that, we began to realize our rights as parents of "special education pupils." So we began to apply a little pressure to see if the school would offer more flexible curricula. As it became apparent that deviates (different-smarter or different-slower) HAD to adapt to the "norm," we returned to our beginning and requested home education.

And, as simple as that, we sat down. The school said what they would provide in the line of materials and what they would expect from us. We made concessions (standardized testing, and therefore standardized curricula to ensure "acceptable grades") but decided at this point that GETTING AWAY was our primary objective. We requested that our children be permitted to continue in the gifted seminar class and music instruction. That was approved with no problem. The principals of the elementary and middle school both indicated their willingness to have our children participate in any special events (Track and Field Day, Spring Musical, etc.)

I am not a certified teacher, nor a college graduate. At this writing, there are no such requirements in Pennsylvania School Code. Douglas Boelhouwer, the Director of Non-Public Schools (Dept of Ed, Box 911, Harrisburg 17126; Phone, 717-783-5146) who was most helpful, says the present code calls for a "qualified tutor" which is left to the local superintendent's discretion. BUT the Pa. House of Representatives, on May

20, 1980, approved a new school code which is supposed to come before the Pa. Senate this session. This new code requires certification for home education. HOWEVER, our local Congressman has advised us that certification will not be required for home education of the gifted.

Provisions for gifted education vary widely from state to state, much as compulsory school attendance laws. Criteria for determining giftedness varies also—although *generally* the IQ range is 120–130. Based upon my experiences with our children, I would think many of GWS parents have gifted children. So this may be another avenue available as grounds to justify home education. It certainly was for us. If there is any way I can help other people in Pennsylvania, please let me know. Or if you still need any help, in any way, I'm available. Thank you ever so much for all the wonderful support we have found in your pages. Being pioneers is sometimes scary, but those of us who are called must go.

Donna suggested that Janet write the other families in the Pa. Directory, since some might not know about the pending legislation and might want to write to their representatives. Janet did so, and wrote back,

The new school code bill is in the Senate Education Committee. It was in the House for *eight years* so hopefully it will be that long in the Senate!! Copies of letters should go also to: Sen. Jeannette Reibman, Chair, Senate Education Committee, Rm. 188, Main Capitol Bldg, Harrisburg. There has been no decision as to whether or not public hearings will be held.

Have since been advised that there is no waiver of certification under any circumstances in the new code. As I get any new info, I'll pass it on.

Unschoolers in Mo.

Robert Baker (MO), one of the “Friendly Lawyers” in GWS #3, sent this story from the Joplin Globe, 6/10/80:

School starts for Daniel and Matthew Baker as soon as they reach the breakfast table. Discussion revolves around any subject the children can think of. Their school lasts until bedtime, there is no set summer vacation and the teacher isn't even certified. There are, however, weekly outings to Missouri Southern State College's Media Center and area libraries.

Daniel, 7, has read “Bambi” cover to cover several times. Matthew, 5, enjoys opera and *Newsweek* magazine. The two have never attended public schools; they learn at home with their parents.

“Civilization somehow managed to produce Milton and Shakespeare without public schools,” said Robert Baker, father of Daniel and Matthew and author of a chapter in *Twelve Year Sentence*, a book decrying public schools.

The Bakers are in a growing group of parents dissatisfied with public education . . .

Interest in alternate education is reflected in the growth of parochial schools. According to *Education USA*, a weekly newspaper published by the National School Public Relations Association, “two new Christian schools are being established every 24 hours.”

Relatively little space in Missouri state law books is devoted to education; that is why the Bakers can teach their children at home. “In those cases where it has come up in Missouri,” said Baker, an attorney, “the court has held that Missouri has no real compulsory schooling law. It merely says children must be educated. How many schools do you think actually teach all they are supposed to?”

And so the Baker boys are taught only what they want to learn, which, so far, has run wider than the spectrum of courses offered at public or private schools, said Baker.

“Children have a natural curiosity to learn,” he said. “We have never forced them to learn anything they weren’t interested in, but they want to learn everything. And we don’t make them move on when the bell rings. There is no bell.”

Nor are there any other students at the home. But Baker said he does not worry that his children might miss out on what teachers call “socialization with peers.”

“Do you think they are even allowed to talk during school? When the bell rings, the teacher stands up and says it’s time to learn, no talking. What sort of socialization is that? My children have friends. They played on the soccer team this year. They know people.”

The boys are encouraged to bring friends home, and show them their teaching aids, including computers and telescopes and other materials obtained from the Media Center.

So far, Baker said, the children have remained out of public schools on their own accord. “Each year, we ask the boys if they want to go to school, but they don’t.” As far as the Bakers are concerned, that’s a healthy attitude . . .

Daniel and Matthew already have taken several tests at a clinic near Monett, and each tested at least two years above his age in reading, spelling, and mathematics. The boys, however, insist they taught themselves, which is exactly how the Bakers want it.

“Kids like to learn,” said Daniel. “They just don’t like to be taught.”

In a letter, Robert added:

The “socialization” boogey man has never popped up. My boys play baseball and soccer with numerous other kids and get along fine. The idea that helping kids to learn at home in the family atmosphere will stunt their social skills appears to me, based on experience, to be pure myth. So too the idea that bright kids—and please note that very ordinary kids who are learning at home will in comparison to schooled kids *appear* exceptionally

bright—may develop the bratty tendency to denigrate their less fortunate fellows: it just hasn't happened. Matthew and Daniel are well familiar with and practice consideration for others, and avoid what people of an earlier generation called "putting on airs." I suspect that the lack of any social problems is the consequence of what my boys *haven't* learned—sexism, racism, etc. While I can well understand the concerns so often expressed in GWS that schools don't help kids learn much, I am less upset about that fact than I am about all the garbage that kids *do* learn in schools.

Success Stories

Penny King (NY) writes:

I have been teaching my 9 year old at home for three years. I am a Seventh Day Adventist but I have been developing my own curriculum. We have dealt with two different local school systems in Putnam and Dutchess County in New York state with much success and cooperation.

Our school was investigated by the Dutchess County Board of Probation with approval. We have also had to go before the Monmouth County New Jersey Children's Court to prove our credibility and sincerity in teaching Joshua at home. I would be happy to communicate with others about the blessings of home schooling.

Karen Kimball (MA) sent clippings from two local newspapers:

School Board Okays Home Study Plan—The School Committee voted last night to allow Karen and Donald Kimball of 163 Hingham St, Rockland to continue the home instruction of their two school-aged children.

Since September, the children have been enrolled in the "Home Study" program of the Santa Fe Community School. Mrs. Kimball is their teacher, and the New Mexico school provides resource material and other assistance . . .

Yesterday, Mrs. Kimball met with the school committee to explain her philosophy and argue why she should continue teaching her children at home . . .

Approving (School Superintendent) Rogers' recommendation, the committee voted to assign the department's home teacher, Doris Higgins, to meet monthly with the Kimballs and submit progress reports to the superintendent . . .

The Tallahassee (Fl.) Democrat, 6/21/80:

Jacksonville—The mother of a 10 year old boy who kept her son out of school and taught him herself has had charges against her dropped after the boy scored above-average on academic achievement tests.

“It seems to us that he (Joshua Voshell) is getting an education, and that is what we are concerned with,” Assistant State Attorney Bob Shafer said.

Helen J. Voshell was charged earlier this year with violating the state’s compulsory school attendance law. Joshua never attended public or private school nor was he educated by a state-certified tutor ... Voshell has been tutoring Joshua at home with a correspondence course designed by the Seventh Day Adventists.

After the School Board filed a complaint against Voshell earlier this year, the State Attorney’s office decided to wait before prosecuting until Joshua was given a test to determine his level of academic accomplishment. Last month, Joshua was given the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test and the Stanford Math Achievement Test. In both instances, the boy scored higher than the national average for pupils in his grade level.

“The child did very well on the tests,” confirmed Shafer. “We looked at the overall picture and decided that it was not in the best interest of justice to continue prosecuting her (Voshell) at this time.”

From an AP story from Kensington, Ohio:

In Columbus, the head of Ohio State University’s department of family relations and human development decided to educate her two sons at home

Dr. Barbara Newman and her husband, Philip, an author, opted for home instruction about three years ago because they traveled extensively. Although the family has finally settled, the youngsters, now age 6 and 10, are continuing classes at home through a program developed by Calvert School, a private institution in Baltimore.

Such cases of home instruction—involving no religious ties—are becoming a “growing problem” in Ohio and elsewhere, according to Roger Lulow, assistant superintendent of public instruction for the Ohio Department of Education.

No exact figures are available, but an estimated 300 to 500 students currently learn at home in Ohio, Lulow said . . .

The Spicers (WI) sent us this clipping:

Parents Get Permission To Tutor Their Own Child—The New Lisbon School Board, at their meeting Monday night, were informed by a letter from State Superintendent of Schools Barbara Thompson, that permission had been given to a rural New Lisbon couple, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Spicer, to educate their son, 8-year-old Jacob Spicer, in a home tutorial program, rather than to send him to school.

The letter from the State Superintendent told the Board that any family who prefers to educate their own child, may be given permission under the provisions of Wisconsin Statute 118.15(4), providing the curriculum drawn up by the parents is approved by the Department of Public Instruction. Such permission is given for a one-year period.

Tom Spicer added, “The clipping was from last year, no such fanfare this year—thank goodness. This year was a whole lot easier and less eventful than last. Our case didn’t involve any religious aspects and neither of us hold teaching certificates. We did take John’s advice and borrowed a typewriter for our homeschooling proposal.”

At Home in Fla.

From Nancy Marsh (FL):

I am teaching my two children, Bonnie (11) and Sara (6), at home. We have registered our home as a private school in the state of Florida. We call it the Children's Discovery Center after a science center for children in Fort Lauderdale. Bonnie has the sixth grade course from Calvert. I did not get the Advisory Teaching Service because the course is too structured. We stick mainly to the basics, reading and writing and math, when it comes to the books. We feel that learning comes from everyday experiences. Sara has a math workbook and some reading books published for schools which she uses. She is reading some. I don't want to push like the schools do because Bonnie enjoyed reading when she first started but it is a chore for her now. I'm not sure if that is a result from reading too early or too much at an early age, but I try to make it fun for Sara.

Many in our area know about our homeschooling. Most think it is great because of the condition of the schools in our county; they're overcrowded and the children are behind the private schools in their learning. Some are opposed because they think the children need to be exposed to the world to make them stronger. Whenever I get that from someone I say like one of the mothers in *GWS* wrote, "That makes about as much sense as putting their heads in a vice every day so they'll get used to the headaches they're going to get when they're adults." Actually I was surprised by the support I get from most people and I know of some who are getting ready to take their children out or already have. Also a few have small children and don't plan on sending them to school.

Bonnie works on Fridays at horse stables in order to earn riding lessons. The owner is also an unschooler. Bonnie is learning so much about horses, and she loves all animals. She is also selling Avon products to friends and relatives. She is putting most of the money in her savings account in order to buy a horse, she says.

We also have two additions to our menagerie of animals. The girls' grandparents bought them each a rabbit and their father said it was all right only if they helped him build a cage, which they did. Everyone worked hard on it to get it done. They take very good care of all their animals, and they do

most of it themselves.

Sara had a few classes of crocheting in which she did a small square. She worked hard and sat for three hours to get it done, something she wouldn't do for math or any other school subject. Bonnie enjoys macrame. She did a plant hanger and has a few more projects lined up.

Our children are happy and much more relaxed since they have been home. Bonnie has not been sick at all this year like she usually is each school year.

Bonnie seems to be getting more interested in current events. Once in a while she will read an article in the newspaper and watch the news, something she never seemed interested in. I think because she was always bogged down from school. She expresses herself more and is beginning to form opinions about things that are going on in the world. I am really glad to see the change in her. I see her becoming a whole person. I was a little worried about keeping my children home at first for fear that they wouldn't learn anything, but they seem to be doing fine.

Part-Time Solution

From Kathleen Meyers, 349 E. 300 North, Alpine UT, 84003:

You mentioned a lack of information regarding part time attendance. In San Ramon, California, we had two sons who took only the solids (Ed—I guess this means English, math, etc) and Physical Education at the junior high. They came home at 1:00 so we could give them electives at home. This seemed to please the school people since they still had the boys “on their records.”

Effects of School

From “A Home-Schooling Solution” by Louise Andrieshyn (Man.), in the Summer '80 Mothering (PO Box 2046, Albuquerque NM 87103; \$8/yr):

As a mother, one of my heartbreaking experiences was seeing the transformation that occurred in my two older children when they went to school. My children were not failures in that impersonal system; in fact they were “achievers”—accomplished in their academic work, favored by their teachers, involved in extra-curricular activities, and popular with their peers. Despite all this they were immensely unhappy.

Heidi and Michael liked their teachers and even their school, but they heartily disliked the compulsory educational system with its arbitrary structure, regimentation, coercion, bribes, competitiveness, unrealistic expectations, lack of individualized learning, and absence of creative freedom. They were frightened by the authoritarianism of the adults and the viciousness of the bullies. They couldn't understand the stealing and vandalism of older students, the racial prejudice of children against children, and the unfairness of punishments imposed on whole groups for one child's misdemeanor. They especially tried to avoid the school bus rides where the older kids teased younger ones mercilessly and aggressive kids picked on meeker ones either hurting them or destroying their school work. (Ed.—all this in a small rural school system.)

I had spent years of time, effort and love trying as best I knew how to raise Heidi and Michael as gentle, sensitive, cheerful, independent, secure, creative individuals who loved learning. Then I sent them to school and watched them become sullen, tense, aggressive, insecure children who were losing their desire to learn and their ability to be creative.

The change was even noticeable physically. Heidi was only nine but her fingernails were chewed down to the quick and every now and then she would break out in a nervous rash. Her after-school “unwinding” was often violent and tearful as she tried to release much

of the tension built up inside her during the day while she was being a “good kid” in school. In Michael the physical effects were even more obvious. Though he seldom had been sick in his early years, when he started school he developed frequent headaches and stomach aches, sometimes actually vomiting in school.

Before starting school Michael was a confident person who had been able to read and print quite matter-of-factly and had been able to draw and paint with a talented, relaxed style. School transformed Michael dramatically into a frightened perfectionist who struggled painstakingly to print his letters exactly, who became upset and angry when he could not read a given word, who could no longer paint with creative freedom, and who insisted he could not draw anymore. In school he became so fear-ridden and inhibited trying to perform as perfectly as he perceived his teachers expected that eventually he believed he was wholly incompetent at reading and writing and art.

Even at home where the school pressure was absent, he would start one of these activities spontaneously only to end up angry and frustrated; finally in a tantrum of disgust and tears he would abandon it completely. In less than two years Michael had become a successful victim of conventional schooling. There he was, a six year old at the top of his class in school while in real life he had been made functionally illiterate.

From Teachers

I've just finished my first year of teaching—fourth grade in a public school. I've seen so many kids who hate to learn and so many kids who are forced to study things they aren't interested in. I've had to tell kids we couldn't spend a lot of time on something because it wasn't in the curriculum. I feel that the kids and I are both being cheated. Needless to say, I am extremely disillusioned with the whole system.

In your “Mother Earth News” article, you had a lot of advice for parents, but what can I, as a teacher do? Having no children of my own, where can I teach, if not in some public or private school system? As far as I know, there aren't even any alternative schools in this area.

My involvement in unschooling has had a negative effect on my teaching. It is becoming increasingly difficult to walk into a classroom and “teach” materials that I do not want to teach. In fact, my presence in a school is becoming unbearable. Trying to prepare “innovative” activities for the kids to do does not help; in fact, it usually makes it worse because to the kids it's just another school thing to be done, and is often treated with greater resistance than rote work. Rote assignments, you see, allow greater opportunities for the kids to “socialize.” School may be a bad place for kids to be, but it can become a living hell for a teacher who has lost all desire to be a professional baby sitter.

I am a teacher who has resented the title because I've had the opinion that anyone can learn anything they want to learn if they are interested enough. I've “taught” all ages from kindergarten through 11th grade, and have felt the frustration of wasted time. My two oldest children, ages 20 and 18, now at college, had talents wasted because of our education system and my not knowing what to do or lack of attempting to buck the system. I have an eight year old who is extremely eager to learn and I'm not eager to put her through the same mill.

I'm a teacher with 20 years experience, a Master's in Secondary Education and a qualified Reading Specialist who quit in disgust. I'm selling insurance.

First, I stopped giving homework because it seemed like punishment. Then the whole business of public education began to look like punishment. The claim is, "We're preparing them for life," but the kids are taken and locked away for 12 years in dusty, stifling classrooms where they are totally isolated from life.

Another Teacher

Barry Kahn (ME) writes:

The family is still asleep so I'll take this chance to share a couple of things with you. Bit of background: Born in Los Angeles in 1948, lived in NY, NJ, Mass, Wisc, back to Calif. for high school and college. BA in Linguistics from UCLA. Taught English with the Peace Corps in Senegal, W. Africa; self-taught guitarist since age 14; learned how to make jewelry while in Africa and have had own jewelry business for 5 years. Two children ... My wife and I teach home-birth classes and she has assisted a certified Nurse midwife at home-births for two years. I've been teaching guitar off and on since age 16—love it.

Since January I have been working towards a Maine teaching certificate. Last semester I took 5 education classes, this summer I am taking one, and I have one more—educational psychology—to go. The *good* side of this self-abuse is that everything said and done in every one of these classes reconfirms my belief in homeschooling and the importance of sparing our children this drivel.

I wanted to talk a little bit about guitar teaching. I am essentially self-taught. I took lessons for a few months when I was 15, but most of what I know I've learned from live performances, from friends, from books and records. The good aspects of being self-taught are that I developed a very good ear—which I didn't have in the beginning; I have an excellent musical memory which comes from playing everything I know thousands of times; and finally that I can improvise very easily, which comes from thousands of hours of doodling aimlessly around the fingerboard. The problem with being self-taught is the tendency to play what you already know 90% of the time and to force yourself to learn new pieces only in desperation. People with more will power may do better, but when I was in high school I spent a lot of time playing all the old pieces.

What I found when I began teaching (which was great for my playing because I had to stay ahead of my students) was that my students learned things in a few months which I hadn't learned until I'd been playing for three or four years. The secret? Organization, a progression of increasingly difficult lessons, something new to work on every week, etc, etc. Plus my belief that

anyone can learn to play the guitar if they really want to (which I still believe cause all my students do great), liberal *honest* praise, and so forth. In other words I don't have any secret at all—teachers have been doing all these things for centuries. BUT—it works for private guitar lessons because, as you discuss in *Instead Of Education*, it's *voluntary*. People come to me willingly, I tell them what I can and cannot do, if they like what I have to offer they start giving me money and I give them enjoyable work. It's the greatest system in the world, gives pleasure to all concerned, requires no fancy apparatus, and it's self-regulating: if I do a poor job I don't have students after a while; if I'm good, I thrive.

I shall continue with other things sometime, but there's a three year old sitting on my lap and little hotshot nearby who's hungry and it's been a pleasure writing to you. Help, they're taking the pen.

Tone-Deaf

I wrote in *Never Too Late*:

My First Music Pupil—In the summer of 1955 I went to Europe. In the fall, as I was getting ready to drive back to Colorado, the parents of one of my students, Sam Piel, asked if I would drive him with me back to school. Sam and I were good friends, so I said I'd be delighted.

We drove long hours, and slept in the car, or outside right next to it. Along the way we talked about a million things, and became much closer friends.

On the last day of the trip Sam told me that he loved music, and wanted more than anything to be able to make music, but could not, because he was tone-deaf. He sang or tried to sing a song or two, and he was certainly very far from the tune, or any tune. He told me the usual sad stories about being first made to sing, and then made not to sing, at school. In the midst of all this I suddenly remembered for the first time in many years what Arthur Landers, music director at my school, had said to us about tone-deafness, that there was no such thing, and that people who had not learned to coordinate voice with ear could be taught or helped to do this, by asking them to match with their voices notes played on a piano, and guiding them to the notes.

Sam was very interested in this. I asked him if he would like to try it, right here in the car, using my voice instead of a piano. He said he would, so we began. I would sing a note and ask him to sing it. He would, of course, sing a different one. I would say, "Here's my note—aah—and here's yours—aah. Now come down (or up) to mine." He would try again, usually get a little closer. I would repeat mine, then his, then mine, then he would try again. I see now that I might have done better to *slide* my voice up or down from his note to mine, or even have him slide up or down until he reached my note, at which point I could have stopped him. But I didn't think of that until much later. However, at each try he would come closer to my note. Eventually he would match it, and for a while we would sing our notes

together, to let him feel what it was like to sing the same note he was hearing.

Then I would sing a new note, and we would start the process again. With each new note I sang, he came closer on his first try to matching it, and was able to match it with fewer tries. Finally he matched my note on the first try. Triumph! I was as excited and pleased as he was. I tried another note, and he matched that. I sang notes all over his range, he matched them all.

We still had a couple of hours left before we reached school, so I thought I would try to teach him the major scale. I began with a note, made that the *do*, and then sang *do-re* and asked him to do the same. After a few tries he could match my *do* and then sing the correct *do-re*. When we had that well established, I sang *do-re-mi*. Same story. By the time we had reached the school, he could match any note I sang and then, from that note, sing the first four notes of the major scale, *do-re-mi-fa*.

Much encouraged by this, he began to study folk singing with the school secretary—by himself at first, as the sound of others singing made it hard for him to hear and feel his own voice, and threw him off. It occurs to me now, thinking of this, that at least some children who are quickly judged to be “tone-deaf” at school might be found to be perfectly capable of singing if they could sing by themselves. In time Sam became coordinated and confident enough to sing with others. He sang in the chorus, started to play the guitar, and soon after took up the cello, where he showed such promise that one of the leading cello teachers of New York told him that if he wanted to, he could probably be a professional musician. As it happens, medicine interested him more, though at college he still played the cello for his own pleasure.

In this connection, the writer Michael Rossman, in an article, “Music Lessons,” in *New American Review* No. 18, has told an interesting story. When he was very young, first going to school, the tone-deaf label was slapped on him. For many years he believed it. But after a while he began to wonder. He listened to music, loved it, could tell

one piece from another, liked one piece better than another. How could this be so if he were truly tone-deaf? Eventually, still half fearing that the label might be true, he began to play the flute. He found he made rapid progress, and soon became skillful. So the tone-deaf label was quite simply wrong.

How had his kindergarten or first grade teacher made such a mistake? The answer is quite simple. She had, apparently, asked him to sing “high” and “low,” or “higher” and “lower” notes, and little Michael, who could *hear* perfectly well, did not know what she meant *by these words*. Unless one knows, as no little children would, that high notes have a larger or “higher” frequency of vibrations than low ones, there is no inherent, apparent, obvious musical meaning in the words “high” or “low.” One might as well speak of red and yellow, or square and triangular notes. If Michael’s teacher had only said, “This is what I call a “high” note, and this is what I call a “low” note,” his problem would have been solved, the words would have been made meaningful.

Since she didn’t do this, Michael did what all little children (and indeed virtually all adults) do in such a situation. He began to make random and panicky guesses, meanwhile searching frantically for facial and other clues as to whether his guess was right. Perhaps with enough such guesses he might in time have picked up enough clues to figure out what she meant and wanted. But he wasn’t given the time; the teacher, like most official testers and judges of people, was in a hurry to make her judgements. So, on went the “tone-deaf” label.

More On “Practicing”

After reading “Practicing Music” in GWS #14, Nancy Wallace (NH) wrote:

I agree with you wholeheartedly—the world “practice” should be abolished (no apologies for being censorious!) Every time I say the word I see my cousin, a small skinny girl, sitting on a large black piano, watching her timer intently and waiting miserably until her 30 minutes are up so she can resume her game with me.

I imagine that those children (and many, many others—me too, sometimes) *are* practicing in the same way professionals do, as you define it. They are preparing to perform for their teachers at their weekly lessons and they of course fear their teacher’s disapproval if they play badly. It is this kind of external motivation, so reminiscent of school, that hinders a child’s relationship to his music.

What about a family like ours, where the children, as it happened, began to be exposed to classical music relatively late? What kinds of things allow our children to become motivated to play music? And what motivates a child to use the same kind of concentration and self-discipline in his music that he used when he learned how to eat with a spoon, tie his shoes, turn a somersault, etc.?

You mentioned a number of things that are useful: encourage children to “play” music not “practice” it, encourage children to improvise (fun!), encourage children to play in groups, encourage children to play great music. These things are so important and yet so difficult to really *do* when your teacher is pushing you to finish John Thompson’s Book 1 by the end of the month.

Anyway, I wanted to suggest a few other things along the same lines. I think children should be encouraged to play often, and enjoy the pieces that they have already mastered. We are usually encouraged to be so competitive (to finish Books 1, 2, and 3 in record time) that we don’t have time to play our “old” pieces. But if I sweat over a Beethoven Sonatina and then drop it when I am more or less satisfied with my playing in order to get working on a Clementi Sonatina, I never feel the exhilaration of playing music beautifully. So in our family what we have been doing is to each develop our own “repertoires.” We usually have one piece that we are sweating over, but at the

same time there are 9 or 10 pieces that we can play fairly well and that we play a whole lot—for pleasure, although they continue to improve from day to day. We have frequent family concerts (complete with bowing and applause) where we play these pieces.

But what about this “sweating” over a new piece (getting the notes right)? You can’t call it “playing,” in the beginning. Isn’t it merely “practice?” No! Although it certainly is work. It’s not great fun, but we are motivated because we have been listening to the piece on tape for a long time and because we like it, it has become a part of us. But even so, it can be very frustrating for children (and adults) in their initial struggles with a piece of music and that is why I am always happy to help Ishmael and Vita if they feel they need me. Once they pick out the notes and get their two hands working together, they really *can* play and the more they play, the more they *want* to play.

None of this has any relevance, though, if children don’t feel that they have the time or interest to play music. How many children come home droopy from school and are still expected to “practice” for an hour before supper? How many kids are pressured into playing an instrument when their real passion is soccer or basketball? But if a child feels he does have the time to put an effort into playing music, it doesn’t seem unfair or stifling to encourage that playing by structuring it into the day and making it an expected (rather than just an optional) activity. I don’t think it’s *bad* for parents to have certain expectations of their children as long as they are reasonable. And a parent who is him- or herself playing an instrument regularly will be setting a clear and inspiring example which will help to prevent this expected activity from degenerating into Compulsory Practice Time.

Starting On The Piano

For many years I have thought that someday, if I ever become a reasonably skillful cellist, and if I have time enough for cello and some left over, I would like to study piano, because there is so much in music that can only be learned, or best be learned, on a keyboard instrument. Every so often, in music stores, I look at books of piano instruction to see whether they look interesting and helpful to work with. Most of those I have seen make what seems to me a mistake. They start people off in the key of C, keep them working in that key for quite a while, then move them into the keys of G and F, spend quite a while there, then move into the next easiest keys, and so on, not introducing them to the more remote keys for a long time. People taught this way tend to think of “easy” and “hard” keys, and to panic when they see music in a “hard” key. It seemed to me, from my beginner’s point of view, that it would be better to encourage people from the very start to move freely among the keys, so that anything they could play in one key they could play in any other.

A few years ago I was pleased to have this hunch supported by a very able musician, pianist, and teacher. He had been teaching piano for many decades, and most of his students, many of whom had begun as adults, had learned to play and read quite well and to get much pleasure from playing. I asked him, if I were going to start piano, what would be some good ways to begin. He said, “Here’s one good thing you can do right away. Pick a simple tune that you know well that lies within a fifth (from *do* to *sol*)—like “Go Tell Aunt Rhody”—learn to play it, with either hand, starting on any note, all over the piano. Do that with other little tunes, or make up some of your own. Get the feeling that any tune you can play, you can play anywhere.” He also recommended a book, *Guided Sight Reading* by Leonard Deutsch, which I have not yet seen. Do any readers know it? If so, what do they think of it?

Meanwhile, Phyllis Jansma (3055 Ramshorn Dr., Fremont MI 49412), after reading *Never Too Late*, sent me some piano instruction books that she publishes, called *Mrs. Stewart’s Piano Lessons*. They are written for children (though adults could use them), and look very interesting. From the very start they encourage children to play in many keys and to move comfortably from one key to another. I haven’t gone through them a lesson at a time, following

on the piano, nor have I seen children working with them. But people have apparently had very good results with this method, and I would certainly look into it if I were starting to play myself.

A friend has also shown me some of the Suzuki piano instruction books. I like these for three reasons. In the first place, all the music in them is good music, by great composers. In the second place, they encourage beginners to learn to play by ear before learning to play from written notes, which is a sensible sequence—after all, we learn to speak before we learn to read and write. Also, for many reasons, it is helpful to beginners to know, i.e., be able to sing, the pieces they are trying to learn to play. In the third place, to make this possible, the Suzuki people can supply for all their instruction books recordings of skilled musicians playing the pieces in the books.

One thing I like to do right now, whenever I can get at a piano, is to make up either tunes or chords. Sometimes I do both, or when I have made a chord I like, then make some tunes using the notes in the chord. Quite often, if I manage to turn out something that I like very much, I will write it down, using a system I invented myself. (I don't mean that I was the first to invent it, only that I had never heard of it.) I call the beginning note of the melody, or the lowest note in the chord, 0. Then I count the number of half steps—from each piano key to the next is a half step—to the next note, and give it that number. Thus the first five notes in a major scale would be written 02457, and the major triad, such as C E G, would be written 047. The advantage of this, for me, is that I can write down my tunes or chords without music paper, and without having to worry about flats, sharps, etc. In other words, with this system you don't have to know anything about music notation to write down the tunes, which means that any children who can count and write numbers can use it.

This way of writing tunes conflicts with the system used in *Mrs. Stewart's Piano Lessons*. In these, the numbers 1, 2, 3, etc. refer to the notes (which musicians sometimes call “degrees”) of the major scale. Mrs. Stewart teaches children to sing these numbers when they are playing tunes. This seems to me a good idea, as from there it is an easy step to solfege, singing do-re-mi etc. with the notes. Since this is an important part of much standard music instruction, it will be handy for children to know it. But I don't think that it would be too confusing to children to use numbers this way when doing Mrs. Stewart's lessons, and the other way when they are writing down their own

tunes and chords.

In any case, I think it is extremely important for children, whether they write down their tunes and cords or not, to spend a certain amount of their time on the piano (or any other instrument) improvising, trying things out to see how they sound, finding things whose sounds they like. Most standard musical instruction pays very little attention to improvising or neglects it altogether, which is a mistake, artistically and historically. Until late in the 19th century, improvising was a central part of what we now think of as “classical” or formal music, and no one was considered a complete or skilled musician who could not do it. Anyway, it is interesting and fun in its own right, and will among other things make music students (as it does me) want to increase their technical skill, so as to be able to improvise more fluently. I know that from improvising in the upper register of the cello, which I like to do whenever I play, I have gained a great deal of technical skill in that part of the instrument, probably more than I would have gained just from doing exercises.

Pastel Crayons . . .

When I first met him in Paris, Arno Stern quickly convinced me that when introducing children to “art,” or painting, or working with colors, it was extremely important to give even the youngest of them good quality materials to work with. Looking at some of the work children had done in his workshop, I was struck by the brilliance and beauty of the colors. I had never seen such colors in school “art” classes, or in paintings done by children in school. The reason is that most schools—at least, those that can afford to have “art” at all—try to save money by using cheap materials. This means that children usually paint with cheap poster paints on low grade newsprint, not white but a pale buff color. The paints look OK in their jars, but their pigments have been so diluted and mixed with I don’t know what that they dry to very dull and muddy colors. So children never have much chance to get excited about color and the possibilities of color. And the wax crayons that most schools and parents give children to work with are no better.

Many years ago, when I was trying to find something more interesting for young children to use, I found out about pastel crayons. I bought a set to use, and soon found that their colors were much more vivid and true than the colors of the crayons and paints that children ordinarily use. I used them to make different kinds of materials for math, and I could see that the children liked the more brilliant colors. They wanted to know how I had made them, and where they could get such crayons for themselves.

I went to an art store and a stationery store the other day, and was glad to find that pastel crayons still exist. The set I like best is called Cray-pas and is made by Sakura. I prefer them to Ni ji, the other brand I found, because they seem slightly less likely to break and their box is easier to use.

I feel so strongly about these crayons that we’ve made arrangements to sell them through this office: \$1.50 for a box of 12 Cray-pas; this price includes postage. (As for books and reprints, make checks payable to Holt Associates, Inc.)

Cray-pas are a little more expensive than ordinary wax crayons, but the vivid, exciting colors make the difference well worth it. Another advantage is that it is very easy to blend one color into another. I hope that many families will try these pastel crayons, and that they will tell us about their experiences.

And Paint

The other art materials I looked into recently were gouache paints. They come in hard cakes or pastilles—you moisten your brush and then mix up the paint right on the cake (water colors often come this way). A box of eight of these cakes cost about \$4.50. Gouache also comes in tubes; I got a box of ten small tubes for \$8.00, but if you were going to use a lot of paint it would make sense to buy larger tubes. On the whole, I found the gouache colors slightly less vivid than the pastel crayons, though the cobalt blue and the green were very close. The red, on the other hand, was quite dull. The liquid paint has its advantages, however. You can put it on much more smoothly, dilute it to many different strengths, and get many effects with the brush that you could not get with the pastel crayons. The two mediums are different; you can do some things with one and other things with the other. I like them both.

I plan soon to try out some acrylics; their colors may prove to be the most vivid of all. I did not try out pastels, though I like them; they break very easily, and the chalky dust tends to get all over everything. If people have had some experience with pastels, or other mediums that we have not mentioned here, I hope they will write. While experimenting with the gouache paints just described, I made a mini-discovery that may be helpful to anyone, adult or child, working with gouache or water color paints, or any other kind (if there are any) in which the paints are diluted and mixed with water.

I began with the problem that we all face when we start working with such paints. How are we going to keep a supply of clean water to dip our brushes in when we are painting, and also, to clean off paint of one color before we put on another color? Usually the amateur painter, child or adult, starts off with a number of containers of clean water, which are soon full of a muddy brown liquid, useless for either mixing or cleaning. Every so often the jars or dishes must be emptied and refilled. All this is distracting, makes for much walking back and forth, and with little children, often leads to a certain amount of mess.

What I did, somewhere along the line, instead of dipping my paint-laden brush into my clean water supply, thereby making it less clean, was to dip one (clean) finger into the clean water and let the drop of water that formed

on the end of the finger touch the brush, which soaked it up immediately. I then squeezed the brush gently in some toilet paper (paper towels or Kleenex would do just as well.) When no more paint came out on the paper, the brush was clean.

You could also drop water on the brushes using a medicine dropper, or a straw (dip the straw in some water, put your finger over the top when you have as much water as you need, hold the straw over the brush, take the finger off the top).

However you do it, when you take the clean water to the paintbrush, instead of the paintbrush to the clean water, it solves the problem of all those containers full of mud-colored water. This does away with the main argument against giving children good water color or gouache to paint with, namely, that mixing the colors makes such a mess.

I pass along this little tip to whoever may be able to make use of it. Happy painting!

Looking Up Answers

A mother wrote:

I still don't know why my daughter doesn't like me to take the time to look things up for her when she asks me a question. I think she likes a simple answer, so I have to do the research on the sly. I think she doesn't want to have to sit if someone expects her to. Perhaps it may have something to do with her schooling in kindergarten. She hated all the sitting they had to do. They could only be active if the teacher said they could. I am really not sure. If I ever discover why I will let you know.

I wrote in reply:

My hunch is that what she wants to find out is not so much accurate information as *what you think* about it. She wants to know what *you* know or think about some particular subject. I don't think that she feels you know everything or that you are always right, though I have to guess at this. It's more that she is interested in the world, and in your ideas about that world.

Math at Home

From a mother in Washington:

My oldest son is just completing first grade and I have already reached a level of extreme frustration and concern with what school is doing to him. He, in fact, looked forward to kindergarten with great joy and could hardly wait to begin. Less than one month passed before the question “How was school today?” would produce tears. To make a long story short, we have spent the last two years “in conference” with teachers and administrators, trying to make school a better place for my son.

I would like to comment on the “Exchange on Math” section in GWS #14. I am amazed at the difficulty and confusion with which most children approach math. My own son’s greatest love is math and I believe the reason is that for him playing with numbers has always been a part of “real” life. From reading GWS I have concluded reading/writing is “candy” for most unschooled kids because those children see that language skills play a big part in the lives of the adults around them, and therefore they need it and *do* learn it. My husband and I are avid readers and therefore by only one year of age my son would sit during our quiet times and “read” his books too. Naturally, by the age of four he was in truth reading. In a similar manner, he saw that numbers were important to us. My husband is an engineer who often does his work at home. Since his father used a calculator and played with numbers, Greg naturally wished to do the same. *All he wanted for his third Christmas was a calculator.* He subsequently spent hours playing with it and has taught himself with little help from us except for brief explanations when it came to “borrowing and carrying.” Similarly he loves mazes, logic problems, and crossword puzzles because (I feel) these are things he can see we enjoy doing.

So, in response to Nancy Wallace’s question “Reading is candy, but why don’t most people feel the same about math?” I would respond that if we as parents feel comfortable with and enjoy doing math (in all its forms) our children will feel the same. It is only because most adults feel that this is foreign territory that children learn to think of math as incomprehensible.

Bootleg Math

The school I went to for my first four years was very traditional. It taught arithmetic by pure rote memorization, as if we were parrots, or talking laboratory rats. No teacher that I can remember ever discussed mathematical ideas with us, or showed us interesting mathematical tricks. All they did was give us “facts,” show us how to do problems, give and correct homework, and drill and test us.

But just as we children had our private secret world of games, tricks, jokes, taunts, and insults, so we had our private mathematical world as well. A number of mathematical tricks and games floated round the school, certainly not encouraged by the teachers, and perhaps without their even knowing about them. Often we worked on these mathematical games in class or study hall, hiding our work behind our official math books.

One of these games was “Think of a Number.” Student A would come up to Student B, preferably with students C, D, and E nearby, and there would follow a conversation about like this:

A. Think of a number. Don’t tell me what it is, but be sure to remember it.

B. OK, I’ve got it.

A. Make sure you don’t forget it!

B. Don’t worry, I won’t!

A. Now add three to it—and don’t tell me the answer.

B. Got it.

A. Now add ten to it.

B. Got it.

A. Now take away seven from it. (No one ever said “subtract,” though the teachers tried to make us.)

B. OK.

A. Now add five to it.

B. OK.

A. Now take away the number you started with.

B. OK.

A. (Triumphantly) The answer is eleven!

At this point B, C, D, etc. would challenge A to do the trick again. It might take A several times to convince them that he really knew how to do the trick, and could do it as many times as he wanted. At which they would walk away, shaking their heads and wondering. Or maybe they would beg him to show them how to do the trick.

No child I knew ever showed another child how to do this trick. Yet every year a gang of us would figure it out and learn to do it, while a new bunch of recruits would come into the school, ready to be tricked and mystified in their turn.

As far as I remember, none of us who did the trick ever wrote down all the operations we asked the other to do. We would do them all in our heads, a step at a time. The longer we could keep going, the more baffled the other would be when we came up with the right answer.

Once in a while someone, perhaps the trickster, usually his subject, would make a mistake in adding and subtracting, and the final answers would not agree. A heated and noisy argument would follow, which was usually settled by the trickster demanding a chance to do the trick again. If the answers disagreed two or more times, the trickster would insist that the subject couldn't add properly, and would look for someone else to work on. Since subjects were usually younger than tricksters, we generally accepted this view of the matter.

I don't remember that we ever did any multiplying and dividing. By the time we were familiar with these, we were tired of this trick, thought of it as just stuff for little kids. I would guess that children just beginning to add would find this trick quite exciting. Might be worth trying out. Let us know what happens.

She Admits It

From the Yakima, WA Herald Republic, 7/2/80:

A state education official reluctantly agreed Tuesday that the state of Washington's emphasis is more on who is doing the teaching than how much children in private and parochial schools are learning.

Testifying in a Yakima County Superior Court non-jury trial which represents a confrontation of church and state about First Amendment religious freedoms, Dr. Monica Schmidt agreed the state's emphasis is "solely on teaching" rather than on learning in the private school setting.

The exchange took place during the second day of the first truancy trial to be tried in Yakima County under the state's truancy statute.

The trial pits Francis Sauve and the River of Life Tabernacle in Wapato against the Wapato School District and the state of Washington over the issue of parental rights and religious freedoms.

Sauve, a member of the River of Life Tabernacle, withdrew his three children from the Wapato Public Schools in March of 1979.

According to the testimony of Wapato school officials, he withdrew the children because he felt the other students in the school system were corrupting his children and making them rebellious.

Sauve testified Tuesday that the children—Robert, 16, Debbie, 15, and Lillian, 9—have not attended a school approved or accredited by the state since March 1979.

Charles Craze, a Cleveland, Ohio attorney arguing the case for Sauve as a representative of the national Christian Law Association, says a key element of the case is the question of certification.

He said the state's compulsory attendance law requires that a child attend either a public school or a private school "approved or accredited by the state of Washington."

There are nine basic requirements a private school must meet in order to become approved or accredited. Most of the requirements deal with health, fire and safety standards. They also set minimum length of school year and minimum length of school days. And they require that any teacher in an approved or accredited school be certified in the state of Washington.

Under Craze's questioning, Schmidt testified that while the state does require private school teachers to be certified, it does not require any demonstration the students are learning.

Craze asked if that did not mean that the state puts its emphasis solely on who is doing the teaching rather than what is being learned where private schools are concerned.

Schmidt agreed that is true. She said that state law says, "The paramount interest of the state is to provide an educational opportunity for all children residing within its borders."

"Is the state's compelling interest that the children be taught, or that they learn?" Craze asked. "If a parent teaches a child at home, and the child is educated, then the bottom line is, what is the difference? The opportunity has been provided. You know that you can get a real stinker who is a certified teacher in an accredited school, and the kids aren't going to learn anything."

Schmidt agreed with Craze that it is possible for a child to get "not only an adequate education but an outstanding education" without ever coming into contact with a certified teacher.

Craze joined local attorney Kip Kendrick in defending Sauve because he says the Christian Law Association believes this case could be an important one in setting a precedent to establish rights to religious freedoms under the First Amendment.

CLA, a non-profit national corporation, seeks out legal cases which might serve as precedents in this area of the law. CLA then provides its legal services free of charge.

Tests More Important

The New York Times, 7/8/80:

Colleges Place Greater Weight On Test Scores—Despite the recent wave of criticism by consumer forces and others, standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test—along with grade-point averages and other statistical measures of academic performance—are apparently becoming more rather than less important in the college admissions process. “Colleges say that they are looking for students who have demonstrated achievement in a variety of areas,” said Warren W. Willingham, an assistant vice president of the Educational Testing Service, which administers the S.A.T. “In fact, there is precious little evidence that they look beyond the standard academic measures of grades and tests.”

“People are moving toward making decisions on the basis of the tests because it is easy and gives it a kind of scientific validity,” said Fred Jewett, Director of Admissions at Harvard. Mr. Jewett said that interviews posed the problem of quality control and that even the academic transcript “no longer has the certainty it once did,” because of grade inflation and other factors. “There used to be a consensus about what a secondary education should be,” he said. “But now you can’t assume the student who has done a certain kind of job at a certain high school will have mastered certain skills.”

A Prose-Poem

From a collection of prose and poems by Marion Cohen (PA):

Report Card

Once too often Elle asks D'ya think
the teacher'll like it? about the
drawing she's been working and
smiling over all evening so I
figure it's time

Elle I go How about if I grade you on it too?
Okay she answers But that grade won't
go on my report card

Well how about if I also give you a
report card? I counter and her
face brightens up . . .

So yesterday was report card day and
Elle didn't forget You hafta make
me my report card she says And
make it real Don't just give me
all A's 'cause you know me

Then she makes a list of the things
she wants me to grade her on: reading, handwriting, math, making book-
covers, and roller-skating.

I open to an empty page in my diary.

Reading, handwriting, math, making book-covers, and roller-skating, I
write vertically on the left. Then
on top I make two columns: Now,
and Eventually. Under Now, I grade
her regular (careful to give at least one B as requested). Under
Eventually I put all A+'s (with an
A+++ for making book-covers and roller-skating).

"Eventually she'll learn everything,"

I finish when I tell the whole
story to two other parents. They
laugh, rich and hearty, and I

wonder.

Eager for School

A father wrote:

I have never wanted to send my children to public school, although I didn't know what we would do. Now we are faced with the problem which has taken on an unexpected aspect. My first grader *wants* to go to public school. She liked kindergarten, her new friends, her teacher. She rejects the idea of attending the new school our friend is starting. She is very bright, does basic math and reads quite well. She has a wide range of interests from art to science to religion. Above all she has a major need for social interaction, much more than I ever had. I don't want to impose my solutions on her with the heavy hand of authority I have always rejected.

On the other hand I am very sensitive to the stories I read in your newsletter about bright, creative first graders who become thoroughly dulled and socialized by fourth grade. I will not let that happen. Our local school stinks in a dozen ways, as do most of them, but her kindergarten teacher was very good, very likable. We know her prospective first grade teacher and she seems good too. Notwithstanding the good people available in the short term, the structure and the rest of the school personnel are typically repressive. I am not afraid of going up against the structure, an old story for me, but I hesitate to contradict my own child's wishes which I respect.

We feel we must be prepared to pull her out of that school at some point whether she likes it or not, but at what point and in what way? To what extent should a parent trust the judgement of a six year old about her growth and when should a parent overrule that judgement? Your advice in this would be much appreciated.

I wrote in reply:

I would say, if she wants to go to school so much, let her go. A few children actually thrive in school, not just survive but thrive, find ways to get out of it things that they really need and want. A niece of mine was such a child; your daughter may be another. As long as she really loves school, not just tolerates it but loves it, it is probably doing her no harm. If you make it clear that she doesn't have to go if she doesn't want to, you can trust her to

tell you if she wants out.

You are quite right in saying that you must be prepared to pull her out of school whether she likes it or not. Let me suggest that if you begin to see signs that school is hurting her, in mind, character, or spirit, making her act in ways that you strongly disapprove of, you can discuss that with her. At some point you might say, "If you keep on acting in this mean and silly way just because all the other kids do, I won't let you go to school." If such talk does not make things better, then it might be time to take her out. But I think you should first give her a chance to show that she can handle the stresses and problems of school without being hurt by them.

I'd like very much to know your thoughts on this, and also, after your daughter goes to school, how she likes it and how it affects her. Do keep in touch, and good luck to both of you.

Hiding Out

From Washington State:

Today I received *Mother Earth News* and I can't tell you how happy I was to see your article. After 11 years of battling public schools (Federal School System) and three years of private schools with their exorbitant tuition, we took the plunge. Since our son had never gone to public school, he was not on any of their lists. We enrolled him in a private school, ordered his work packets, crossed our fingers and with great trepidation, started in.

His three years of private school had given him a good background. In the third grade, he was reading on a 7th grade level. That helped. His comprehension was good, and he liked a challenge. We started out by letting him set his own pace. If there was too much free time, we upped the amount of work. If it took him too long, we cut back. It finally evolved into a pattern. He spent three hours a day doing school work, setting his own time within reason. Evening was ruled out because he would be tired and not as alert as earlier. I insist he learns the multiplication tables, but hating math myself, and never getting past the fourth grade level, can only assume God created calculators for people like me. I further expect they will be around as long as he lives. He is happy and well adjusted, smarter than most of his peers, and has much time to spend with the family.

The only thing that I really hate is the fact that the poor kid is virtually a prisoner in his own home between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. We can often get by by stating he goes to a private school, and they don't keep the same schedule as public school, but that can't be used too often. If someone comes who is not "in the know" he hides out.

I think your estimate of dropouts is way too low. We live in a community of 4600 people, with several smaller surrounding towns. Our school system is deplorable, and a constant irritation to the people. We have in our area alone *five* private schools. People don't spend money on those unless there is a desperate need. I also know of six drop-out families, and I'm sure there are a lot more. Maybe your article will bring them out of the closet.

It's hard to teach a kid honesty when you live a lie, but he understands why it must be done. He is learning the values we want him to learn without having an outside influence tearing them to shreds. We've been told he has to

face the “real” world someday. I hate to say it, but he already has. He is not isolated, by any means, and though we gave up our TV several years ago, he still sees it, goes to movies, goes to the pool and the park, and knows a 19 year old who for the past four years has tried to destroy himself with alcohol and dope. We have had foster kids and battered wives staying with us. He can’t understand why people can’t raise their kids without interference from the State. I could write volumes on the detrimental effect of public schools, and the results of peer pressure.

From Alberta

Part of a news release from the University of Calgary:

Two years ago a landmark Crown decision ruled that the Alberta School Act was secondary to the Alberta Bill of Rights and thus allowed the Kneehills Christian School in Linden, Alberta, to be established, but not without social upheaval.

The development of the school three years ago grew out of a gradual disillusionment by the Holdeman (Mennonite) people with the public school system. When the Holdeman school was completed and classes were in session, the school board of the Three Hills School Division launched legal action against the parents of the children, but the provincial attorney-general intervened and the charges were dropped. The Crown later laid charges against the parents pertaining to a contravention of the Alberta School Act for failing to send their children to a recognized school. A test case was formed against one parent. After two days of hearings, a verdict of “not guilty” was handed down.

It was ruled that those who insisted that Holdeman parents send their children to public schools were actually infringing on the parents rights. By practicing freedom of religion in selecting an alternative form of education for the children, the parents were practicing freedom of religion guaranteed to them by the Alberta Bill of Rights.

As a result of the trial, the Alberta Department of Education approved a new kind of private school not requiring certified teachers, although the schools have to meet certain standards of curriculum, health and fire regulations and be inspected periodically.

MO Ruling

Al Hobart (MO) has sent a summary of another important homeschooling case in which the courts have ruled in favor of the family. On page 189 of the South Western Reporter, 2nd Series, we find Mo. App., 598, which says in part:

State Of Missouri, Plaintiff v. Carles and Alyne DAVIS, Defendants. No. 11366. Missouri Court of Appeals, Southern District. April 17, 1980.

(Summary:) Defendants were convicted in the Circuit Court, Greene County, Donald L. Clough, J., of violating compulsory school attendance law and they appealed. The Court of Appeals, Greene, J., held that allegation that parents failed to provide child with proper home instruction was essential element in charge of violating compulsory school attendance law and, in absence of State proving that element, convictions could not stand.

Reversed and defendants ordered discharged.

Prewitt, J., filed dissenting opinion.

GREENE, Judge. (Ed.—here follows the Judge's ruling.)

Defendants Carles B. and Alyne Davis, the parents of 13 year old David Neal Davis, were court-convicted of violating the compulsory school attendance law, #167. 061, and were each sentenced by the trial judge to serve ten days in the county jail and pay a fine of \$25 ... This appeal followed.

At trial, the state presented evidence that David did not regularly attend a day school, but did not present evidence that the parents failed to provide their son with home instruction that was substantially equivalent to the instruction given children in the day schools of the locality. At the close of the state's case, defendants moved for a judgement of acquittal on the grounds of failure of proof on the home instruction issue. The motion was overruled. Defendants presented no evidence. The judgement of conviction followed.

The question is whether there was sufficient evidence to sustain the convictions, or, more precisely put, was the state's failure to prove part of the statutory elements of the offense (failure to provide equivalent home instruction) fatal to the state's case? The state, in its brief ... argues that the burden of going forward with the evidence on that issue lies with defendants, and that since they failed to meet such burden, the convictions should stand. We do not agree.

The statute in question, #167.031, reads as follows:

“Every parent ... having charge ... of a child between the ages of seven and sixteen years shall cause the child to attend regularly some day school ... or shall provide the child at home with regular daily instructions during the usual school hours which shall, in the judgement of a court of competent jurisdiction, be at least substantially equivalent to the instruction given children of like age in the day schools in the locality in which the child resides.”

While it is true that a defendant has the burden of proving that he falls within an exception to a criminal statute ... the negative averments in the information that the child did not attend a day school and did not receive proper instruction at home do not create an exception, as they are incorporated in, and are an integral part of, the statutory definition of the offense. In such a case, the negative averments are not mere matters of affirmative defense, but are essential elements of the offense, as charged by statute. See *State v. Cheney*, 305 S.W.2d 892, 894 (Mo.App. 1957). The reasoning in *Cheney* was approved and followed in *State v. Pilkinton*, supra at 307-310. *Cheney* and *Pilkinton* do not discuss the burden of proof issue, but it is elemental that the state has the burden of proving *all* essential elements of a criminal offense ... Further, the Due Process Clause of the United States Constitution requires that a defendant be proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of every fact necessary to constitute the crime in order to support a conviction. *In re. Winship*, 397 U.S. 358, 364, 90 S.Ct. 1068, 10.3, 25 L.Ed.2d 368, 375 (1970).

Since the allegation that defendants failed to provide their child with proper home instruction was an essential element of the state's case,

and since the state failed to prove such element, the convictions cannot stand.

This case is almost identical to the Sessions case in Iowa (GWS #7), and, very probably, other cases we have not heard about. Here, as in the Sessions case, the schools say in court that equivalent home instruction is an allowed *exception* to the law requiring people to send their children to school, and therefore, that the burden of proof is on the parents to show that they come under this exception. Here, as in Sessions, the lower courts (which can generally be expected to take a rather narrow view of the law) agreed. Here, again as in Sessions, the higher court said that under the statutes equivalent home instruction was not an exception to the law requiring parents to send their children to school, but was, on the contrary, one of the things which the law said that parents could do and therefore, that the burden was on the state to show that they hadn't done it.

This is an extremely important point for homeschoolers to note. If we are trying to persuade legislatures to write something into law permitting homeschooling, we should do all we can to get them to write it in as an optional requirement, and not as an allowed exception to school attendance. The difference may not seem very great, but if these matters come before a court, it is in fact extremely great, as these cases show. By the same token, we must be alert for attempts by teachers' lobbies to sneak this seemingly small change into the law.

Ranger Rick

Several readers have told us that their children really enjoy *Ranger Rick's Nature Magazine*, published monthly by the National Wildlife Federation (1412 16th St NW, Washington DC 20036; \$8/yr in US, \$10 foreign.) We got a copy and like it very much: lots of color photographs of animals, articles on science and history, activities, and some letters from readers. Like National Geographic's *World*, the magazine is written especially for children, and some people object to that: if you're going to spend money on a science magazine, they say, why not get *National Geographic* or other "adult" magazines that the whole family can enjoy? There may be something to that argument; nevertheless, the enthusiastic recommendations of the readers suggest that for many families, *Ranger Rick* may be worth investigating.—
DR

Super-Insulated Houses

I don't know how many GWS readers, particularly in Canada and the northern US, may be thinking about building their own homes in the near future, but if there are any, I strongly urge them to buy a new book called *Super-Insulated Houses and Double-Envelope Houses* by William Shurcliff (\$10; order from him at 19 Appleton St, Cambridge MA 02138). By "super-insulated house," Shurcliff means a house that 1) is situated in a cold climate, 2) receives only a modest amount of solar energy (south-facing windows not exceeding 8% of the floor area), and 3) is so well insulated, and so air-tight, that throughout most of the winter it is kept warm solely by (a) the small amount of solar energy received through the windows and (b) miscellaneous within-house heat sources (people, lights, stove, refrigerator, other machines and devices). A super-insulated house requires little auxiliary heat, that is, heat from a woodstove, furnace, or other system designed solely for heating: less than 15% of that required by houses of the same size built before 1974. One such house described in the book gets all its auxiliary heat, which it needs rarely, from a not-very-large hot water heater—there is no furnace at all.

In the world we are living in, this is how more buildings are going to have to be built. People who have such houses, or know how to build them, will be in a good position.

Kidpower

From New Roots, May/June 1980:

Imagine tuning in your favourite radio program and hearing a high-pitched 11-year-old voice say, "Hello. I have this invention that runs a generator on electricity produced by playing the piano."

Saturday Night Live on the radio? No way. It's *Kidpower*, a freewheeling children's program promoting appropriate technology (A.T.) over the airwaves of public radio in Ohio and West Virginia.

Energy poems, commentary on government energy policy, and discussions of A.T. inventions are common fare on *Kidpower*, a regular feature of WOUB-FM's *Chautauqua*, a community self-reliance and A.T. program from Athens, Ohio, produced by host Bobbie Renz.

Listeners have been treated to 12 year old Robert Bowman's first-hand account of life in an underground house. "The reason it's underground is because it's energy-efficient. Under a certain level underground it always stays the same temperature. . . . I think we ought to take energy into our own hands, not mess up Mother Nature or anything . . . When I'm older I wish to see more underground, more solar, and more wind power, even some tidal power houses being put up, so we kids can have some energy left for us too."

From stories of building home-made solar hot water heaters to erecting miniature windmills outside bedroom windows to power lights, the discoveries of the solar generation's young pioneers are being chronicled.

Kidpower is sponsored by the Tri-County Community Action Agency of Athens and the National Center for Appropriate Technology.

Busy Children

From Sydney Clemens (CA):

Alex (13) now programs the Apple II, works at the hardware store, helps our Supervisor at City Hall, takes math from his former public school math teacher, writes journal and book reports for me, passed his karate green belt in June, and cooks his own meals.

Jenny (11) goes to school and cooks for herself, knows the public transit system cold, and took second prize in the citywide trampoline jump-off.

A Great Opportunity

From the New Alchemy Newsletter, Summer 1980:

Have Land—Need People. The Laurel Hill Learning Center is an organization informally linked to New Alchemy through a former NAI apprentice, Pierce Butler. The Center, located on 1400 acres, twelve miles south of Natchez, Mississippi, has abundant and helpful community contacts, a vision of tree crops, aquaculture, solar cabins, and all the broad spectrum of health-giving technology and lifestyles essential for a survivable future, based on a community land trust. They have everything needed to realize this vision except people-power.

Laurel Hill is seeking minds and bodies to join in creating viable alternatives for the Gulf Coast states. People talented in carpentry, foodcraft, mechanics, livestock, and farm life are invited to contact the Laurel Hill Learning Center, Rt 3 Box 191-B, Natchez MS 39120; phone 601-445-9760.

Helpful Directory

The 1980 National Directory of Free Universities and Learning Networks is available from The Free University Network, 1221 Thurston, Manhattan KS 66502. This little booklet lists the names and addresses of 247 skills exchanges, community schools, learning centers, etc., all over the country. The Network's 1979 Directory, describing the organizations in greater detail, is available for \$2.00.

Calvert Books Wanted

From Jan Emlen, Box 269, Blue Hill ME 04614:

I would like to get second-hand textbooks and lesson books used in the Calvert Home Study School, grades 1–4. If someone isn't using theirs any more, I'd like to borrow. Thanks."

Ruling from Minn.

Attorney John Eidsmoe (Law Office Bldg, Fergus Falls MN 56537) sent us information on a case in Minnesota in which a homeschooling family, convicted by a jury of violating school attendance laws, was acquitted on appeal.

The full brief which Mr. Eidsmoe (and perhaps some colleagues) prepared for his clients is a superb piece of work, a model for all such cases. It is very closely and powerfully argued, and contains every important point that could be made. We quote here some sections of Mr. Eidsmoe's much shorter Preliminary Brief, as showing the essential legal points that homeschoolers should make, either in their own briefs or simply in their proposals to school officials and boards.

After each of its first eight points, the Preliminary Brief cites a number of court cases. We have not included these citations, but we'll gladly send a full copy of this Preliminary Brief to any who send a SASE.

After the quotes from the preliminary brief, we quote some pertinent sections of the court's ruling. About this, I would make two comments.

The first is that in a number of cases, including this one, homeschoolers have tried to get the courts to say that compulsory school attendance laws were unconstitutional because they were "vague," not telling parents specifically enough what they could and could not do. I have yet to hear of a case where a court has upheld this claim, and my quite strong feeling is that we would be wiser to stop making it. In the first place, I don't think it's a good idea to mix weak arguments and strong ones in a brief; the weaker arguments tend to dilute the stronger ones. In the second place, if the courts ever do declare compulsory education laws unconstitutional on the grounds of vagueness, the legislatures will respond by writing much more detailed laws, which will almost certainly not work in our favor. Only where we have very strong reason to believe that a legislature wants and means to make homeschooling *easier*, is it in our interest to have school attendance laws made less vague.

My second comment is that this Minnesota ruling, and others as well, point up an important area where the law is confused and contradictory. As the judge points out, the courts have said 1) objections to compulsory school

attendance must be on religious, not secular, grounds; 2) the courts may not inquire into a person's religious beliefs. But if a court may not inquire into someone's religious beliefs, how can it judge whether they are in fact religious rather than secular? There is sure to be much tangled and heated legal argument on this question in coming years.

What I think we can assume for the time being is that the courts will not judge a belief religious unless it is stated in conventionally religious terms. Many parents might say in court that they wanted to teach their own children because they believed very strongly in peace, in human brotherhood, or in a certain kind of relationship between human beings and the earth and all other forms of life. But a court will probably not call such beliefs religious unless the parents put some kind of recognizably religious label on them, connect them somehow with some known religion or sect, or with some religious text, whether the Bible itself or some other avowedly religious writing. However, once people have stated their beliefs in such religious terms, the courts will probably not challenge them very deeply about the "sincerity" of these beliefs, though they still may require them to show in some detail how these beliefs are in fact violated by the teachings or practices of the schools.

In other words, if we say that we don't want to send our children to public schools because we disapprove of the dog-eat-dog competitiveness they learn there, the courts will probably not hold that belief religious. But if we say, as I think many could in good conscience, that the violence and competitiveness in schools seem to us to conflict with the teachings of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (or elsewhere), or the Commandment about loving thy neighbor as thyself, the courts are much more likely to consider our objection religious. This is not to say that they are going to judge the package by the label, but only that unless it has the right kind of label they aren't going to look at the package at all.

County Of Lake Of The Woods In County Court, Criminal Division
State of Minnesota, Plaintiff, vs. Chester & Alvina Lundsten,
Defendants.

Preliminary Brief Of Defendants

Come now the Defendants, Chester Lundsten and Alvina Lundsten,

and move the Court to enter a judgment of acquittal and/or dismiss the charges against them on the ground that Minnesota Statute 120.10 is unconstitutional or that they are entitled to exemption from Minnesota Statute 120.10 on constitutional grounds.

COUNT TWO: Defendants are entitled to exemption from Minnesota Statute 120.10 on constitutional grounds because:

I. The Affidavit signed by Defendants and other evidence brought to the Court's attention clearly established that Defendants hold strong and sincere religious convictions and that requiring Defendants to send their children to the Lake of the Woods public schools would constitute an infringement of their right to free expression of their religion under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Affidavit further established that there are no other schools, public or private, within a reasonable driving distance of Defendants' home to which Defendants could send their children, and which would be compatible with their religious convictions. While Defendants are capable of defending their beliefs, the purpose of said Affidavit is not to prove that their beliefs are true and that those of the public school system are wrong, or that Defendants' beliefs and moral standards are good and those of the public schools are bad. The purpose, rather, is to establish that Defendants' religious convictions are incompatible with the teaching and curricula of the Lake of the Woods public schools and that for that reason requiring Defendants to send their children to the public schools would constitute an infringement of their right to free exercise of their religion under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

II. The case law clearly establishes that parents have the right to direct the education of their children, based on the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth and/or Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, as well as the Preamble clause, "Secure the Blessings of Liberty."

III. Recent case law establishes that this right of parents to privacy in family relations and to autonomy in the making of decisions such as whether to have children, how to raise children, how to educate children, etc., are "fundamental" rights and therefore cannot be

infringed simply by showing a “reasonable relationship” to police power or general welfare power or even by using a “balancing test.” Rather, the state cannot infringe upon these rights unless the state can show that it has a “compelling state interest” in doing so.

V. Case law also establishes that the right to free exercise of one’s religion is a fundamental right and thus has preferred status among other rights.

V. The right to raise one’s children according to the dictates of one’s religion constitutes an integral part of the fundamental First Amendment right to free exercise of religion . . .

VI. Even if the state can show a compelling state interest, the state must use the “least restrictive means” of achieving that compelling state interest; that is, the state may not achieve that compelling state interest by means of infringing upon the fundamental rights of some citizens if it can achieve that compelling state interest without so infringing.

VII. In cases involving “fundamental” rights, the state must achieve its “compelling state interest” by the “least restrictive means” even though that “least restrictive means” might involve considerably greater work or expense to the state.

VIII. In matters involving “fundamental” rights, the state may not achieve or enforce its “compelling state interest” by creating an “irrebuttable presumption” that the “compelling state interest” may not be achieved without violating that “fundamental right,” especially if said “irrebuttable presumption” is neither necessarily nor universally true.

IX. All of these principles come together in *Wisconsin v. Yoder*. *Yoder* involved the Amish of Wisconsin, who educated their children in private schools only through the eighth grade and used teachers with only slightly more education than that. The Court recognized the “fundamental right” of *Yoder* and other Amish parents to educate their children according to their religion. Without specifically finding that the state had a “compelling state interest” in educating the Amish

children, the Court found that the state did not need to insist upon teacher certification and the other requirements imposed by the State of Wisconsin upon private schools, in order to achieve that state interest. Therefore, the Court found that the State of Wisconsin could not constitutionally compel the Amish to send their children to public schools or to compel them to use certified teachers or the equivalent thereof in their own schools. Note that the Court did not broadly strike down the compulsory education statute as being totally unconstitutional; rather, the Court declared that the statute could not be enforced against the Amish. In effect, the Court granted the Amish an exemption from the compulsory education statute.

X. While some have tried to construe *Yoder* narrowly to apply only to the Amish and very similar separatist groups, this cannot be the intention of the Court in light of its broad definition of “religion” in other cases such as those involving conscientious objection ... Two recent State Supreme Court decisions, *State of Ohio v. Whisner* and *State of Kentucky v. Rudasill* extended the protection of *Yoder* to other evangelical or conservative Christian denominations who do not practice separatism in the way the Amish do. And *Perchemlides v. Frizzle*, decided by the Superior Court of Hampshire County, Mass., expands the parental rights set forth in *Yoder* and *Whisner* to those who object to public school instruction for non-religious reasons as well . . .

XI. *Yoder* noted that the compulsory attendance laws were generally adopted by the states in the late 1800s, and that the main reason for their adoption was the prevention of abusive child labor, the need to prepare youths for a vocation, and the need to educate children for citizenship. In the case at hand, there has been absolutely no showing whatsoever that the State of Minnesota has to require certified teachers or the “essential equivalent” thereof in order to achieve these state interests.

County Of Beltrami (Change Of Venue From Lake Of The Woods County)

Findings Of Facts, Conclusions Of Law And Order For Judgment

The main focal issue in this case is whether or not M.S.A. 120.10 is unconstitutional because it is in violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution in that it denies the defendants their privacy and free exercise of religion, and if it does not, has the State shown a compelling interest in the education of their children to overcome defendants' rights under the constitution.

Meyer v. Nebraska involved a Nebraska statute which prohibited the teaching of modern foreign languages to children who had not attained the 8th grade. The (US Supreme) Court held that the Nebraska statute unconstitutionally interfered with "the calling of modern language teachers, with the opportunities of pupils to acquire knowledge, and with the power of parents to control the education of their own (children)."

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees to individuals free exercise of religion. The free exercise clause is not restricted in its protection to formal ritualistic acts of worship common in theistic religions, but also includes the practice or exercise of religion which is binding in conscience.

The government may not contest the validity of a religious belief or the reasons for so believing. As stated in *US v. Ballard*, "Men may believe what they cannot prove. They may not be put to the proof of their religious doctrine or beliefs. Religious experiences which are as real as life to some may be incomprehensible to others." The real issue to be determined is whether the beliefs are sincerely held.

In analysing *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, the US Supreme Court initially stated that a "State's interest in universal education, however highly we rank it, is not totally free from a balancing process when it impinges on fundamental rights and interests, such as those specifically practiced by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, and the traditional interests of parents with respect to the religious upbringing of their children, so long as they, in the words of *Pierce*, prepare (them) for additional obligations." The Court then reiterated that however strong the State's interest in universal

compulsory education, it is by no means absolute to the exclusion or subordination of all other interests.

The second section of the opinion deals with whether the Amish claim was based upon constitutionally protected values or secular considerations. After reviewing the basis of the claim the Court determined that it was religiously motivated and entitled to First Amendment protection. This section has been misunderstood in that it distinguishes between secular and religious values. The Court stated that the very concept of ordered liberty precludes allowing every person to make his own standards on matters of conduct in which society as a whole has important interests. A First Amendment claim must not be a subjective evaluation of contemporary secular values accepted by the majority but on a religious basis. This is true although the validity of a religious belief is not subject to litigation in the courts. In *State v. Kasuboski* (1978), a recent Wisconsin Appellate Court case, a parent's First Amendment defense to a violation of the compulsory education law was rejected by the Court because of the secular nature of their beliefs.

State v. Whisner (1976), is an Ohio Supreme Court case similar to the present case. The Court found that the certification requirement as applied did burden the free exercise of religion and the State did not demonstrate an interest of sufficient magnitude to overcome the assertion of the First Amendment rights. The Court also noted that the Ohio regulations were so pervasive that they effectively destroy the distinction between public and non-public education.

In applying the foregoing cases to the case at hand ... the first determination that must be made is whether the defendants' claim is based upon secular or religious grounds. The affidavit which apparently both parties have stipulated to, clearly indicates that the defendants' objections are religious in nature. Defendants apparently subscribe to a fairly literal interpretation of the Bible. Subjects that are taught in Lake of the Woods Public School conflict with this literal interpretation.

The States' purpose in requiring that private school teachers possess

certain qualifications is merely to effectuate the compulsory education statute. As previously noted, the compulsory education is to prepare children for the responsibilities of citizenship and to teach children to be self-sufficient and self-reliant. There has been no demonstration that these goals are not being fulfilled in this case, in fact, quite to the contrary. The testimony indicates that the children are in a structured well-run program that more than fulfills the requirements ... The State made no attempt to discredit this testimony and the State failed to show that the Lundsten children are not being taught courses which will make them good citizens ... The State did not show that the children are idle or any abuse in child labor, but to the contrary agreed that they are attending school at home and being taught the common branches. The State has failed to demonstrate a compelling interest superior to the rights of the defendants.

This decision probably will result in more litigation as each parent who attempts to teach his child at home will have to show that it is based on their religious belief and it surpasses the State's compelling interest in their child's education.

The verdict of guilty as found by the jury is set aside, and the defendants are acquitted on the grounds of violation of their constitutional rights as applied to this case.

Donald E. Shanahan, County Court Judge. Dated May 20, 1980.

Raising Our Prices

We are sorry to have to say that we are going to have to raise our prices at the beginning of next year.

In the first issue I wrote:

GWS will be supported entirely by subscriptions, not by advertising, foundations, universities, or government grants.

This first issue is four pages. All following issues will be eight pages, perhaps in time more than that.

Someday, if we get enough subscriptions, we may be able to lower the subscription price—even at its present price, GWS will probably not be self-supporting until we have around 2000 subscribers. And as we said, we think GWS must be self-supporting. Charity is fickle, and we mean to be around for a while.

That figure of 2000 turned out to be a bad guess. We have over 2000 subscribers right now, but our income from subscriptions doesn't even cover a quarter of our costs. Even if these costs remained constant, GWS would need close to 10,000 subscribers to be wholly self-supporting.

That figure of 2000 was much too low because: (1) With group subscriptions (which we believe in and will continue), we get on the average only about \$6 per subscription instead of \$10. (2) Putting out GWS, and all the work that goes with it, takes much more time than we had thought, over 100 person/hours a week. (3) The magazine itself is twice as large as we first planned—and even now we always have far more good material than we have room to print. (4) Printing and postage costs, and indeed all costs, have gone way up.

Where *does* the money for GWS come from? Partly from subscriptions, partly from the sale of books, mostly from royalties from my books and from lecture fees.

But these sources of income are uncertain. Book publishers are much influenced by fashions and fads and the lecture business far more so—the big hits on the college lecture circuit these days are hypnotism, ESP, and the supernatural. (Maybe I should lecture on “I Learned At Home On A Flying Saucer.”) GWS will be in a stronger position when it pays more of its own costs.

Hence the raise in our prices early next year. The new prices will not go into effect until after *GWS* #18 has gone out, or until 1981 (whichever is later). Meanwhile, people can bump their subscriptions, renew them, or extend them into the future (up to three years) at the present rates.

The prices we are planning would be \$15/6 issues; \$24/12 issues; \$30/18 issues (which is the same as the present one-year rate). The group sub price would be \$3 per additional person per year (instead of the present \$2).

Clearly these prices are not going to make *GWS* self-supporting, but they will at least bring our income a little closer to our costs.

Kon-Tiki

KON-TIKI by Thor Heyerdahl (230 pages; \$2.00 + post). Heyerdahl, a Norwegian who had lived in the South Sea islands, had like many other people become interested in how, and from where, the Polynesians had first come to the islands. Most of the experts in that field claimed that they had come from Asia. For many reasons Heyerdahl did not believe this, but grew more and more certain that they had sailed westward from the coast of South America. He wrote a book defending his idea, but few people would even look at his manuscript, let alone publish it. They demanded scornfully to know how these stone age people could possibly have traveled four thousand miles across a huge ocean. Heyerdahl suggested that they had sailed across on rafts made of balsa logs. Impossible! Ridiculous! snorted the experts. He decided to prove that it was at least possible by building such a raft and sailing it across himself. How he and five other men did this is the story of this fascinating, delightful, and beautiful book.

One of the many pleasures of this book is getting to know Heyerdahl himself. Though he tells his story modestly, and puts his companions, and the raft, and the voyage, at the center of the story, rather than himself, we can't help realizing that he is an extraordinarily imaginative, determined, resourceful man. The obstacles he had to overcome to get his project paid for and his raft built and across the ocean would have stopped a hundred ordinary people. He is a wonderful combination of dreamer, poet, precise and careful scientist, and practical man who knows how to get things done. And his five Scandinavian companions are as capable as he is, and just as interesting, good-humored, and brave. We feel very strongly how much they liked, trusted, and enjoyed each other, and can't help thinking what fun it would be to join that little company of good friends.

Heyerdahl is also a very funny writer. His rather wry, dead-pan humor reminds me somewhat of Mark Twain, except that there is no bitterness in his laughter, only a delighted enjoyment in the variety and foolishness of life and human behavior. At one point, in order to get his raft built, he had to have the support of the President of Peru. Twain would have enjoyed his description of the meeting:

Soldiers in shining bandoleers escorted me upstairs and to the end of a

long corridor; here my name was taken and registered, and I was shown through a colossal oak door into a room with a long table and rows of chairs. A man dressed in white received me, asked me to sit down, and disappeared. A moment later a large door opened, and I was shown into a much handsomer room, where an imposing person in a spotless uniform advanced toward me.

“The President,” I thought, drawing myself up. But no. The man in the gold-edged uniform offered me an antique straight-backed chair and disappeared. I had sat on the edge of my chair for barely a minute when yet another door opened and a servant bowed me into a large gilded room with gilded furniture and splendidly decorated. The fellow vanished as quickly as he had appeared. Then steady steps approached, and I jumped up and hesitantly greeted an imposing man in uniform. But no, this was not he. But I understood enough of what he said to gather that the President sent me his greetings and would be free very soon when a meeting of ministers was over.

Ten minutes later steady steps once more broke the silence, and this time a man with gold lace and epaulets came in. I sprang briskly from the sofa and bowed deeply. The man bowed still more deeply and led me through several rooms and up a staircase with thick carpets. Then he left me in a tiny little room with one leather covered chair and one sofa. In came a little man in a white suit, and I waited resignedly to see where he intended to take me. But he took me nowhere, only greeted me amiably and remained standing. This was President Bustamante y Rivero.

But perhaps the best parts of this wonderful book are Heyerdahl’s descriptions of the sea itself, its winds, waves, and weather, and the huge variety of strange creatures that investigated, followed, played about, and even lived on their raft all through their voyage. He makes us feel very strongly the great size, peacefulness, and beauty of the ocean, and also, now and then, its enormous destructive power. We ought not to fool ourselves about this—sailing across oceans on rafts is hard and dangerous work, and Heyerdahl and his jolly friends would not have made it if they had not been extremely thorough and careful, and prepared for just about everything. No doubt they were lucky, but they left very little to luck.

At the end, it is hard not to wish that we could have gone with them on their voyage. Indeed, it would be interesting to know how many letters Heyerdahl has received saying, “Next time you go on an ocean voyage,

please take me with you.” If I were not so busy with other things, I’d be tempted to write such a letter myself. Reading this fine book is the next best thing.

How To Lie With Statistics

How to Lie With Statistics by Darrell Huff (142 pages; \$1.75 + post). The strong sales of *I Hate Mathematics!* and *Arithmetic Made Simple* since John added them to the booklist show that GWS readers are looking for good mathematics-related materials. Here is another book that will help. In fact, I think it is a tremendously important book, one that everybody should read—and there isn't any other book I can say that about.

How to Lie With Statistics is entertaining and easy to read, full of little jokes and cartoons. Huff does not even begin to pretend that the reader truly wants to learn “how to lie” with statistics; such a gimmick would quickly become tiresome. Rather, he shows us example after example of statistical facts and graphs, taken from newspapers and magazines, that are deliberately or innocently misleading. He explains what is wrong with them, and gives us the tools to become more wary in the future.

We are surrounded on all sides by statistics; every individual or organization that wants to convince us of something uses numbers to support the case. And if there's more than one way to present the data, naturally they will pick the way that supports their arguments the most. Yet most of us have no grasp of large numbers, and may even be intimidated by small ones, and so it simply does not occur to us to question what we are told.

When we see or hear a statistic, we may react with surprise or indignation or indifference; what we *don't* think often enough is, “*How on earth could they know that?*” Could they possibly have observed and counted every instance of the behavior? Or, more likely, was it based on a survey? In that case, *who did they ask?* How many people? Could the way they picked the subjects affect the results? How likely are those subjects to represent the whole population?

After you've read the first chapter or two, you'll see the vital significance of such questions. Did you realize, for example, that social scientists, including educators, make sweeping generalizations based on very tiny samples? Furthermore, when I read Huff's explanation of why IQ's mean even less than most people realize, I can't tell you how upset and angry I get.

Oh, there are some goodies in this book. Did you know you can take a perfectly honest, boring graph, perhaps one with a gentle upward slope, and

transform it into a dramatic zigzag, full of steep climbs and drop-offs? It's easy (just chop off the "wasted" space at the bottom, and stretch the left hand scale to fit the new space) *and it's done all the time*.

I could go on and on, quoting all the good parts from this book, but I'd really rather you read them yourself. One very good thing about *How to Lie With Statistics* is that it is *not* a text, not even very mathematics. It helps if you know what percents are, or how ratios work, but you can still understand and enjoy the book without knowing those things. In fact, the book might very well motivate you to find out what percents and ratios are, because it shows you how people use them. And taking this one step farther: you might even want to find out more mathematics than the bare minimum—to find out what a standard deviation is, for example (Huff mentions it in passing), or how probability theory works.

One of the justifications for compulsory schooling has traditionally been that education prepares us to be good citizens, by teaching us to think for ourselves. Schools are not doing a very good job of this. Too many people accept what they're told, and even people who are quite willing to be skeptical of authority don't have any weapons, any tools, any way of spotting where the weaknesses are in the pronouncements of officials. The knowledge in *How to Lie With Statistics* provides an important step toward acquiring these tools, and I hope you all take advantage of it.—Donna Richoux

The King Must Die

The King Must Die by Mary Renault (402 pages; \$2.65 + post). This novel, which follows Theseus from his childhood to his killing of the Minotaur (in legend, half bull, half man) and his return to Athens, has long been one of my favorite historical novels. More than almost any other I know, it creates for us a society very different from our own, in this case pagan, almost pre-historic, barely literate,—and makes us understand it and believe in it. We cannot really know what life in pre-classical Greece was like for the people who lived it, but we can easily believe that it was much like this.

The book is not only about Theseus, but about other things as well. In part, it is about leadership, or authority. What did it take, in those times, to persuade people to follow you, obey you, support you, fight with you, and if need be die for you? What kinds of qualities made successful leaders and rulers, and how did they use those qualities? What kinds of choices did they face, what kinds of decisions did they make, what risks did they run? In the person of Theseus, we are given vivid and convincing answers to these questions. According to legend, he united a number of small kingdoms into the kingdom of Athens, and first made it a great power. He was thus one of the first great leaders of “Western” civilization, and in this book we can easily see why. If in some ways he is only a standard hero-figure, fierce and skillful fighter, ardent lover, etc., in many others he is much more than that, a proud, brave, curious, resourceful, innovative, and admirable man far, far ahead of his time (and perhaps even ours).

Even more, this book is about religion, and the many ways in which different and competing religious beliefs clash, blend, and evolve. Without ever having felt such beliefs, I have long understood that we humans create religions for very serious reasons and purposes—to answer questions we cannot help asking, to explain experiences we cannot otherwise explain, and to help us bear troubles, dangers, and fears (including the fear of death) that might otherwise overwhelm us. Religions that do not do these things for their believers must soon change or die. Perhaps societies with weak religions were and must be as fragile and short-lived as societies with destructive agricultures or weak armies. In this book we see how some religions

weakened and corrupted their believers while others made their believers stronger, and in the emotional climax of the book we understand why Theseus, even at the cost of his heart's dearest love and in violation of his most solemn oath, refuses to take a bad religion back to Athens, which fate has made his home and where he will someday be king.

Living in mostly Christian times, we tend to look scornfully at the pagan classical religions. Even when I knew enough to take all religions seriously, I could not see how the pagan religions of the Greeks and Romans, with all their indifferent, capricious, cruel, and vengeful gods and goddesses, could have been much use to them. But this book has not only made me see and feel pagan religion from the inside, but has made me understand how such a religion could sustain, guide, and even ennoble a man like Theseus, who took it seriously and lived by it. Indeed, it is easy to envy him the passionate strength of his belief.

In the book we see coming into being a new and enormously important idea in religion, that perhaps to some degree even foreshadowed Christianity. The idea of sacrifice, animal and human, was as old as religion itself. The gods are powerful, terrible, unpredictable; therefore we must appease them by giving them gifts—and of course the gifts that count most are the ones we value most. So the strongest and best animals and people were chosen to be sacrificed to the gods for the sake of the rest. This much was not new. What was new in the religion that Theseus grew up in, and later took to Athens, was the idea that the victim, the King Horse of his boyhood tribe, in other tribes the King himself, *consented* to the sacrifice, willingly gave himself or herself up to the god, and that it was this consenting that gave the sacrifice its meaning and power. For clearly, to give unwillingly to the gods what they could take from you whenever they wanted could hardly count for much. (The idea that the gods themselves might sacrifice something was still far in the future.) Meanwhile in Theseus' own life we can see vividly what strength he gained by giving himself completely up to his god Poseidon, by saying, in effect, "Thy will be done."

But the characters in this book don't sit around all the time arguing about religion. Far from it. This is a romantic story of action and adventure, and one that you will remember a long time.

Other New Books Here

Heidi, by Joanna Spyri. (225 pages; \$1.75 + post). I never read this when I was little, thought of it as a book for girls. Reading it now for the first time, I loved it. It is a touching and believable story, that makes you feel good to read. Heidi is no Shirley Temple cutesy-pie in a dirndl dress (though sometimes pictures show her that way), but a poor, strong, hardy, spirited, affectionate, intelligent, fearless, candid, self-reliant little mountain girl, who passionately loves her old grandfather and the high alpine country that is their home. She is an admirable heroine in every way. When her aunt, meaning well, takes her away from her home and grandfather and sends her to live with a rich city family, Heidi (with a little help and luck) manages to win her way back home, and by her goodness and strength of character not only solves her own problems but enriches the lives of many other people. (Can't say more without giving away too much of the plot.)

One thing that strikes me about the book is how poor these mountain people were. Heidi and her friend Peter, the goatherd, eat mostly goat's milk, cheese, and bread. In all the book there is no mention of any vegetable other than potatoes, far less fruit, candy, or dessert. Peter is so unused to eating meat that at one point he trembles with excitement at the mere sight of a sausage. And he cannot imagine that he could ever have enough money to be able to buy, at the annual village fair, both the cheap knife and whistle that he would like. It's good to be reminded how recent (and fragile) is our present wealth in Europe and North America.

One of the nicest things in the book is the picture it gives of Heidi's life with her grandfather, who treats her like a real and serious person. (In this he is much like the grandparents in *The Education of Little Tree*.) In fact, no adults in the book treat children with either sentimentality or condescension. All in all, a splendid, heartening, happy story.

The Borrowers, by Mary Norton (180 pages; \$1.35 + post). This delightful book is the first of a series (I am eager to read all the others) about the Borrowers, a race of tiny people who live in the walls and under the floors of old houses, and "borrow" from the giant human beings in these houses whatever they need to live on. They are *not* fairies or elves or any kind of magical or supernatural creatures, but ordinary human beings like ourselves,

only very small. They believe that they are the dominant race on earth, and that only a small handful of large human beings exist here and there in order to keep them supplied. When they are told that there are many millions of human beings, they take it as a huge and absurd joke.

In this book we meet a Borrower family named Clock: father, mother, and fourteen-year-old daughter Arietty, a brave and resourceful girl and the heroine of the book. They are named Clock because the entrance to the passageways that lead to their hidden home is under an old clock in the hall of a big country house in Victorian England. They are the last of a large number of Borrower families to live there, the others all having been “seen” by human beings (the worst thing that can happen to a Borrower) and forced to “emigrate.” How the Clock family is seen, pursued, and finally helped to make their escape is the subject of this charming story. One of the things that makes it so believable is that the Clock family is not sentimentalized or made exotic. They are a perfectly conventional, respectable, middle-class Victorian family, finding nothing unusual in their way of living, and living as any other ordinary people would under those circumstances, and meeting difficulties and dangers as best they can. The many pen and ink illustrations fit the story perfectly. A wonderful book.

Kidnapped, by Robert Louis Stevenson. (225 pages; \$1.75 + post). Another great tale by the master. In 1745, upon the death of his parents, David Balfour, sixteen years old, leaves the small Scottish lowland village he has grown up in and goes to find his supposedly wealthy uncle, to get from him whatever help he can. There he begins a series of exciting adventures, that finally take him on a long journey of escape through the Scottish highlands with his friend the highlander Alan Breck, whose life he had earlier saved.

The book is in part about a contrast and conflict between the different ideas of law and morality held by the two men. David, for all his youth, is a modern “civilized” man, who believes in law, formal justice, the institutions of government. Alan is what we would today call more primitive. He believes in an unlimited personal loyalty to his King, clan, and chief, whom he is bound to support and help in any and every way he can. It is a code of honor much closer to what we might now think of as the code of the Mafia. But this fierce personal code, that David disapproves of so strongly, saves and protects him when the institutions of law, order, and justice, perverted by

greed and self-interest as they so easily and often are, would have hanged him in a second. Who is right in this argument? Stevenson does not say. He lets each of his two heroes make the strongest possible case for his side, and then leaves the problem in the lap of the reader.

But don't let me give the impression that David and Alan spend much time arguing about law. They are too busy running for their lives.

The Magician's Nephew (186 pages; \$1.75 + post) and *The Voyage of Prince Caspian* (216 pages; \$1.75 + post), by C.S. Lewis. The next two books in the Narnia series. At least, I call them the next two. The British publisher of the Narnia books makes *The Magician's Nephew* the first in the series, because it takes place before all the others. The American publisher puts it next to last. I put it second, because even though it is the first story in time, it often refers to events in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Lewis obviously wrote it to explain how the situation in that book came about.

In any case, here are two more tales of magic, fighting, and adventure in the enchanted land of Narnia. As in the other stories, the heroes and heroines are children, and their conflicts and combats as much moral as physical. Splendid and beautifully written stories.

Best Science Fiction Stories of H.G. Wells (303 pages; \$2.70 + post). In "The Invisible Man" (first in this collection), as in so many others of his stories, H. G. Wells tries to answer as seriously and literally as possible the question, "What would it be like, how would we feel, what would we do, if something very unusual happened?" In this case, if we could make ourselves invisible. He shows us that it would not be quite as easy or wonderful as we might think, that if being invisible could have certain advantages, it also would have terrible disadvantages. It is a very exciting adventure story—I still remember the movie of it, which I saw when I was about ten, and which scared me more than any movie I have ever seen.

Among the many short stories in this collection is one of my special favorites, "The Man Who Could Work Miracles," about an ordinary Englishman who discovers one evening, in a pub, that he *can* work miracles—make lamps stand upside down in the air, and so on. To prove to others and himself that he really does have these powers, and is not just doing magicians' tricks, he one day commands the earth to stop rotating. The result is a very painful and almost fatal surprise. What he does about it, you'll have

to read to find out. This collection is one of the best books by one of the early and great masters of science fiction.

The Time Machine by H.G. Wells (126 pages; 70¢ + post). In this classic of science fiction, a scientist inventor travels millions of years into the future to look at the distant prospects of the human race. One of Wells' earliest and greatest stories.

Ghost Stories of an Antiquary, by M. R. James. (153 pages; \$1.80 + post). Around the turn of the century, supernatural stories were very popular, and many "serious" writers wrote one or more of them. At one point in my life I was a ghost story addict, and read every collection I could find. I suspect there are few good ghost stories (in English, anyway) that I have not read. Many of them I still enjoy. Of all the tellers of ghost stories, Montague Rhodes James, teacher and medieval European scholar, is the grand champion. No one else wrote so many, and few wrote any as good. This collection contains about half of his stories, including many of his best ones, among them "Count Magnus," for me the scariest story ever written. (I think of it whenever I hear Sibelius' tone poem "Tapiola.")

Take it from me, these are scary stories. I would not think of reading them to young children, and I would not advise anyone who is at all nervous about darkness, night noises, etc. to read them alone at night. M. R. James's ghosts are neither friendly nor quaint. They don't just drift around making noises. They are fierce and malevolent—and all too believable. Stay away from them if you are timid. But if you like to shiver a little, this book is for you.

The Graphic Work of M.C. Escher (96 pages; \$6.75 + post). A large collection of the prints of the most (deservedly) famous printmaker of modern time. The pictures are not only beautiful as pictures—Escher could do extraordinary things with black and white—but as works of the imagination. In many of them one kind of creature gradually turns into another; in others, Escher shows us worlds where water flows uphill and other equally impossible things happen, right on the paper under our eyes. The front of the book contains notes written by Escher about each picture: how he designed them, or special features to notice. These prints will excite the curiosity and wonder of all who see them.

Friendly School Districts

We are printing a list of school districts that are willingly and happily cooperating with homeschoolers, and who are willing to be listed in *GWS* as doing so. We will run this list in each issue.

One reason for such a list: I want to encourage and reassure school officials who may be hesitant about approving homeschooling, and let them know that there are other districts enjoying good relationships with their homeschooling families. Also, families who are willing to move to escape a difficult situation with school officials would have at least some ideas about where to go.

We will only list these school districts under the following conditions:

1) The family has to be not just satisfied but *pleased* with the cooperation the schools are giving to their homeschooling efforts. 2) The schools themselves have to be pleased with the relationship with the family. 3) The family has to be happy with the idea of asking the schools whether they want to be included in this list. If they feel that listing the schools, or asking the schools if they want to be listed, may endanger their good present relationship, then they shouldn't ask. 4) The schools themselves have to be happy about being included in the list. If they are uneasy about it, or fear that it may get them in trouble with someone, we'd rather not subject them to that risk.

So—if your district is cooperating with your homeschooling, and you would like them to be on this list, ask them, and let us know if they say to go ahead.

By the way, we would also like to hear from schools that would like to help homeschooling families, but have not been able to do so because no families have yet asked them.

CA—San Juan Ridge Union School District, 18847 Tyler Foote Rd, Nevada City 95959; Marilyn DeVore, Administrator.

MA—Barnstable Public Schools, 230 South St, Hyannis MA 02601; Jane Sheckells, Curriculum Director.

Rockland Public Schools, Rockland 02370; Supt. John W. Rogers.

Southern Berkshire Regional School District, Sheffield 01257; Director of Guidance, Paul Shafiroff.

VT—Woodbury School, Woodbury; Marilyn Hill, Principal.

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Growing Without Schooling 17

October 1980

We're putting this issue of GWS together more quickly than usual, partly to get back on schedule for the calendar year and partly because we have so much wonderful material that keeps coming in. Things are still busy here. We've been averaging over 60 new subscriptions per week since the end of June (As opposed to 10 per week for the three months before that). Many of these are due to the *Mother Earth News* interview, which still brings us mail. We're also getting many orders for samples from Nancy Wallace's good article in *Country Journal*.

Thanks again to our office volunteers, who help us do so much at once. Our new volunteers are Scott Layson, Laurie Phillips, and Heather Kapplow (8 years old).

Some of you have seen the new version of the GWS flyer. One side is the same invoice and "*What is Growing Without Schooling?*" description as on the previous flyer; the other side is the front page of GWS #15. I like using the front page of #15 because it shows what GWS looks like, it mentions the *Mother Earth News* interview and other good news, it mentions the co-operating school district in Barnstable MA, and it gives some of the general feel of the magazine. An easy way to bring GWS to the attention of many people.

There was a short interview with me in the Sept. *Boston* magazine. And Mel Allen of *Yankee* magazine is putting together-a-major story that will come out this winter.

Happy to hear that GWS readers in two more states are getting together informally: in Pennsylvania, Joe and Lorraine Clark (see Directory) held an unschooling picnic, and in Maryland, unschoolers have held several meetings and have started a small newsletter (contact Gail Himes or Manfred Smith.)

Attorney Richard M. Borod (Edward & Angell, #1 Hospital Trust Plaza, Providence RI 02903) sent us a copy of the R.I. Commissioner of Education's decision concerning the Irving Rothwell family of Smithfield.

The Commissioner decided that the home-teaching of Mrs. Rothwell, using Christian Liberty Academy curriculum, complies with state law. We plan to quote from the decision in the next issue of *GWS*.

My editor says that my unschooling book won't be out until next June; the title should be decided upon by December.—John Holt

Learning Exchange News

As we go to press, we've received three offers to run a Learning Exchange (see *GWS* #16.) We won't be surprised if a few more offers come in. We tend to feel, let them all start up—the more the merrier. They can all call themselves “GWS Learning Exchanges” if they want, or make up their own names; they can work out for themselves how to organize and whether to charge for the service. Perhaps people will want to use the Exchange closest to them, perhaps not. These Exchanges may decide to merge with each other, or split up into even smaller ones—anything can happen.

First to respond was Nancy Plent, 2 Smith St, Farmingdale NJ 07727:

I would Love to do the “GWS Learning Exchange” you mention. We have started one here in New Jersey, but it would be great to reach *all* of *GWS* readers. We have a good volunteer group and the use of a computer if things get out of hand. The idea fits in well with my thoughts lately. Want to start *doing* this new world we're after instead of just talk!

Instead of filing people as “Seekers” or “Sharers,” I would rather put together all the names and addresses of people interested in a certain field —“Photography,” “Computers,” etc. Each person should include a short description of their degree of interest or involvement; for example, “beginner,” or “5 years experience.” Then I can make a photocopy of all the cards on a particular topic, and it's up to the people who receive the photocopy whether or not to get in touch with the others.

I ask that people send \$2 with their original letter as a kind of “registration fee.” Later if they want to get an update of the additional names in an area, I can send that for just a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE).

We next heard from Norm and Sherrie Lee of Homesteaders News, PO Box 193, Addison NY 14801:

We already have experience with this sort of thing with our “*Homesteaders' Directory*.” We ask that each send a 3 x 5 card in this form:

Will Share: Gardening Zip Code

Name

Phone

Or, "Am Seeking: *Gardening*," etc.

Only *one* skill per 3 x 5 card, otherwise it will be impossible to organize. Each card must be accompanied by \$1 bill or check. We'll inform by card or telephone right away of contacts now in file, plus new ones as they come in. Also do periodic print outs—perhaps include in our Directory, or a separate publication if enough come in to warrant it. We have a colony here now with enough manpower to handle it.

Third was Shelley Dameron in North Carolina:

Announcing the start of the Knowledge Bank. Based on the Learning Exchange, it is a list of those who seek and those who know. Persons may send a list of things they know about or are skilled at (from Puppy Training to Astronomy) to: The Knowledge Bank, PO Box 1568, Boone NC 28607. Requests for the addresses of those in the know must be accompanied by a SASE. No fees—thanks to our home computer, this should be fairly easy. I'm glad to offer this service to unschoolers (and anyone else!)

Good luck to all these people; we hope they keep us informed as to how things go. And we'll be happy to announce more Learning Exchanges.

Anne Sullivan

From the letters of Anne Sullivan, printed in the back of Helen Keller's The Story Of My Life:

No, I don't want any more kindergarten materials. I used my little stock of beads, cards, and straws at first because I didn't know what else to do; but the need for them is past, for the present at any rate.

I am beginning to suspect all elaborate and special systems of education. They seem to me to be built upon the supposition that every child is an idiot who must be taught to think. Whereas, if the child is left to himself, he will think more and better, if less showily. Let him come and go freely, let him touch real things and combine his impressions for himself, instead of sitting indoors at a little round table, while a sweet-voiced teacher suggests that he build a stone wall with his wooden blocks, or make a rainbow out of strips of colored paper, or plant straw trees in bead flower-pots. Such teaching fills the mind with artificial associations that must be got rid of, before the child can develop independent ideas out of actual experiences.

Young Writer's Success

On page one of GWS #15 we printed a letter from Pat Stone of Mother Earth News saying that they were very interested in carrying some stories written by children for children, "of a practical how-to nature." Now Nancy Wallace (NH) tells us:

Wanted to let you know the exciting news. *Mother Earth News* has accepted an article by Ishmael called, "*How to Build a Raft*," and they sent him a check for \$80! Ishmael was flabbergasted. We immediately went to the bank where he opened a savings account. The article should appear next summer.

Congratulations, Ishmael; I hope many others will follow your good example, and with equally happy results.

Report From Nebraska

A Nebraska reader writes:

GWS has been an immense help to me since receiving Issues 1-12 last January. I wrote to you last fall and again in January, looking for moral support in my attempts at home education for our children. Your personal replies to my letters and the information in four of your books that I ordered have been invaluable to me.

I was disenchanted with Calvert's courses and was just beginning what I thought was a good experience with (a Christian correspondence school) when I wrote to you. One of my statements to you then was that I was delighted that these new lessons were "really teaching our children how to think." You surely must have raised your eyes heavenward at that comment as I do now in looking back on it. After about three months with these courses I threw in the towel and opted for letting the kids help their Papa and me dig out the basement rather than battle for 6-8 hours a day on lessons that they hated and I found an increasing aversion to. We haven't sat down to a formalized lesson since then and are all a much happier family for it.

There is never a dull moment in our children's days and I never cease to be amazed at how "educational" their games usually are. My occasional feelings of guilt are always salved by reading (or rereading) past articles in GWS, and the feeling that you and other non-schoolers like myself would probably feel I am on the right track.

Our nine year old son had always posed problems for me in my attempts to educate him according to the books. On the other hand, his abilities to operate and work on our farm machinery were years beyond what most children his age could do. My husband always gave him whatever help he needed but never lectured him on being careful and seldom gave him more than minimal instructions. This learning on his own worked far better than my teaching ever did. Creating a similar atmosphere here at home for him has proven to be successful and I'm now looking forward to many pleasant years of learning *with* the children, not just from 9-5 but 24 hours a day.

I have not asked that our names be added to the GWS directory because so far we have had very little trouble with the authorities and have come to the conclusion that not advertising our feelings is the best way to avoid trouble,

at least for the present. I think in many instances the authorities would prefer to ignore non-schoolers but are almost forced to action because of the “flag waving” done by some non- schooling parents. We had little trouble here until others using these Christian courses began harping about the immorality, etc., in the local public schools, and thumbed their noses at the school superintendent. Our desire is not to be lumped together with anyone but simply be left alone to do what we feel is right for our family.

On the other hand, it has been wonderful to read in GWS the experiences of others in situations like ours and to be able to gain from their mistakes and triumphs as well as by my own. What I’m trying to say is that I feel like a traitor for not being listed in the Directory, but feel it’s best for us presently to keep a low profile. If you ever feel any of my comments might help others I wouldn’t object to having them repeated in GWS or elsewhere but I’d prefer simply being known as “a reader.”

In my reply, I wrote:

I think you are 100% right about not inflaming the authorities and instead keeping a low profile. Please don’t even *for a second* think of yourself as any kind of traitor for not listing yourself in the Directory. You are already helping the unschooling movement just by the fact of teaching your own children, and even more by writing us such good letters about what you are doing. Don’t think about making yourselves publicly visible until you feel absolutely confident about the local school situation.

Good News From Miss.

A Mississippi reader writes:

Perhaps other people have already told you about Mississippi, but in case they haven't, I will.

For many years there wasn't a compulsory education law. We came here at that time (1974) with our children. A couple of years ago a compulsory education law was passed.

The secretary of our local superintendent of education told me a few weeks ago that the compulsory education law isn't enforced anywhere in the state. I have no idea what it would be like to live in other parts of the state, but we like it here. We've never had any confrontations with school officials. We just live our lives in peace going where we please, when we please, as our interests and finances allow.

From time to time certain people will question us about why our children aren't in school. We explain, and always, so far, that has been the end of the matter.

This is a poor area. It is actually in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. It is hilly and wooded and pleasant in a way of its own.

We were afraid there would be a lot of racial problems, but so far we haven't observed anything major. As a matter of fact I've never witnessed anything minor either.

What I've been trying to tell you in this letter (which has become much longer than I intended) is that this has been a good place for us, and it might be just the place some other unschoolers have been looking for.

School in Fla.

A reader writes:

A group of parents here in Highlands County are operating under Florida Law 623, "*Private School Corporation Law*," each teaching their own children. About eight or ten counties in Florida that we know of have private schools formed by parents to teach their own children. Our school was formed three years ago by one family and called the American Heritage Private School of Highlands County. This couple serves as principal and administrator and each parent is certified as an instructor by the school. We started teaching our kids last year, and while it requires a lot of effort and self-discipline, we feel that the kids are better off for it.

Credential Program

My good friend Eleanor Siegl, who runs the alternative “Little School” in Seattle, reminded me the other day that her school offers a teaching credential program. Because the program is affiliated with Pacific Oaks College in California, student teachers can work toward a Calif. and/or Wash. certificate. Unschoolers who have decided they want to get a teaching credential (and who have, or will have, a bachelor’s degree) might find this an enjoyable way to earn one. For more information, contact Eleanor at 2706 10th St E., Seattle WA 98102; 206-827-8708.

Live-In Babysitter

In “Live-In Teenagers,” (GWS #15, p.2) Sandy Sapello wrote about having found live-in babysitters for her children, and how helpful they had been to her. A friend of mine, Sylvia Zwick (Box 123, Shrub Oak NY 10588), who has recently graduated from high school and who has been a *GWS* reader from the start, just wrote me that she would like very much to be a live-in babysitter for a while in a family with young children. Any interested families might write to her directly.

May I suggest also that any families who would like to find live-in babysitters, or any other people who would like to be live-in babysitters, write to us. We will help you get in touch with each other.

Kids Exchange?

A reader writes:

As I was reading *GWS*, an idea formulated itself, mostly from the article about the father putting up an ad at the ski resorts for employment for his son (*GWS* #12). Why don't we have a "student" exchange program among *GWS* people? Families that live by the ocean may want their children to have access to the mountains, or families with farms could take a teenager in for the summer to help with the chores, etc. We could use *GWS* as the advertising medium since the families involved would want to share the same ideals.

More Cheap Texts

Nancy C. Fletcher, Roseland Research Library, PO Box 356, Roseland FL 32957, writes:

We have a great quantity of used textbooks for grades K-12 which we obtained at auction from the local school system. Some are rather antiquated "Alice and Jerry" type readers but most are fairly recent—no doubt State Directives called for a new publishing house and these books had to be disposed of in the quickest manner possible. The high school texts include such subjects as drafting, metalworking, and journalism. We would be happy to get these books into the hands of people that can use them. Our only quandary is how to cover the costs of handling and shipping. On an individual basis we could probably fill requests at \$1.50 per book. On a quantity basis we would entertain any offers.

Legal Info Resource

A reader writes:

I discovered last week that the League of Woman Voters in Pennsylvania (and probably other states too) runs a “Legislative Information Center” with a toll-free number (in Pa., 800-692-7261). I called them last week and received in the mail today eight pages of copies of Pennsylvania school law. I am sending the League a donation.

More From Minnesota

From John Eidsmoe, the attorney in the recent important homeschooling case in Minnesota (GWS #16):

I did not really expect the court to rule the Minnesota statute unconstitutional for vagueness, although I personally believe it is unconstitutionally vague. My reason for requesting this was to enable the judge to rule in our favor on the key point—constitutional exemption for the Lundstens—while appearing to take a middle-of-the-road position. An examination of the decision would indicate that, on the surface, we lost four out of five issues; but we won the one we really wanted. Psychologically, I believe a judge is more likely to rule in our favor if he can do so without having to appear to be totally against the educational bureaucracy.

In this past session the Minnesota legislature decided to leave the Minnesota statute as it is for the time being (See “Minn. Testimony,” GWS #13). The primary reason, I am told by friends in the legislature, is that while nearly everyone wanted the law changed, there was about an even division between those who wanted to allow more freedom for private schools (primarily conservatives) and those who wanted to clamp down on private schools. Both sides apparently decided they did not want to risk a showdown at the present time.

Good News From Pa.

From a Pennsylvania reader:

I would like to share our first year's experiences at homeschooling with you. We have good relations with the Superintendent of Schools for our district. We hesitate to ask him yet about being listed in *GWS* since he is considered a radical and has many enemies in our community. When the opportunity seems right, though, I will ask his permission. I do not wish to jeopardize in any way our chances of homeschooling, or the chances of any others who may want to in the future. I know you understand this.

We have been approached by approximately five families who want to homeschool. We have been able to give them the legal boundaries and how we accomplished it, so we feel that we have in a small way been able to open the door for other interested families in our community.

We have two sons, 11 and 9. I was a tutor for four years in our local Christian day schools. We are born-again believers.

Though I felt the Christian schools were better than our public schools, my heart would ache as I'd watch the children (including my own) grow tired and paler in color as 3 o'clock neared, only to go home and have several hours of homework to do, then maybe a little play time, then bed, with dinner hastily gulped down somewhere in between. The days were almost always the same, and I found myself looking forward to the vacations as much as the children. It was our only break and free time, at least until the higher level grades when term papers would be assigned for vacations. I resigned myself to the plight of them doing these things for twelve years, wishing there was a way out.

Deep inside I felt we should be doing more to free their minds, and that whatever wonderful experiences we could let happen, we should. But where was the time? How would we ever be able to do what we wanted and still get "educated" as the world *demand*ed?

Well, the answers started coming fast. I was getting desperate inside, and I asked our Lord to step in and show us the way. It was scriptural to teach our children at home, and unless the Lord had some fantastic reason for having our children suffer in the schools, I knew He would help us.

Solar Energy Digest had a tiny notation about *GWS*. We subscribed and

found we were agreeing with many of the premises set down. Our favorite bookstore had *How Children Fall*, *Instead of Education*, and *Education and Ecstasy*. Our whole outlook on schooling, started changing dramatically.

I looked in the laws I had around, from trying unsuccessfully to start a school of my own several years before, and found one that fit our family. The law said that children could be taken out of the public schools of Pa. if they had a *properly qualified* tutor *approved* by the District Superintendent of Schools. As a certified teacher I was qualified; now to be approved.

The next step was to contact the District Superintendent. He said it was a fine idea, arranged an appointment to meet the boys and me, looked over my certificate, and told me that it was all right for us to tutor the boys; but, what he wanted was a written program of what I would be doing during the year, what curriculum I would be using (they let me use the Christian curriculum I liked), and he set up another appointment. I did what he asked, and when we met about a week later, he dictated his letter in our presence, wished us luck, and two days later, our typed, signed letter of approval was in our mail. Praise the Lord!

The Superintendent had one apprehension in letting us do this. The boys might miss out socially and become introverts. So we assured him that we would do our best to give them contact socially. And what a social year it was!

Some of the children the boys knew would call and invite them to participate in the activities at the church and school. Some would invite them overnight, and we'd have them overnight, too. Some of the school children really missed seeing the boys, and the boys missed seeing them, but that was basically all the social life they had in school. There was no talking in the classroom, the hall, when going to the bathroom, getting a drink, or at lunch until they were completely finished eating; the morning recess of 15 minutes was for a planned exercise program with no talking. So the only "social" life they had in school was after gulping down lunch, and the 20 minute recess in the afternoon. So with our homeschooling, the boys had more "social" time with the children than they ever had in school (I know because I was at school daily helping to keep order.)

We had one problem during the year and that was finding a routine that suited all of us. At first we tried to work all together, each son working on his grade level, but both working on the same subject. This didn't work for

us.

Finally, we settled in on a one-day, one child routine. One day I would teach John all his subjects, while Jim was responsible to read and match his spelling words. He could do the reading and spelling at any time of the day or evening; the rest of the time he could play and do what he wanted. The next day I would work with Jim, and John would be free. They really liked this, and since they enjoy reading and spelling, this was no burden to them.

We started our day around 9 a.m., since that was when we all were finally up and finished with breakfast. It would take us about three hours to do the day's work, and the rest of the day the boys were free. Some days we took off completely to go places of interest to *them*, such as playing in the local park, going to a peanut-butter factory nearby, and visiting McDonalds for a tour and some goodies. Since we considered life to be learning, and learning life, school was always in and always out. It was great!

We did not work at a table or desk, we bought each of them a notebook and we sat on the sofa together and held our books on our laps. It is wonderful to be able to sit next to your own child and touch arms and hug if you want or wrestle and still get work done. We could yell and cry and laugh; we could read with the most ridiculous expressions whenever we wanted, and no one cared!

The only commitments we had with the school district was to meet with the superintendent in the middle of the year, so he could see how we were doing, and then to have the boys tested again in May. We agreed. They did very well on the tests again this year, and the superintendent was very pleased with what the boys knew and how poised they were as he conversed with them.

My sons were relaxed all year, and were free from any illnesses. In school they averaged 14 days a marking period sick, and I didn't do much better. I got sick twice this year, but they did not. The only time they remarked about even a belly-ache was when we had to go back to school in May for the standardized tests.

We applied again this year for homeschooling, and received our letter of approval in July. It was a great year of mixed, fantastic experiences, and I cannot stand the thought of ever sending them back to that race unless *they* would choose to go.

Update From Canada

Freda Lynn Davies of Ontario (GWS #13) writes:

Kevin (9) and I went to Europe for 5 weeks in April and May, travelling mainly by train and finding accommodation in hostels and private houses. Kevin was the official photographer and he seemed pretty pleased with the results. I certainly get so involved observing the surroundings that I forget to take pictures and afterwards wish that I had some to look at.

You may remember that Kevin had in his three school years developed a strong aversion to anything connected with the 3 Rs and would state flatly that he couldn't read, as if that were the end of the matter. For most of his first year out of school I rarely asked him to read. When I did, he would try a few words, then get impatient, lose interest, clam up, and stomp off. He also seemed too proud to ask for or accept help, and absolutely hated being "taught." So I let the matter rest for many months, though I continued to read to him. I can't imagine many educators who would approve of that tactic.

By late April almost a year had passed from the day I had informed Kevin's teacher I would no longer be sending him to school. We were in a crowded Paris railway station (Gare de Lyon) late in the evening preparing to board an overnight train to Marseilles. Both of us were tired after a long day of sightseeing, and I think Kevin was a little perturbed by his first full day of total immersion in foreign sounds. We spied a small section of English language paperbacks at a newsstand, and he immediately pounced on a couple of them, each with about 120 pages of Peanuts cartoons. In the next few days I read them to him 3 or 4 times, and then suddenly he started reading them aloud page after page non-stop, including the big words like "ophthalmologist" and "impregnable." Later in Copenhagen we picked up another one, and the same thing happened. He kept reading them over and over, obviously enjoying the sounds emanating from his own mouth, as he steadily improved his pronunciation and dramatization.

It's curious that all this happened in foreign countries. It was as if Kevin were homesick for his own language and culture, and was seeking ways to hang on to them. It makes me wonder if he and many others have been stuffed with too much language—words, words, words,—from television, teachers, and parents, and need a relative scarcity of it in order to develop a

hunger for it.

After the big binge in Europe, we have been living a very quiet, poorer but richer life, with the woods, lakes, and hills of northwestern Ontario outside our back door. The Local public school people have been very cooperative and understanding since learning of Kevin's out-of-school learning activities. The regional supervisor that I visited in June tried to encourage me to enroll Kevin in school, but told me there was no need to obtain board approval for educating a child outside the system. I wonder if this stance is now the official one in Ontario since the ruling in Lambton County (GWS #13).

Kevin has been getting a little itchy to find some friends, and though he doesn't want the "teacher" part of school, he does want some of the recreational and social parts. After my experience in Winnipeg, and after hearing of the experiences of other parents with many schools, my expectations weren't very high when I requested the local principal to consider allowing Kevin to visit the school from time to time. I'm not sure if I looked bug-eyed with my jaw touching my toenails, or not, but I was certainly happily astonished that he had no objection whatsoever. Kevin and I have met with one of the teachers who seems to have one of those pleasant isolated islands of comfort within the system. He teaches mainly six year olds, but has agreed to have Kevin visit his class, probably for the first time next week.

Teaching Themselves

From Carrie Smith (VT):

I forgot to report that our pre-schoolers are doing so great without any FORMAL teaching! Rebecca (5), who had been expected, though not legally compelled to attend kindergarten, is teaching herself to read. Oh, I know I have read about this, and what happens with others, but it's very exciting to watch it happening! It's left up to HER (I didn't even think up her ideas. etc., or ask her to do it; she just started on her own) and SHE has just started picking out words, or asking us what they are. We have one book on nature that shows everything—all kinds of animals, flowers, fish, dogs, etc. It gives the name under it, and a description. She got into this book, and started guessing at the names, going by the picture of it, and also the first letter of the word naming it. She has also picked out words from the Dr. Seuss books, and sometimes finds the same words in ANOTHER BOOK (which *thrills* her!) One word she knows is “zoo.” We get a box of library books every two weeks, for us all, right down to the 2 year old, who picks out her own books (and isn't restricted to any special age limit to subject, etc.) She likes the *Ranger Rick* nature magazines (see GWS #16) and we tell her the names of everything.

More Babies on the Job

From a Chicago suburban paper:

To Patty Stockdreher, the baby (son Lake) presented a common choice for mothers—stop working or pay for baby sitters. She asked her husband, Don, if he would work nights and mind Lake by day. “He wasn’t too keen on it,” Patty said.

So she decided to stay home for three months. After six weeks, Pamela Chernivsky, a La Leche League member, cold Patty of a job at Jim Stark’s Dexter Machine Company.

Stockdreher called Stark for an interview. He told her to bring the baby. He asked if she had a sitter and she said she didn’t.

For Patty’s first three days of work, Lake stayed with the wife of another Dexter worker. Bored her, too. The woman told Stockdreher the child was quiet enough to stay at work with her.

So now Lake spends his working hours in a crib beneath the “*Tubing Rod and Bar Pipe*” calendar. Or he rests in his mother’s arm while she pecks at the adding machine or phones clients, who sometimes ask her, “Hey, do I hear a kid in the background?”

“I was a little worried,” Stockdreher says. “When Lake does get rowdy I get flustered. But he’s pretty content. He isn’t confined much. If you’re at home with a baby you have to watch him there, too. It isn’t like you can relax and read a book.”

“Who am I to deprive a baby of its mother?” Jim Stark asked. “It’s perfectly natural for Lake to be here as far as I’m concerned. It’s sort of a constant reminder of what the hell the world is all about. We get so wrapped up in making money that so often we lose perspective on why we are working. The baby presents the brightness of the future.”

Once each morning, Lake gets his feeding behind a file cabinet. Lil Koldowski the receptionist, lullabies him and Norma Frederick visits daily from the machine shop.

Nobody has anything but dandy things to say about Lake, although the standard line holds it will be “interesting” when he starts crawling.

“He’s a nice baby,” Koldowski said. “I feel like his grandmother.”

“Very contented,” Stark said. “He doesn’t cry like a bottle-fed baby.” He wailed only once, Stark added, on the day the Internal Revenue Service auditors arrived.

The Sept. 22 *Boston Globe* ran a story saying that Joan Lunden, co-host of the ABC-TV show “*Good Morning America*,” demanded and won the right to take her ten-week-old daughter to the office with her, and has it written into her contract that the baby will go with her on all her assignments. Of course, the studio provides a nurse, and they don’t make such arrangements for their ordinary help. But it’s a good step, and congratulations to Joan Lunden for keeping her baby with her.

The Process of Work

A friend told me that her son, going on four, who had been very happy at his nursery school, was beginning to get a little bored and dissatisfied with it. She said she thought perhaps he might be ready for more “structure.” I wrote in reply:

My feeling is that E, like all bright and happy little children, is strongly pulled in the direction of adults and their understanding, competence, and skill, and may find it boring or frustrating to have to spend so much time with little folks who don’t know any more and can’t do any more than himself. I take it that this is close to what you have in mind when you say he needs more structure. I tend to avoid that term, since almost all who use it mean by it only one thing—some adult standing over the child telling him what to do and making sure he does it.

What E may need to be introduced to are more tasks and activities that take more time, concentration, effort, and skill. This isn’t a matter of “giving” him harder tasks and making him stick at them until they are finished. In such situations the controlling factor is the will of the adult, not, as it should be, the requirements of the task. It would help if E and other kids his age could see older children choosing and undertaking various tasks and working on them over a period of time until they were completed. Children need to get some sense of the *processes* by which good work is done. The only way they can learn how much time and effort it takes to build, say, a table, is to be able to see someone building a table, from start to finish. Or painting a picture. Or repairing a bicycle, or writing a story, or whatever it may be.

At the Ny Little Skole in Denmark the six adult “teachers” had all done many kinds of work before they began teaching, and all brought to the school a number of visible and interesting skills. One woman was a good musician and dancer, another a skilled weaver, several of the men were good at working with tools in both wood and metal. One teacher was actually making himself a bass viol at the school. It took a long time; it was a serious instrument. Some of the older kids worked with him on the project; younger kids hung around, helped a little, asked questions; still younger children watched less attentively, for shorter stretches of time. But even the youngest children were aware of that project going on, and kept track of its progress.

Children need to see things done well. Cooking, and especially baking, where things change their texture and shape (and taste yummy), are skills that children might like to take part in. Typing might be another, printing still another, and either or both of these could be added to bookmaking and bookbinding. These are crafts that children could take part in from beginning to end. Skilled drawing and painting, or woodworking, might be others.

Adults must *use* the skills they have where children can see them. If they have no skills to speak of, they should learn some, and let the children see them learning, even if only as simple a thing as touch typing. They should invite children to join them in using these skills. What we want to see is children being slowly drawn, at higher and higher levels of energy, commitment, and skill, into more and more serious and worthwhile adult activities.

In this connection, your own work as writers, though perhaps less easy for E to understand than the work of a carpenter or farmer, may be less opaque and meaningless than you think. Your work is a process that takes place in time. You begin (if you work like me) with raw materials and scraps of notes, write rough drafts, correct them, change them, finally produce a smooth draft, turn this over to someone else for further editing, see it go into galleys or some kind of proof sheets and eventually find its way into the finished newspaper or magazine. Even if what you write *about* might not make much sense to E, he will surely be interested in many of the things you actually *do*. Thus, at every stage of the process outlined above, you might show him what you have done and talk a little (as much as he wants) about what you are going to do next, and why. In the end, you could show him your articles when they finally get into print. You might even keep all your notes and rough drafts for a particular article, and on a big piece of cardboard paste up an exhibit showing everything from first steps to final product. This would also be an easy and interesting thing to do in schools; it would show students what none of them now know or could imagine, the amount of work that goes into serious writing.

It is this sense of *process over time* that children want and need to learn about, and much of this is visible in your own work. And even if you can't show him the shop where your own articles are printed, you can show him places where *some* stuff is printed. Even a small offset press would be quite fascinating to a small child, the noise, all those things going round and round,

the paper flying out with stuff printed on it. A mystery! But he would see that a grown-up understands it and controls it, and think that maybe someday, if he wanted, he could too. And he would know that you were not, because you thought he was small and stupid, excluding him from a central part of your life.

School in Mo.

From a mother in Kansas City:

Good news! I've found a school here, "Jonathan's Place," which has agreed (with enthusiasm!) to a program whereby John (who is now nine) will attend school one week a month and "study independently" the other three weeks. The people at Jonathan's Place, Pat and Marshall Martin (4301 Harrison, Kansas City MD 64110; 753-5392) have given me permission to tell you that they would be willing to talk to other families who might be interested in working out programs similar to ours. They would, of course, want to evaluate each individual situation, but they seem very willing to explore all kinds of new ideas. John will also be able to go on any field trips he would like during the other three weeks—and they take *many*.

On Alternative Schools

Fernando Gonzalez and Mary Classen in California asked me to write something about alternative schooling for a book they are doing. I wrote in part:

I want to do away with the idea of compulsory learning, and the idea that learning is and should be separate from the rest of life. Above all, I want to break down the barriers that separate children from adults and their work and concerns.

Most alternative schools meet my objections to only one of these three basically wrong ideas, the idea of compulsory learning. Many do not even do that; they are just a little more subtle than regular schools in the ways in which they tell children what to learn and try to make them learn it. And they leave untouched the great isolation between learning and serious work, or other parts of life, and between children and adults.

It's OK to have some special places for kids, since they have certain needs that in some respect are different from the needs of adults. At different ages they need different kinds of places to play, to run around, to make noise, to learn certain physical skills, and to mingle with each other. But they should not have to spend all their time in those special kid places. The adult world should be as far as possible open to them, and they should not have to go to special kid places unless they want to.

People say to me quite often, "I want to work with kids." What they really mean is that they want to work *on* kids, to do things to or for them, usually without their consent, which they think will do them good. I often say to these well-meaning people, "Why not find some work worth doing, and then try to find ways to make it possible for young people to join you in this work?" This is very different from starting an alternative school.

Children should be able to have contact with many adults who are outside their own families, and whose work is not taking care of them. They should be able, if they wish, to make friends with adults, who may or may not be friends of or even known to their parents. They should be able to see adults at work, and if they wish, to share in that work according to their energy and skill. To make this possible, even on a community or neighborhood level, will take some planning, organization, and work. If we want to call the place

where this work is done a “school,” I suppose we can. But I would much prefer to call it something else. If we are inventing something new, and in our time this is new, I’d rather think of a new name for it than bend an old name out of shape to fit it.

There seems to me something deeply and even dangerously ambiguous about the relation between adults (“teachers” or whatever) and children in an alternative school. In most schools the relation is stark and clear. School is the Army for kids. Adults make them go there, and when they get there adults tell them what to do, bribe and threaten them into doing it, and punish them if they don’t. When the teachers in an alternative school try (as they should) to give up this bad relationship, it is very unclear what they put in its place. If they are not there to tell the children what to do, what are they there for? To “help” the children? Did the children ask for this help? Can they get away from it? Sometimes alternative schools talk about teachers and students being equal. If so, why are the adults paid? And to do what? One of the reasons teachers burn out so quickly at alternative schools, even faster than in regular schools, is that their position, task, and function are so unclear. Are they the students’ servants, or their bosses, or if neither, then what?

Is the task of adults in alternative schools to think up interesting things for the students to do and then try to seduce or cajole them into doing them? Is their task to be available if students want their help, but otherwise to stay out of their way? Neither of these seems to me like good life-time work for serious adults.

I personally would hate to be in the position of having to think up things for children to do and to find ways to get them to do them. If and when they ask me, I often show them how to do things I like to do, so that we can do them together. But I am not going to do things that bore *me* in the hope that they may interest or be good for *them*. Thus, I am always glad to play my cello with children around, and to offer them a chance to play if they want. But if they don’t want, that’s fine with me; I am not trying to “get them interested” in the cello. I am not going to take up painting in the hope that, seeing me, children will get interested in painting. Let people who *already* like to paint, paint where children can see them.

When adults come into our office with children, if we are doing anything which children could do, we ask them if they would like to help, and they almost always say yes. They work hard and well, and are a real help. I think

children could and would like to help adults much sooner and in more ways than most adults give them a chance to. An important part of our work here at *GWS* is trying to find ways to help that to happen.

Children Working

From Mabel Dennison (ME):

I am thinking of young people, ages 9–14, in this informal survey of work in our rural community. I know of children who do volunteer work, exercising and feeding animals at an animal shelter. I know of children here and in another town who go to nursing homes regularly to visit with the elderly. This was arranged by the small “free” schools they attend. One child has visited the same older person for three years. Children whose families own farm animals, or a dairy, or a vet clinic, do regular chores feeding animals. I know of three children who have done enough fishing to make a useful contribution of food to their families, and children who can tinker with and repair bikes and mini-bikes. I know of only one young person who loves plants and does a large amount of gardening.

The paid work here for young people consists of harvesting strawberries and vegetables for a truck gardener (12 and up), picking blueberries, picking up apple drops, gathering apple tree brush left from pruning (12 and up). And, of course, there is the usual paid work for neighbors, mowing lawns, babysitting, cleaning yards and houses. It is too bad there isn’t more work for children.

Father As Teacher

From “The Leopolds: A Family of Naturalists” in Science, 3/7/80:

Aldo Leopold exerted the same fascination on his children. As a family friend observes, “He had this amazing courtesy to the young. You felt intelligent talking to him because he was so attentive and respectful of your ideas.” For the children, Aldo was a naturalist, teacher, and master craftsman who impressed them by what they speak of as their father’s quiet assurance and gentle example.

“Starting when I was five,” says Starker, “Dad and I used to go down to the Rio Grande River on his bicycle, with me seated on the handle bars. I don’t remember talking land ecology at the age of five, but it wasn’t very long after that that he would stand out on the hillside and talk about why quail were in one place and not another, or why ducks preferred a particular pond because of some food he recognized in the water.” But Aldo usually began by asking Starker what he thought. “He treated us with considerable dignity—I suppose that had as much as anything else to do with our being so intensely interested in what he had to say,” Starker says.

Inspired and encouraged by their father’s example, all the Leopolds became craftsmen. At Christmas, it was their custom to exchange handmade gifts. “The tradition was that, if you did it by hand, it was good,” says Luna, who still counts as a prized possession a fly rod that Starker made for him years ago. Luna thinks this emphasis on craftsmanship helped prepare him and the others to become scientists. “Science is a craft,” he says.

Of all the Leopolds, Starker had perhaps the closest relationship with his father and his career parallels Aldo’s more closely than do the careers of the others. As youngsters, he and Luna were always ready to go along with their father on hunting trips, and when he could not take them both, they would draw straws. “If I won, fine. If Luna won, then I would trade him out of it with one thing or another. Every damned thing I had except my pocket knife,” Starker recalls. “So I had the advantage of sitting around campfires with Dad most of my early life.”

Self-Taught: Tennis

A reader reminds me that Bjorn Borg, the five-time Wimbledon champion and one of the greatest players in the history of tennis (some say the greatest), was self-taught. She is quite right. He taught himself to play as a small boy. The very heavily top-spinned strokes he taught himself, especially the two-handed backhand, were not in fashion in those days, and when he became old enough and skilled enough to attract the attention of tennis pros, they tried to get him to change his game to the more conventional flat strokes. But he stubbornly refused and stuck to the way he had invented and was used to. Nowadays most serious young players are being taught to hit the way that Borg does.

And Computers . . .

Apple Computers, the multimillion dollar company that helped pioneer the home-computer movement, was founded by two young college dropouts. In 1975, Steve Jobs, then 21, and Stephen Wozniak, 25, who had been friends at high school, met again at a computer club in Palo Alto, Calif. Both had been doing design work for electronics companies, but when their employers refused to fund their personal- computer projects, they started building their own in a family garage.

Not long after they built the first working models of the Apple, they got financial help from “venture capitalists,” investors such as Arthur Rock and the Rockefellers who look for innovative ideas to support. Apple has been expanding at a tremendous rate ever since, and is second only to Radio Shack in the personal computer market.—DR

And Architecture

From the Boston Globe. 11/26/79:

How did Lewis Mumford, who never received a formal college degree, become such a qualified generalist, able to comment and write on architecture, urban planning, philosophy and geology if, as was the case, he was “thrown out of college” in his freshman year because of tuberculosis and told to take it easy?

“When that happened,” he said, “I spent my time walking around New York. I knew the city by direct acquaintance, not by studying the statistics, not by putting figures on a computer but actually by having a conversation with the buildings. I talked to them and they told me a great deal.

“I first have to experience something. I didn’t study architecture—I looked at buildings. I didn’t study geography in the abstract—I walked around the landscape and had conversations with the environment before I studied it systematically.”

Mumford’s self-teaching was followed by formal enrichment courses at City College, New York University and Columbia.

He feels that far more young people today should go out and study the environment *before* studying it formally.

Young And Old

More from the PA mother:

Right after we were approved to homeschool, my father was taken seriously ill with a stroke, so when he had recuperated enough, he was put in a convalescent home for therapy. Because the boys and I were free, we would go in each day to visit him. (They would not have been excused from school for this and probably you may say “Who would want to!”) But my father was very depressed and the therapist at the hospital had on his record “uncooperative.” This didn’t give the therapist at the home much confidence, so we went in each day to make sure they didn’t give up on him. It was a good experience for the boys as well as me, for whenever the grandchildren would come my father would get un-depressed. He would laugh at their antics and then sink back into depression when they would leave.

So we agreed that we would take our books (it was now September) to the home and stay most of the day with their Pop-Pop. It worked out well, for the boys had a large place to do their work and they could go outside to play whenever they got tired of being in. They would go to the vending machines and get us things, and several times when the home was short-handed because of the flu season, we would sort some laundry and the boys would help take it to the rooms. We made it a game and the patients loved having the boys come in their rooms and talk to them.

At therapy we kept assuring my father that when he could walk well, we’d take him home, so he really worked hard, and the boys and I would cheer him on, with “You can do it, Pop-Pop. Hurray!” “Great, Pop-Pop!” The other patients enjoyed us cheering them too and when the therapist saw the positive results from this, he was glad we were there. We saw many patients recover in weeks that the therapist thought would take months. We don’t hope to have this kind of experience again this year, but it showed us that we *could* take a “sad” situation and turn it into one of rejoicing.

I included the situation about my father in this letter because when one is really growing without schooling, one must include whatever life hands out and deal with it, hopefully turning it into something positive. Sometimes I feel growing without schooling should be called “living and learning.” (Ed. note: Or learning from living.)

I almost forgot, the boys also learned to operate elevators by themselves, run errands for the nurses, and hold conversations with their elders, all in a natural situation

Job Tickets

From Behavior Today:

The retiring president of Columbia University, William J. McGill, said in a recent interview, “There are 2,000 separate advanced degrees that you can get today, each of which is a form of occupational entry. The substance of education is being eroded and giving way to the use of the degree system for occupational entry.”

The Firemen's Test

From The Measuring Cup (See "And Test Info." GWS #12):

Firefighters in Bridgeport, CT, were required to pass a true–false test. Blacks and Hispanics who had been denied firefighting jobs succeeded in persuading a federal judge to order the department to cease giving the test after he reviewed the actual questions. These were among the questions applicants had been asked: “True or False —Philosophical questions are a waste of time;—I can’t see how intellectuals get personal satisfaction from their impractical lives:—When I was a child, I showed no interest in books.” The judge could not understand why candidates who answered “True” to all three questions would make better firefighters.

Professor On Testing

From Behavior Today, 7/14/80:

After studying the achievement tests of more than 5000 students in Canadian schools and universities, Dr. James C. Powell (Faculty of Education, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario N9E 1A5) has concluded that almost all existing test procedures are defective. Powell's critique is more fundamental than that of educational critics who see existing test procedures as "fair" for the white middle class but "biased" from the point of view of various minorities and subcultures. Middle-class children and adolescents are also victimized by the fact that these examinations represent a mental set appropriate to the earlier stages of the Industrial Revolution—when you had to have the "correct answer" or the bridges would fall down—and one that has been obsolete in the scientific world since the early part of the twentieth century.

A Strange Diagnosis

I have really enjoyed your magazine. I am a “retired” school teacher with two small children ages 6 and 3. We experienced school last year for the first time as parents and wow—it was really different. My son started out with a multitude of problems that hadn’t seemed to bother us at home. He was placed in the slowest group. The teacher told us he just didn’t have the ability. Later, I insisted on having him tested to find out the problem. The psychologist who tested him said he should immediately be placed in a class for the *GIFTED*. However, there was no other class to put him in and his teacher didn’t believe the testing was accurate. If he has as bad a year this year, I hope I can find the courage to take him out.

And Another

A parent writes in The National Foundation for Gifted and Creative Children Newsletter (395 Diamond Hill Rd, Warwick RI 02886):

I intend to fulfill my responsibility and right as a parent to protect my children from a harmful atmosphere which will eventually transform their creative energies from avenues of learning to patterns of aggression and destruction. The very characteristics which define them as creatively gifted work against them in an atmosphere of conformity and enforced rigidity. Because of a preferred way of learning, labels such as “inattentive” and “disruptive” have been used against them. It is, to me, ironic that a child performing in the 99th percentile of his peer group upon testing and evaluation should be labeled “learning disabled,” unless it is the learning methods themselves that are in fact disabling him.

Learning Disabilities

To a friend who insisted that some children really do have “Learning Disabilities,” I wrote:

I know there are internal obstacles to learning, since I encounter them in myself. What I don't admit and in fact stoutly deny is 1) that these should be considered as *diseases* or *disorders* and 2) that there is any good reason to infer that these obstacles are *primarily* physiological or neurological in character.

There is a very bad tendency in modern psychology to mix up the two meanings of the words “normal” and “abnormal.” Strictly speaking, “normal” means nothing more than “usual,” i.e., the high point on the distribution curve. But doctors, psychologists, etc. increasingly tend to assume that “normal” also means “right, proper, correct, desirable,” and that “abnormal” means not simply “unusual” but also “wrong, incorrect, sick.” You will admit that this is a semantic, philosophical confusion of the highest order.

In any of the literature I have seen, the LD people make no distinction between LD as observed behavior and LD as inferred causes (neurological or otherwise) of that behavior. Until they begin to understand the importance of this distinction, and begin to make it clear in their talk and writings, there is little reason to take them seriously.

You describe C. It sounds to me like a classic stress reaction, of the kind I described in *How Children Fail*, and that I still encounter, i.e., the day before yesterday, when playing music a little faster than I can really play it.

You say, “The neurologist found plenty wrong.” Neurologists do not directly observe nervous systems. They observe behavior, and make inferences about the causes of that behavior. Did this particular neurologist test any other hypotheses about the cause of C's behavior, such as

- 1) that it might be a stress reaction.

- 2) that it might have something to do with diet and/or fatigue.

- 3) that C might have some of the kinds of confusions about the meanings of right and left, or forwards and backwards, that I have written about in *GWS*? I would cheerfully bet \$10 that he didn't. If he did, I'd like to know *how* he did.

I return to my first point, about the tendency to call the unusual “wrong.”

Your words confirm my point. The neurologist found plenty “wrong,” you say. In what sense was it wrong other than unusual?

As Einstein knew, experiments do not prove theories. The fact that Doman–Delacato patterning techniques work, i.e., improve reading in children, does not necessarily prove that their theories of learning or nonlearning are correct. People built perfectly good furnaces and steam engines when they had mistaken ideas about the nature of heat and energy.

I never heard of a method for dealing with learning disabilities that *worked*, that actually *improved performance* that did not involve enormous reduction of stress, anxiety, guilt, self-blame, self-hatred. I have never heard of any methods that were anywhere near as successful as those experienced and described by people like Dennison, Herndon, Fader (and myself), which addressed themselves *as directly as possible* to the reduction of stress and to the use of the real interests of the students (they read what they wanted to, for their own pleasure, and without having to be tested, etc.) Over and over again we have seen children, way behind in reading, gain four, five, or more years in grade level *in a year* by the use of such methods. Reading technologists rarely, if ever, match these results.

Mothers write me letters about their own children’s letter or word reversals stopping within a few months or even weeks of their being taken out of school.

The schools would solve 99.9% of their “reading problems” if they simply gave children plenty of time each day to read whatever they wanted, free of tests, judgments, corrections, grading, and so, of the possibility of failure, humiliation, and shame. Until they do this—which won’t be soon—I refuse to believe in what they tell me about LD. *After* they have done it (if and when they ever do), in the *tiny* population of non-readers which will then remain, we can look for other causes—which even then may have to do with diet, intellectual confusion, family problems, power struggles, etc.

What Schools Teach

From the newsletter of the Feingold Association of Minnesota, 6800 S Cedar Lake Rd, St Louis Park, MN 55436:

Walt Disney Educational Media Co., a division of Walt Disney Productions, has prepared a series of educational materials in the form of four filmstrips, running anywhere from seven to nine minutes, attacking the health food industry. The filmstrips are provided for use in school systems as a guide to teach elementary children the “correct” story on nutrition.

Filmstrip #1, *“I Eat Whatever I Like Regardless,”* claims that health food lovers are “devotees,” food faddists are very unscientific, while the rest of the world is normal.

Filmstrip #2, *“Food Fads—You Bet Your Life,”* claims that no food is a health food, and that, in fact, certain health foods can be highly toxic and dangerous.

Filmstrip #3, *“Is Natural Healthy?”* refers to health food faddists as being overly excited about chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and food additives, and says these are not only necessary but actually beneficial.

Filmstrip #4, *“Is There a Perfect Diet?”* suggests that health food diets and any type of weight loss diet that has been thought of today are bizarre and do not work.

Throughout the entire four filmstrips, the media company goes to great lengths to justify white bread, white sugar, chemical colorings, and additives, preservatives, chemical pesticides and fertilizers. It shows, in a favorable light, products from General Mills, Pillsbury, and other major refined food processors in America, and offers an unfavorable depiction of health food stores and of products from vitamin and supplement companies.

What Schools Teach—2

A mother sent us these quotes from her child's teachers. Her child was not allowed to read books during "reading" classes in school, though she tested in the 99th percentile in "reading skill" tests.

"If your daughter would just apply herself a little harder I think she could get it. She has got to understand that much of the work done in school is boring and tedious."—Fifth grade teacher.

"I know some of this work is boring for your daughter, but you've got to understand that's what school is all about."—Second grade teacher.

"These kids have got to understand that LEARNING isn't FUN!!"—Elementary principal.

Be Social—Or Else!

From Susan Goss (NY):

Feb. 4: My husband and I work with our kids almost every day—doing math, helping them type letters to their relatives, listening to them read, reading to them, writing captions to their stories and novels—yes, novels! I buy diary books with blank pages and my older daughter illustrates whole books with the continuing adventures of her fictional characters. I do the writing as she dictates it, for while she writes very well, this is faster. We include a photo of the author at the end with a short biography. There is a table of contents, copyright date and dedication.

People say, “I don’t know how to teach my child.” We have found that the main ingredient here is to be attentive to the questions and interests of the child. She will point the way.

So while we are sending our kids to public school, they are getting their education at home.

Aug. 29: The last sentence of that letter is no longer true. We took Sarah out of her public school kindergarten room last winter.

We sent Sarah to public school kindergarten hoping for the best but expecting the worst. We felt that if we became active in the school, selected her teachers personally, and monitored the situation, it might work out. When she started kindergarten she was already reading (she was reading books that I had read in the fourth and fifth grades!) and writing pages and pages of stories in which she sounded out words and wrote them phonetically—without help.

She was happy and enthusiastic at first. She loved riding the bus. Her teacher refused to do any academic work with her at her level. She was taught the sounds of the consonant, but this did not bother her. The problem arose because her teacher decided Sarah was backward socially and that she needed to be cured. At first she gently pushed Sarah to be more out-going and “join in more.” But when the cure didn’t take, the teacher became impatient and in an angry voice asked Sarah why she could not be like everyone else.

Sarah was crushed and angry. She didn’t immediately tell us what happened, but she was very angry at home. She was constantly saying she hated people, even people she didn’t know, like waitresses in restaurants. She

came home from school tired and in a bad mood. She began to say she didn't feel well and didn't want to go to school.

We kept her home. When it clear to me that she didn't ever want to go back, I tried to find out what had happened. Sarah cried when she told us about the pressures her teacher had been putting on her. She seemed ashamed, also, and this hurt me the most. Sarah felt she had failed her teacher and that was why the teacher had lost patience with her and stopped liking her. At about this time, Sarah and I and my younger daughter Maggie flew to California to visit their grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They were shocked at the change in Sarah. She was very hostile, and her hostility was inappropriate in the loving atmosphere she was in.

When we got back home I searched for a new school and found a Montessori kindergarten in which the teacher was very sympathetic to my story. Although she had more children than she had originally intended to have, she said she would take Sarah. She said she thought that Sarah's reading ability would make her an asset to the class! Her public school teacher had considered it a definite liability and thought that it was probably responsible for her social "backwardness" Her public school teacher, we later found out, had said to Sarah, "You'll never have any friends if you just stand there! You have to approach the other children." To Sarah's delight and surprise, many children approached her at her new school and she made three or four friends. Within a few months she was her old self again.

This fall Sarah and Maggie will go to a Montessori School which has one ungraded classroom for grades 1-3. The teacher's philosophy jibes with mine and I hope they will be happy in her room. But, if they are not, I am prepared to take them out, keep them at home, or look for another school. In any case, it will not be a public school.

This summer we all travelled by car 7,000 miles, going from NY to California and back. During this trip Sarah wrote close to a hundred pages of stories, songs, poems, rhymes, and nonsense rhymes. She writes very quickly, never asks for a word to be spelled, and anyone can easily read what she has written. One of her best stories was one called "The Dog Who Went Bananas and the Cat Who Went Apples."

Sept. 15: Sarah was pleased with her second day of school (today) because she had been allowed to work on arithmetic for as long as she wanted to, which was from 9-12. She said she stopped because it was lunchtime, which

surprised her because the time had gone so fast! To think that teachers could make kids happy by “allowing” them three hours of unmolested problem solving! It’s really so simple. So I’m guardedly optimistic.

I just thought to throw in these photos, because they are so expressive of the time period I wrote you about. The big one, obviously, is Sarah’s public school picture. The two square ones show a more recent and happier time.

Ed. note: The difference between the tense, unhappy, self-hating in-school face and the relaxed, laughing, confident face after Sarah left the public school are amazing, and heartbreaking—they say more than thousands of words could. Wish we could print them.

Horror Stories

People send us hundreds of letters telling about callous, stupid, cruel things done to children by school people. We don't print most of them in GWS—we haven't room, and there are too many more important things to write about. What to do with such stories? There are enough to make a large book. But the people who think that schools are bad don't need any more proof of it, and the rest won't listen.

I think people should start sending these stories to legislators, state and national. If the schools have done or are doing things to your children that you think are stupid, cruel, or wrong, and if they have treated or are treating you in a hostile, contemptuous, evasive, or bullying manner when you have tried to do something about this, write a letter to your elected representatives and tell them about it. You could also write to editors of local and major newspapers in your state.

You might also say something like this: "I think you should know that these things happen, and I hope you will remember them when the school people come around saying that they are the only people who know how to teach children, and trying to get you to give them more power over the nation's children than they have already."

Lawsuits

A parent, now teaching her children at home with the school district's approval, told me that the Superintendent seemed to be very nervous about it. I suggested she write him a letter something like this:

Dear Dr.———,

From our recent conversations I get a strong feeling that someone has put in your mind the thought that at some future time, if I and/or my children feel dissatisfied with the results of our home education, we may hold *you* responsible and bring suit against you. I and my children have no such intention and would be willing and happy to say so in writing, in any form you may wish. I gather, however, that this assurance does not altogether relieve your fears. Let me instead point out why, if I and/or my children were to do such a thing, there is no reason whatever to suppose that the courts would award us damages.

In the first place, any court would rule, as a matter of equity and common sense (which are the foundations of the law), that in strongly and repeatedly demanding the right to teach my own children I was assuming the sole responsibility for the results.

In the second place, even in cases where children have suffered severe and obvious educational injury *entirely as a result of things done or not one in the schools*, the courts have refused to award damages to the parents. In one such case in California, a boy of whom the schools had said, all through his school career, that he was doing satisfactory work—and it is worth noting that these schools regularly used standardized tests—turned out at the end of high school to be reading on only a fifth grade level. The parents sued the school system, but the court, as in a similar case on Long Island, refused to award damages, saying that: since there were no generally agreed on ideas as to what things should be done in and by schools, the school system could not be judged negligent and liable for not having done these things.

In another even more flagrant case, a boy was diagnosed as retarded upon entering school, and was so diagnosed throughout his school

career. But when, after leaving school, he tried to get some kind of disability allowance because of his retardation, he was tested again and denied the allowance on the grounds that he was not retarded and that the earlier school diagnosis had been a mistake. He and his parents then sued the school system for having denied him a proper education. But a Court of Appeals in New York State refused to award such damages, saying that it was not the business of the courts to correct or compensate for mistaken educational decisions.

Clearly, if the courts are not willing to award damages against school systems in such cases of obvious school malpractice, they are not going to award damages to parents who insisted on being allowed to teach their own children. To expect any such thing is wildly unrealistic, and if this possibility has been put into your mind by your lawyers, you have been ill advised.

Aside from that, it is not at all clear to me why you believe that you would be protecting yourself against this hypothetical lawsuit by demanding that my children be tested by standardized achievement tests. During this past year we have enjoyed a very friendly and cooperative relationship with you and the schools, one from which our children have benefited a great deal. It would be a shame to put this relationship at risk simply to avoid remote and imaginary legal dangers. Let us instead continue to work together as we have been, in a spirit of mutual confidence and trust. Sincerely, etc.

Private Schools in Ca.

Pat and Joe Tennant in California sent this clipping from their local paper:

It's easier to start a private school than you may think.

Just fill out a one-page form asking for your name, the number and grades of students, plus some other basic information and you're in business.

"It is the responsibility of the local school district to require private schools to keep proper attendance records. That is all," Virginia Sauls, county schools credentials officer, said.

The state has myriad requirements for public school buildings and teachers. Not so for private schools. The state education code says private schools "must be staffed by teachers capable of teaching." The code does not elaborate further.

A space in the affidavit that the private school must file with the county office refers to any county or local ordinances the schools may be subject to. In Tuolumne County, no such ordinances exist.

Mrs. Saul's sends the affidavit on to Sacramento.

The simplicity of the California private school regulations was one reason why Joe and Phyllis Tennant moved to Sonora from Indiana. They have been teaching their children—Doug, 12, and Virginia 13—at home for the last two years. They are a registered private school, called "Lothlorien."

The Tennants have no set schedule for their children. "We don't have a classroom as such. We don't set out to teach them. We respond to what they're interested in at the time," Joe Tennant said. No conventional text books are used by the Tennants, but they use the public library extensively.

"We don't think it's right for everybody. It's right for us. It is a 24-hour a day job. It's a life philosophy. You have to be willing to answer questions whenever they ask them."

County Schools Supt. Orville Millhollin calls the skimpy private schools qualification "a concern I have. There is nobody designated to monitor it. The education code doesn't say it's us. It doesn't say who it should be. There is a statewide movement to bring more accountability into play with the private schools." Such legislation was introduced last year, "but I don't think it will get very far." Millhollin added.

Pat Tennant wrote:

Have been wanting to write for months—just to tell you we are still out here doing it. So when the enclosed article appeared in our local paper, it became the incentive I needed. Had I written earlier I would have just told you that the information we received regarding private schools had apparently been right because we have done it for two years now with no hassles at all. We file our affidavits (the first in San Jose, Santa Clara County, and the second in Sonora, Tuolumne County) in Oct. and other than that we haven't seen or talked to any authorities about what we are doing.

The affidavit states that each school is required to meet local ordinances concerning fire and safety codes but both of the counties we have lived in don't have any ordinances governing private schools.

We are now in contact with and enjoying the friendship of three other families teaching their children at home in this county. All of our four families have different reasons for what we are doing and different ways of doing it but we like sharing ideas, experiences and support.

We are the only family we know who follows your no-school approach. The other families in this letter all have special times and places set aside each day for the study of certain subjects. But we are believers and won't be talked out of what we are doing. We have been using the no-teaching approach long enough to see the results and we feel good about them. I suspect the biggest problem parents have is in shucking off their own socialization. We get only good comments on our children and from people who go out of their way to talk to us about them as well as from those close to us.

We had a really good winter last year because the local college (Columbia College) reaches out to the community and our whole family was able to become involved with the Drama Department. We explored this possibility because our daughter Ginger, 13, is interested in drama. Drama turned out to be an over-all education. We performed in *The Christmas Carol*, *Phantom Tollbooth*, *Under Milk-wood* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. In each case we sewed costumes and built scenery, made props and painted. That plus what we have learned by performing—how can you act a part without an understanding of the customs and the times?—really reached a lot of facets of

learning. I think maybe we planted the seed of home education and your no-school approach in the minds of a lot of people, some of whom still have that part of life ahead of them (college age people). And so many people expressed to us how much they enjoyed our children, what a good spot they seemed to be in, and how many skills they had. Doug, 12, was often in charge of a building project and in charge of props for the performances.

Ginger and Doug started out this summer by writing a book. It is entitled *The Triple Crowns of Power*, a fantasy 132 pages long. Ginger did the actual writing, fantasies being her thing, but Doug collaborated on names for the characters and illustrations and did the typing. It was bound in book form with a cloth cover and Joe and I weren't allowed to read it until was all done. We were impressed upon reading it. Those people who try to convince us that children won't learn unless they are force fed just don't know what they are up against.

Getting Approved

A father in Connecticut writes:

My two older children (10 and 8) are staying out of school this year. They have been released to the joint custody of their mother and me for one year by the local Board of Education. I write this note to thank you for the effective advice of GWS and to share my experience with other parents who might consider unschooling a superior educational opportunity for their children.

Three conclusions stand out from my experience: a proposal which meets the specific requirements of the law is essential; the particular circumstances of the family are very important; and sensitivity to the values and objectives of the Board of Education is very useful.

I found the administrators in our town quite cooperative. The local building principal, after reviewing my initial inquiry and proposal, expressed a favorable, personal response but judged that my requests exceeded both his knowledge and authority. He sent the letter to the superintendent. Because I raised the issue of the legality of unschooling the children, the superintendent sought a reading of the state law from the lawyers retained by the school system. We met to discuss their conclusions. In a subsequent letter to the superintendent, I summarized my understanding of the conversation.

I felt the need of some sense of what the Board would judge more and less important in a proposal. By good fortune, one Board member, an acquaintance of ten years, lived in our neighborhood. She emphasized that since the Board members would probably judge the specific program of my proposal a superior educational opportunity for the children, my primary concern should be to establish that the Board had the power to decide and that, further, by presenting a detailed specification of how my program would meet each specific requirement of the state statutes, the Board would have fulfilled its obligation to that state by examining the proposal and questioning me on any points which required clarification.

Our proposal began with an analysis of the specific schooling requirements of the state laws. We committed ourselves to exceed the minimum requirements of the law (in respect to hours and days) and set against the subjects mandated for instruction our intention to provide Calvert

Home Study materials, showing how the latter satisfied the former. Further, Connecticut law empowers local school boards to impose additional schooling specifications beyond those of the state statutes. The local school board had recently completed a very detailed and extensive set of educational objectives. We balanced against those local objectives the resources we could apply to satisfy them in a rather detailed way.

The evaluation we proposed was to have both children take the annual standardized testing given to children of their grade. This included in 3rd and 5th grades the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, and Math skill and aptitude tests. We also agreed that on condition of the children being accepted into their appropriate grade levels by the Calvert School, we would subscribe to their advisory teaching service to obtain certification that they had completed a year of school work. Our proposal was both detailed and long, and necessarily so to satisfy the requirements of the statutes and to establish that the children would be offered a superior educational opportunity by unschooling.

The favorable response of the Board Members to our proposal was nearly unanimous. The one critic (“My gut reaction is that what you’re proposing is all wrong”) did not vote against our proposal but deferred to the judgment of the Superintendent.

The final point I emphasize is that our justification for unschooling the children did not criticize the schools at all. Our proposal, in fact, accepted the statement of the school board objectives as valuable guidance. This acceptance was not merely necessary or politic; it was appropriate. Our town has been fortunate to be served by a Board of Education composed of bright, practical and dedicated people. Further they have shown themselves willing to accept a novel, well-justified proposal.

This observation leads me to a criticism of *GWS* that I would like to make explicit. *GWS* is scary! People going to prison, children taken away from their parents, endless lawsuits, all because some parents believe their children may be better educated out of school than in it. Maybe America is the repressive, scary place such news suggests; maybe not. If so, perhaps it is changing already because of the kind of level-headed advice *GWS* presents. I know my proposal was much improved by specific suggestions I first read in *GWS*, and it worked. Perhaps it is now possible for your readers to go forward with forethought, caution, and confidence.

Ed. note: We try to report the facts in this field, and sometimes they *are* scary. We think that parents who want to teach their own children should know that doing this may be anything from very easy to very hard.

Children versus Courses

Wendy Priesnitz, who edits the Canadian Alliance of Homeschoolers newsletter, writes:

Heidi (8) and Melanie (6) are refusing to do the correspondence courses. Don't blame them! They certainly keep themselves busy, however. Even I am amazed at how fast and well Heidi has learned to read. And she reads constantly, almost until she starts to do the courses, when she soon is heard to say, "I *hate* reading!" We've said they don't ever have to ever do the course, but they seem to feel an obligation to them because they helped get us approved. So from time to time they go at it, only to remember how boring it is and put it away until they've forgotten again.

Melanie is producing a magazine every week. Calls it *Kids Mag.* and photocopied about six copies. Has had it out on time so far, too. She's now producing the issues ahead of time and releasing them at the proper time. Gave me a Lecture about the theory behind that, too. The masthead proclaims that she is art director and publisher. Heidi is editor—"because she can read"!

Must tell you something Heidi and Melanie had going last night—had a lot of fun with it. Melanie came up to me and said in a gruff voice, "I'm the government and big people have to go to school!"

Heidi said, "Yeah, everyone over 32 years old." (Rolf is 32). She said, "We'll sneak into the government buildings at night and write our own laws on the back of theirs."

Melanie said, "So that we don't waste paper—I'll bet they always use just the front of paper."

This scenario went on to become more and more ridiculous, until Heidi said, "Maybe if the government went to school they'd get to know that kids shouldn't need to go."

A Singing Painter

Louise Andrieshyn (Man.) wrote last year:

When Lisey started tempera painting, and that was not till she was 2½ (because, although the paints were sitting right there on the shelf. I was so swamped with other things I just couldn't put together the energy to do anything extra), she always talked as she painted.

I had to dig out the paintings to check how old she was, and they brought tears to my eyes. That first time, she was so excited about it—painted nine pictures and I wrote down the main things she said of each one: a priceless diary of that adventure. The paintings themselves are lovely, a few spectacular; but it's her comments that moved me. Each one of them recalls for me exactly what kind of a person she was at that age, especially how open and eager she was about new things and how easily and naturally she grew into whole new fields of learning. Like this: (all yellow painting) "Lookit. I made mustard, Mommy. I made some bananas."

Yet, by the second time she painted, two days later, she was doing elaborately detailed "Tratratch" (Sasquatch—sometimes called "Big Foot. ") I mean, her picture was still non-representational, as the terminology goes, but every stroke of her brush *represented something to her*. Here's the comments I recorded, but it appears there was more I didn't get down:

"Another tratratch . . . There's a big slipper. There's another slipper. There's his big goo-gooey eyes. There's a couple eyebrows. There's his big ribbon in his hair—a barrette in his hair. There's a big brown belt for him."

Well, that gives you some idea. That was almost two years ago so you can imagine the running dialogue she puts out now when she paints!

I had vaguely noticed that she had started singing some of her paintings, rather than just talking them. But it was a friend, intrigued by Lisey's painting style, who pointed out to me that L was singing not only in rhythm, but also in perfect *rhymes* and the words even made sense! I've listened a couple times, but haven't had the opportunity to record it. I should *tape* it.

Luckily, the song of this (enclosed) painting had only one verse repeated with variations, so I could remember it: "Down, down, down, around the town, town, town," sung with a decided American twang to "down" and "town." But this is the important part: the song and the painting are one—a

whole. It's not that she sings *while* she paints: she sings *what* she paints. Her brush paintings, and their songs, of course, are about *things*, i.e., what kind of objects she representing on paper. But this finger painting was so different because it was all *process* and the song was about that process—almost the whole time, she was painting around and around, as you can see from the final picture. She didn't start singing those words until she began painting around and around; and this was the only painting of seven in which she painted in circles. I took a photo and will share it with you when I get it.

The ending was perfect: it was about to give her a new paper, which is my sneaky “teacher” way of ending a kid's painting at a point where the end product will look “nice.” (As you no doubt know, when most little kids paint a picture until they're finished with it, it is usually covered solid in one color, or, left in boredom at some unfinished-looking stage because they are more intent on the process of painting than the product.) So, just as I was about to stop her process at a point where one could easily see her “around” painting, she luckily finished it up herself—with a beautiful flourish right across the picture and down, down, down to end at the bottom of the page, as her song ended. A much more expressive, finished painting than I could ever have guided her to do, in my teacherly way which I still find myself indulging in.

What struck me so, later, after having watched this singing painting of L was that it did not happen until *I left her alone*. I had been sitting with her up till then and sat with her again after it, but only when I went away did she start singing—I mean, I was standing watching her, but I was not interrupting her or even there close by where she would be drawn to interact with me—so she could get totally involved in her own creative process—which obviously is how all artists in any medium, create.

Tape Recorders

For a long time I've felt that a tape recorder was a wonderful exploring and learning tool for children. In *What Do I Do Monday?* I talked about some ways of using them, and many parents are using them now. One thing homeschooling families or children might do is exchange tapes with each other. I've been looking for a good inexpensive cassette recorder to recommend to families, and in the latest Radio Shack catalog I see one for \$30 (less during sales, which are frequent). Radio Shack is a huge, nationwide outfit; they have a store in most towns of any size, and the stuff they make has a good reputation. So one of these cassette recorders would probably be a very good buy.

“New Games” Programs

From Ann Bodine (NJ):

GWS readers might be interested in the two and three day training workshops offered by the *New Games Foundation* CPO Box 7901, San Francisco CA 94120; newsletter \$5/yr.) throughout the US. I'll be attending one in October.

Some time ago I decided to try to get involved with the Recreation Dept. and library of my town in the way most people get involved with PTA's. I figured I might be able to influence them to offer programs that would meet some of the needs of unschooled children. The Rec. Dept. not only decided to institute a weekly program of Cooperative Games, but hired me to run it. GWS readers who feel their own Rec. Dept. puts too much emphasis on competitive games might try the same.

From a later letter:

The New Game “course” I talked the rec. dept. into letting me give is much over-enrolled. We've had to add two more sections and hire four teachers besides me. My next project will be to propose a mixed-age (adults & children) New Games program in the early evening. I suggest you look at *The Cooperative Sports & Games Book: Challenge Without Competition* by Terry Orlick, pub, by Pantheon Books.

Bootleg Math—2

Here's another math game that I and my friends used to play in school when we were about eight or so—a game that the teachers had nothing to do with and may not even have known about (See *GWS* #16.) Since this had to be done on paper, and took some time, we had to be careful not to get caught doing it.

We would begin with a piece of paper ruled into squares. Since we didn't have graph paper (sometimes called quadrille paper), we had to measure and rule these squares ourselves. Usually a grid of 10 x 10 squares was big enough for us, though sometimes for more elaborate shapes, we would make a bigger one.

Then on our grid we would make a shape (see Fig. 1), by drawing straight lines from one grid intersection to another, and so on around until our shape was completed. The shape might be a simplified dog, or sailboat, or airplane, or simply a shape. For the “dog” in Fig. 1, we would begin somewhere near the left edge of the grid.



Figure 1

Then we would say, “Go up two squares and two squares over to the right.” That would give us our second point. Then we’d say. “Go down two squares and two squares over to the right.” that would give our third point. Then, “Four squares over to the right.” and so on until the “dog” was finished.

Then came the exciting part of the game. Again we would draw a 10x10 grid, but this time with the squares much bigger or smaller than in the first one. On this new grid we would make a shape, following exactly the same steps we had taken to make our first shape, beginning with our starting point, then going up two squares and two over to the right, and so on until the shape was completed. Then we would compare this new drawing with our first drawing. We were always absolutely astonished to find that our new shape looked exactly like the first one, only a different size. It seemed like a

miracle. We did it over and over again. and every time were just as surprised and delighted to find that our second shape was just like our first one, only smaller, or bigger.

Since we were “spoized” to be working on regular arithmetic, and had to keep our pictures hidden, we couldn’t get a great variation in size. But if the teachers had known about this game, and had wanted to encourage it, we might have been able to copy a shape from little teeny squares to great big ones, even on a sheet of paper big enough to cover a large part of a wall. That *would* have been exciting.

I don’t remember that anyone ever thought of numbering the squares along the bottom and up the left side of our grids, as in Fig. 2 or of using these numbers to locate each one of the points on our drawing. This too would have been exciting for us, the

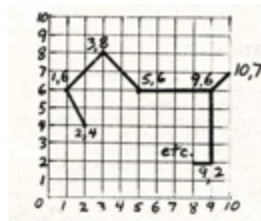


Figure 2

idea that you could make a shape and then tell someone else how to make a shape just like yours by giving him nothing but a bunch of numbers. That would have seemed another miracle. It would also have led us into the basic idea of analytic geometry, graphs of equations, and other interesting ideas that students usually don’t meet until late in high school—too late, when all but a few of them have learned to hate and fear math.

It would also have led easily into the idea of scale drawings, in which a certain distance on the drawing stands for a certain distance in real life: 1 inch = 1foot, or 1 inch = 100 miles, etc. From there we might have gone to architectural plans—I have always thought that many children, once they understood what a plan was, would be interested in the project of making a plan of their own room, or house.

Some families might find it interesting to try out some of these ideas. You can get graph paper of different sizes in stationery stores. For really big copies of shapes you will have to make your own. As always, if you and your children try out any of these ideas, let us know what happens.

Miracle Copies

Something else we used to do at school, hidden behind our books, was to make our own “carbon paper” (we didn’t know the real thing existed) by scribbling in pencil on a piece of paper until it was solid black. Then we’d turn it over and use it to make copies of things. We’d put a clean piece of paper on top, then our homemade carbon paper, then another clean piece of paper. Then we’d draw or write something on the top sheet, pressing down hard on the pencil. Then we’d look at the bottom sheet, and there would be a rather faint copy of whatever we had written or drawn. A miracle! We’d compare the two carefully, and no doubt about it, they would be exactly the same.

I suspect that young children would still be fascinated by the idea of exact copies, two things looking exactly alike, and would be interested in the various ways in which we make exact copies of things. I’ve read about a very inexpensive way of duplicating— spirit hectography?—involving a flat tray of some kind of gelatin. Could probably be done in a kitchen. If any readers know about that, please let me know.

Meanwhile, little children will probably be interested in carbon paper and what they can do with it. But I’d suggest that before giving them store bought carbon paper to work with, you let them make their own. I think they’ll find it more exciting.

Using “On Counting”

A reader writes:

I met a very unusual teacher who is teaching math right now to our CETA group. She has been having trouble getting the subject across particularly to one older fellow but all of us get hung up at times. I showed her your *GWS* article about math (“*On Counting.*” *GWS* #1) and later that afternoon I found her using that principle of tying a number to something and having much more success.

Those Easy Tables

Here's an approach to the multiplication tables that will make them easier and more fun to know, that will make them stick better in memory, that will give something to fall back on when memory is not sure, and that will give some idea how numbers work, and the beauty and harmony in the patterns they make.

I'm not saying that children (or adults) *should* know the multiplication tables, or that their lives will be ruined if they don't. Many happy and successful adults couldn't recite the tables to save themselves. But it's handy to know the tables, and—if we approach them right—they are easy to know, and the patterns they make will be exciting for children to discover. So we might as well make friends with them.

Please note that I said “know” the tables, not “learn” the tables. The best way to know them is *not* to sit down and try to memorize them, one at a time, like words in some strange language, but to become familiar with them, to see how they work, and to use them. After a while we will find that we know them without ever having consciously learned them—just as we know many thousands of words in our native language, without ever having “learned” any of them.

We begin with a 10 x 10 grid, ten rows of squares, and ten squares in each row. Number the rows 1 to 10 down the side, and columns 1 to 10 across the top. Every square in the grid will be in a numbered row and a numbered column.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1										
2			6							
3										
4					20					
5										
6										
7		14								
8										
9										
10										

To fill out the grid you put in each square the product of the number of the row it is in, and the number of the column. The drawing shows the basic grid with a few of these products filled in. For the square in the 2 row and the 3 column, the number we want to put inside is the product 2×3 , or 6. In the

square in the 4 row and the 5 column, we want the product 4×5 , or 20. And so on. If you yourself don't feel at home with the tables, I'd suggest you fill in an entire grid yourself, taking as much time as you want. Use a calculator if you like.

One way to start children working on tables is to start out with an empty grid and have them slowly fill it in. Give them plenty of time to do this—weeks or even months, if need be. The grid might be posted in some convenient place—refrigerator door, etc.—so that as children figure out a new product they can put it in its proper square. But there's no rush. What will probably happen is what we hope will happen—the children will probably first fill in the 1 and 2 rows and columns, and then the 5 rows and columns, and the 10 rows and columns. They will think of these products as being “easy.” Perfect! When they think of a product as being easy they *already* know it, probably so securely that they will never forget it.

Suppose, in filling out these squares, a child makes a mistake. Please don't correct it; leave it alone. As the child gets more familiar with the tables and the patterns they make, s/he will see that one of the numbers looks wrong, doesn't seem to fit, causes contradictions—just as children teaching themselves to read see these kinds of contradictions when they read a word wrong. What is far more important than knowing the tables as such is that children should feel that numbers behave in orderly and sensible ways. Children who feel this, when they do make a mistake, can usually say, “Wait a minute, that doesn't make sense,” and find and correct the mistake.

At any rate, at some point the child will put all the products in the grid. If the grid is on a door or in some visible place, filling in the last square will be quite exciting. There might even be a little ceremony.

Of course, if there is a calculator around and the child knows how to use it, s/he will be able to fill in the grid very quickly by using the calculator. Fine. Even in filling out the grid this way the child will begin to notice some of the patterns. And the game will then become, how much of the grid can I fill out without using the calculator. Please don't ask “How much can you remember?” Most or what children know, they don't “remember,” that is, they aren't conscious of remembering, and if we start them worrying about what they can remember and what they can't, we will simply make more and more of their knowledge unavailable to them.

Without wanting to turn these suggestions into exact rules, I'd suggest that

when the first grid has been filled out, correctly or incorrectly, you take it down from its public place and put up a new blank grid. The child will fill this out more quickly than it did the first one. More products will seem easy than the first time. If mistakes were made the first time, some or all of them will be noticed and corrected. But even if the same mistake keeps turning up, don't worry. Sooner or later the child will catch and correct it.

Some variations of the grid filling game. (1) When children can fill in an entire grid in, say, less than five minutes, let them do it against the clock and see how long it takes. Next time, see if they can do it a little faster—children like breaking their own “records.” (2) See how many products the child can fill in, in a given time, say one or two minutes. The child will stay away from the “hard” products, will race through the products that are already easy, and will spend most time thinking about those products that used to be hard and that are now beginning to be easy. One day a child will have to think a few seconds to figure out that $5 \times 6 = 30$. A few days later, the child will know it, that product will have become easy, and it will move to other semi-hard products, which will in their turn become easy, until one day *all* are easy. (3) Try filling out the grid backwards, i.e. beginning with the lower right hand corner, going up each column and left along each row. Children doing this will see new patterns they hadn't noticed—as you go up the nines column the last digit goes up 1 each time, and so on. (4) Make a grid with the columns and rows numbered randomly, and see how long it takes to fill that out. (This is harder.)

More about these patterns in the next issue.

Tutor in The Tropics

A friend and GWS reader, presently a staff member of the New Alchemists, told us that he has been invited by a wealthy family on a tropical island to tutor their twelve year old son for the next year or two. He asked me about curriculum materials. I wrote:

Nice to get your letter with the exciting news. I had heard of those islands—from all I hear, very beautiful. Many exotic life forms, plants, birds, etc., not found elsewhere, a fascinating ecological niche that would be particularly interesting to a New Alchemist.

Since this young person lives in one of the most unusual biological places in the world, it would be foolish not to make that habitat and its special life forms a central part of your study. You should make it an important part of *your* business to learn as much as you can about this place, and have him learn with you.

I think it would be a very good idea to write this boy a letter, quite a long one, telling him something about yourself, your work, your interests, and your particular interests in the islands, and ask him to write you back telling you something about himself and his life and interests. The point is that you have as much to learn about this boy's world as he has to learn about yours. In teaching you, he will learn a great deal himself.

Given your interest in worms, and by extension, other critters that feed on wastes, you might make an inventory of local creatures that could perform such a function.

You should tell this boy something of the work of the New Alchemists. Part of your work should be considering what a New Alchemist project on the islands might do. From their location I would guess that they are very windy, and also, that they have to pay a lot for electricity. Maybe you could do a study of wind-power possibility on the islands.

I know that some of the island people are very worried about preserving the natural beauty, flora, fauna, etc., against the invasions of tourism. You might make it a part of your work there to get to know some of these people and find out what they are doing. The boy could be your associate in this.

The thread that is running all through these suggestions of mine is that this boy will learn best and most if his learning grows out of being associated

with you in *serious adult work*, not just school stuff. In all of these projects that I have suggested there is plenty of mathematics, physics, etc., etc. But it will be better if it is all rooted in some kind of serious reality.

I don't know where to find any books on this. You ought to be *writing* a book. You are going to have a unique experience, and you should write about it. Maybe this could be another project that the boy and you could work on jointly—some sort of mutual description of your work together.

Driving

From an article by Becky Cramer in Manas:

I've found that one great unsettling factor in our lives is the need to drive our children everywhere. How can they feel the world responds to them in predictable ways while being chauffeured to all the important places in their lives, unable when small even to see out along the way? I try to at least point out landmarks, draw picture maps of the route, and even discuss the operation of the car, to demystify the very physical task of getting us to where we are going. Walking is so much better, seeing clearly what you pass, sensing the energy needed to cover the distance, remembering the route afterward and happily anticipating it when you do it again—and joyfully finding that all those things you passed are there again, right where you thought they would be!

Children in Church

From Barbara Lafferty (NJ):

We have been attending the Sacred Heart Church in Camden, which actually welcomes children at Mass and recognizes how important and necessary they are. Kids aren't looked upon as a distraction but a welcome and encouraged addition. It's beautiful! Last Sunday our 4, 5, and 10 year olds decided that they wanted to sit in the front row right next to the center aisle—we sat about seven rows back. I wish you could have seen their attentiveness is even though the temperature was 100° as the Church has no air conditioning. The Saturday before that, we attended the Walt Whitman International Poetry Center's Annual Festival—beautiful readings by Daniel Berrigan—and there was a husband/wife team of puppeteers there. The kids had a tremendous time playing in the park with them. During Mass the puppeteers came in and sat directly across the aisle from our kids. Needless to say, they were really thrilled. After Mass we always gather in the church basement and have coffee or juice and cake. They were with the puppeteers the entire time. As learning cannot be separated from living, we want our kids to know that God cannot be separated from everyday living—not just a Sunday thing.

A Religious Homeschool

The Louisville. KY, Times. 6/6/80:

School starts early and quietly in the Thiels' simple cabin in south-central Kentucky near Bowling Green. The day begins with meditation, spiritual chants, and scripture readings. The family sings thanksgiving for the day. Then Shanti Thiel, the lone full-time student, begins her math lesson. Even before breakfast, she is learning decimals and toiling over fractions.

Her teacher, her mother Nancy Thiel, is nearby. Throughout the morning, she will guide her pupil in history, reading, and grammar, social studies, geography, and science. There are short breaks for laughter or meditation.

But Mrs. Thiel follows a careful curriculum. She and her husband, Raymond, depend on their own knowledge, the family's library of several thousand books, a new set of encyclopedias, and dozens of textbooks.

Apparently they're doing something right. Shanti, 9 years old, should be in the fourth grade. But her skills, according to tests given by the Bowling Green school system, are far above her age group. Her skills compare favorably with those of an eighth grader in the third month of school.

The Kentucky Department of Education says she and her parents are breaking the law. Now the matter is in court, and a decision is expected soon.

"We have our own private school," says Thiel. "It's a parochial school ... like the Catholics'. But it's little." Shanti is the only full-time student, although a younger brother receives some instruction.

Their religion is not a known quantity like Catholicism. The Thiels have a self-styled religion they call Manchu Buddhism, which they have practiced for 10 years. It is a combination of Hindu, Zen Buddhism, and Christian beliefs. They believe in the power of

meditation to direct their lives. They practice the breathing and stretching exercises of yoga. They have taken vows of poverty. They are pacifists. They do not eat meat. They do not smoke, drink alcohol or caffeine beverages. They do not own a television because they believe it glorifies greed, violence, and sex abuse.

Their spiritual beliefs are woven into their day. Meditation for a Thiel child begins early. Shanti began meditating when she was 4.

And their religion, likewise, is woven throughout the Manchu Buddhist School. In history class, for example, war heroes are not glorified, Thiel says. Instead, Shanti studies about people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, and Mother Teresa. Math word problems might be taken from the Bible. And through the day there are periods of meditation, chanting, and scripture reading.

Raymond and Nancy Thiel plan the same daily pattern for their two boys, Rahman, 4, and Bodhi, 6 months. “We’re trying to live a life that mixes religious values with education,” says Thiel. “We’re conscientiously opposed to public schools. There is no alternative to teaching her at home.”

Thiel told Judge Gordon Johnson at a hearing April 11, “No public school or private sectarian Christian schools are capable of nurturing Shanti’s integrated religious academic education in harmony with our religious beliefs. These are our children’s formative years, in which a strong religious base must be established from which they can then relate to the world with a religious understanding not commonly found in this culture.”

The Thiels are basing their case on the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees religious freedom, and on the Fifth Section of the State of Kentucky Constitution.

Dealing From Strength

A reader writes:

I was able to enroll my kids in a private school which provides a completely individualized educational plan for each child, but before choosing an alternative to the public school I did many things.

I began by seeing how many concessions I could get from public school permitting MY control over what my youngest child learned. These were informal concessions granted by teachers and supervisors. I got quite a few of them. All concessions were withdrawn, however, when I tried to extend them to my older girl also.

I watched the school district closely and found out what they are doing that violates state law or board policy. I made them obey the law on one issue, just to show them that I could see an issue through to victory and make change happen. The fact that the issue I chose didn't really directly concern me or my kids at all established me as an unpredictable maniac. I attended every school board meeting for a year, taping all meetings and saying very little.

I used the Freedom of Information law to get copies of applications for funding for Title I and Special Ed. I compared what they said they would do with the money to what they actually put on as a program.

I found out what the weakest spots in the school's educational programs were. I compared them with what the *latest* experts are saying is the way it should be done.

I documented all the ways in which the school was failing my children. I determined what special individualized needs my children had, and what problems they had that the school was not helping to solve. I cited state and federal law and school policy that said the school should be meeting these needs and problems.

I put this all together in writing. I could show that I knew what the educational needs of my children were, and that the school was not meeting those needs; not fulfilling its legal obligations.

I prepared my specific requests concerning changes I believed were necessary for my children's education and started taking these requests up the succession of appeals. I told them every step of the way that I was prepared

to go from teacher to principal to superintendent to school board to state board, and even to court, because I meant business. Each step of the way I kept tape-recorded records of conferences, copies of correspondence, and avoided phone calls.

It helps to know the due process procedures associated with state and federal special ed laws and development of IEPs (Individualized Educational Plans). Any state department of education will have them in writing.

Here I must stop to explain. The schools claim the ability and the practically exclusive RIGHT to cure all educational ills, but they are often reluctant to provide an- appropriate program. Yet, the school has not FAILED to provide an appropriate individualized educational program until I have asked for one and they have refused. If, for example, the parents of a kindergartener who is reading at fifth grade level ask the school to have their educational examiner test the child for giftedness, and the school refuses to do this, the fact of the refusal could be very important.

All of my requests were refused as far as appeal to the superintendent. The next appeal would have “gone public”—school board meetings get good news coverage. I was and still am prepared to continue up the chain of appeals, and I think we were at the point when the school would have suffered some public embarrassment, but I had become absolutely confident that the most positive step I could take would be to choose an alternative to public school for my children. My accomplishment was that I knew just exactly what I was getting my kids out of, and I was very confident in the rightness of getting them out.

I was fortunate to find an acceptable private school arrangement, but what if I hadn’t? What if I had no choice but to unschool and risk prosecution and possible forced return of my kids to public school? In that case, I would have taken the risk, because I believe the school district would have to risk some loss themselves. I was prepared to demand (1) exercise of my parental right to exempt my children from objectionable curriculum (in this case, their demonstrably rotten reading program), (2) testing by an educational examiner—\$\$, and (3) a gifted IEP *which I approved of* (due process requirement), \$\$\$\$. Any time my children should return to the public school I would simply continue where I left off in the chain of appeals, seeking answers to these issues. Would the school district want to risk having a judge decide for them? Is any school district willing to risk having to provide a special program they

don't want to provide, or facing a lawsuit to settle an issue, or exposure of their illegal dealings?

When parents carry an issue properly through the chain of appeals established by the school and department of education, this is referred to in court as exhausting administrative remedies. I think it is important for parents to know that judges have thrown cases back into the laps of local and state boards of education for failure to exhaust administrative remedies, so parents should regard their confrontations with administrators as important and worthy of good record-keeping. One example:

Me: In fourteen weeks of school my daughter did not learn one single new thing in any subject.

Superintendent: I'll take exception to that. Anytime your daughter is in school, we're teaching her something.

Me: Not anything she doesn't already know.

Supt: THAT'S BESIDE THE POINT! Anytime she's THERE we're teaching her SOMETHING.

My husband: Yeah. How to sit quietly.

I think the superintendent meant that if my daughter is there and teacher is there, then everybody had fulfilled the legal requirement. That's like if we had compulsory TV viewing, it wouldn't matter that the program was the 15th rerun of *Gilligan's Island* as long as we were watching and they were putting something on the screen.

The one indicator I had of my effectiveness was tape-recorded at a noon luncheon of the school board:

Chairman: I wish I knew that much law.

Board member who is an attorney: (laughing) So do I! Well, she wrote a damn good brief; better than most lawyers, as a matter of fact. I put it in my briefcase so I could use it on FOI. Oh, she can do a good job. I'm TIRED of her!

Anybody can find the law in their public library, courthouse library, or nearest university law library. Every school district has a policy manual, school board minutes of meetings, etc., all required by law to be open to public inspection.

It seems this year a child only attended school 23 days. The principal wanted to retain the child (not let him go on the next grade). The parents objected. The school checked with the attorney general. He said they could

not *legally* retain the child simply because of poor attendance. The child was allowed to go on to the next grade. I will try to find out the legal reasoning on this.

How to find out how many compulsory attendance violators have been referred to the county prosecuting attorney's office: Go there and explain that the school had threatened to refer you. Secretary will haul out the stack of referrals and shuffle through. While she shuffles, you count.

G.E.D. in PA

More from the mother in PA:

The *Penna. Code*, Title 22, “Education,” Chapter 5, “General Curriculum Requirements.” Section 5.81. “Requirements for secondary school diplomas,” states:

The Commonwealth secondary school diploma may be issued to an applicant who is a resident of this Commonwealth and who meets the following requirements:

(1) a passing score as determined by the Department on the high school level Tests of General Educational Development (GED); or

(2) presentation of evidence of full matriculation and the satisfactory completion of a minimum of one full year or 30 semester hours in an accredited college.

Looking carefully at (1), and looking at bookstores in the area, we found there are preparatory booklets available to prime oneself on the GED tests.

My oldest son will be in 7th grade next year, so since my teaching certificate covers only K- 6, I will be at the mercy of the superintendent of schools in our areas, as to whether I can teach him here again next year.

Section 5.82, “Restrictions.” says: “The Department will not issue a diploma until after the class of which the applicant was a member has been graduated.”

In other words, the *only* restriction is that my son would not have a diploma in hand until his grade reached graduation. (I would insist on a letter or certificate of some kind to show that he passed the test.)

There is no restriction on age (Ed—this is not true in all states). After passing the test, there will *legally* be no more schooling required, and my son will be able to pursue education the way it should be, by living!

Along with *The Complete Guide To Taking Tests*, and the GED workbooks at our local bookstore, we will begin this summer teaching him all the basics for the GED test. When he is ready, we will request a test for him.

This is not the ideal situation for learning, and I love the reports in GWS

about those families who have dropped out and are really letting their little ones experience life and learning as it should be.

But our consciences won't allow us to have authorities breathing down our necks because of this point or that. We want *out*. All the way—free, clear, and legal, and with the law and the opposition to unschooling right now, we feel this is one way to get through it.

If our oldest son passes, we will diligently work with our younger son (5th grade) so that by junior high, he will also be ready to be tested.

Preparing For The G.E.D.

The current catalog of McGraw-Hill Paperbacks (1121 Ave. of the Americas, New York NY 10020) lists *How to Prepare for the NEW High School Equivalency Examination (GED)*, \$5.95. The book is divided into the five major areas covered by the GED Exam, and includes a pre-test and a post-test.

McGraw-Hill also publishes five GED in-depth study books, each with many hundreds of questions, and each with its own pre- and post-test. These are *The Mathematics Test*, *The Writing Skills Test*, *The Reading Skills Test*, *The Social Studies Test*, and *The Science Test*, each \$4.95.

Homeschooling parents might find these useful in many ways. They could use them to reassure themselves, and if need be the local schools, or perhaps even a college, that their children were learning or had learned enough of the material ordinarily covered in high school. If these children were younger than most high school seniors, but could still easily pass these sample tests, this would be a convincing argument for letting them learn at home. And if the schools pushed matters to the courts, few judges would hold that these children were being “neglected” or “abused.”

If you use any of these books, either as a way of feeling more secure or of getting the schools to leave you alone, please let us know the results. I would particularly like to know whether any people who used these books and later actually *took* the GED Exam felt that these books prepared them well for it. And I would also like to know whether homeschooled children of less than high school age, say 10-12 years old, and found these books or tests easy or difficult.

VA. Statements

From David and Carol Kent ("Owning a Press," GWS #15):

Re: the Sept.16th Subcommittee hearing on homeschooling legislation in Virginia (see "Va. Legislative Study," GWS #16) We are sending you copies of our statements, which we are sending directly to each of the six subcommittee members, as well as to homeschoolers in Virginia.

Carol's statement:

I am a resident of the State of Virginia and a registered voter. I wish to record my opinion in favor of the compulsory school attendance law presently in force in the State of Virginia. The present attitude of the Virginia government with respect to alternative education is an exemplary one. It enables the parents responsible for the education of children in the State of Virginia to pursue whatever educational avenues they feel will best ensure the superior education of their offspring. The residents of very few states enjoy such a benevolent educational atmosphere.

The following are arguments presented for amending the present statute, which I would like to answer.

1. Parents cannot prepare their children adequately for life in today's complex world. My answer: There are no available statistics or other evidence to show that public schools prepare children for life.

2. Children deprived of such credentials as diplomas and transcripts are unemployable. My answer: Various tests have been devised and are currently available to the public which enable anyone to show his or her educational level. Institutions of higher learning readily accept students on the basis of test scores alone in the absence of previous school records.

3. Homeschooled children make compulsory attendance unenforceable. My answer: It is anyway. At some time every school district confronts the known incorrigible truant, whom it ultimately ignores in the interest of economy or convenience.

4. School districts need high attendance for state aid. My answer: High attendance can only enrich the school system which devises a method of spending less money per child the more children are enrolled. The result must be that the largest school systems will provide the least satisfactory education

for all but the brightest students.

Newspaper articles concerning the present compulsory school attendance law hearings make clear that the real reason for these hearings is not concern for potentially neglected children under the present law, but *rather a resentful vendetta on the part of Norfolk school administrators who were frustrated in their attempt to force one family to participate in public education* (Emphasis added.) I hope the legislators will realize that by writing laws to discourage homeschooling and other educational alternatives they will not eradicate this practice, but will merely force otherwise law-abiding parents to break the law and deprive them of the expert outside help they might otherwise seek. The present law is uniformly beneficial: it enables the school districts to conscript children not otherwise being taught, while simultaneously sheltering those whose parents desire to exercise their right to supervise their children's education. I therefore urge the legislators to decide in favor of continuing the present law.

David's statement:

I am a resident of the state of Virginia and a registered voter. As a parent of young children, I present the following statement.

This Joint Subcommittee of the House Education Committee and the Senate Education and Health Committee is charged with preparing a report to be presented to the 1981 General Assembly. At issue is whether Section 22-275 of the state Code should be altered so as to introduce the subject of "homeschooling" into the Code.

A primary question to be asked is this: To whom would such legislation apply? According to an article appearing on pp.1 and 4 of the July 19, 1980, issue of the *Newport News Times-Herald*, one of this Subcommittee's "legislative aide(s) said, "the committee would love to hear from (parents now teaching their children at home). We just don't know any.'" If the Subcommittee knows of no parents in Virginia who are teaching their children at home, then *why such legislation?* In fact, there are about one dozen couples in the state who admit they're teaching their children at home. If legislation is passed which is aimed at possibly 25 children in the state, that legislation comes perilously close to constituting *ad hominem* law. (Ed.— what the US Constitution calls a "bill of attainder," and specifically forbids.) Punitive law, as well, if one considers the considerable expense imposed on

any or all of the parents of these children by the necessity of challenging such legislation in the courts. Sen. Stanley Walker asks the question, “If everybody started teaching their children at home, what would that mean?” A Republican might tell Senator Walker that legislation drafted to control a theoretical condition which might or might not prove dangerous to social welfare, is supererogatory legislation. There is no damage now being done to society requiring legislative remedy, by the handful of parents who wish to exercise their constitutional right to educate their own children.

As I am sure you are aware, in 1965 the Supreme Court stated that “the right to educate one’s children as one chooses is made applicable to the States by the First and Fourteenth Amendments.” The legal right is clear enough. That any parents at all are prepared to invest so heavily in time and effort to rear their children by themselves, is remarkable. Yet these few do, and the state should not attempt to hinder such parents. It should be apparent that a father or mother who will spend a large part of his or her time with a child, one-to-one, will have a better result than the group system of the public school; and I can show, if you wish, that this does happen. It is for this reason that the Supreme Court noted in 1972 that “this primary role of the parents in the upbringing of their children is now established beyond debate as an enduring American tradition.”

Delegate Howard Copeland, *at the behest of the Norfolk city government and school division*, proposed the creation of this Subcommittee, with a view to seeking amendment of Section 22-275. This resulted from a decision handed down in the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court of the City of Norfolk in 1979 (*Commonwealth of Va. vs. Theo and Daniel Giesy*—see GWS #11), in which Judge Martin stated in relation to private schools, “The law provides no guidance—no definition, no delineation of institutional parameters, no prescription as to faculty, students, curriculum or accreditation—nothing whatsoever.” Senator Walker says the Subcommittee will seek testimony to see “If there’s a loophole that we ought to look at.” Certainly, the Norfolk school division has construed the decision in terms of “loophole” legislative crisis. I call on the Subcommittee to examine the motive behind this absurd and incorrect construction, which would cause a good deal of harm to the parents in this state who wish to take the responsibility on their own shoulders for educating their own children. Members should read the entire decision, in which Judge Martin states further, in relation to private

schools, “The legislative wall all of silence is *not deemed to be accident or oversight, but rather an eloquent expression of formal state policy.*” It is indeed a credit to earlier legislators of the state Virginia that Section 22-275 was drafted in such a way as would secure educational responsibilities to those parents who choose not to turn the education of their children over to the state.

I would remind you that Section 22-275.1 spells out three options available to parents: (1) “a public school”; (2) “a private, denominational or parochial school”; (3) “a tutor or teacher of (State Board prescribed) qualifications.” The second option makes quite clear that the educational responsibility can be turned over to a religious body, with no provision given for control of standard or achievement, in the case of parochial or denominational schools. To assert that any sort of oversight, or supervision, or qualification, of a “private” school (by elimination, nonsectarian and independent from state control) is intended or implied simply violates the clear sense of this provision, which is to allow two, or four, or a dozen parents to educate their children as they see fit.

I believe the correct historical, legal, and ethical position is clear enough, with regard to private schooling.

I believe the Subcommittee is not actively seeking proofs of the ability of “average” parents to bring their children up to be capable and useful members of society. It should be obvious that any parent who cares to make such an effort will not produce a delinquent, asocial, or incompetent citizen as a result.

The Subcommittee’s legislative aides have prepared a memorandum which contains a number of options, and I should like to address these options.

1) “Doing nothing.” This is precisely the course to follow. I realize that it may be difficult for the members to make this recommendation, but I have explained at length why the tradition of personal freedom and initiative, so strong for many generations in the Old Dominion and which places Virginia in the lead of perhaps all the states, should not be abridged by imposing educational patterns which are foreign to the ways in which many families in the state wish to have their children reared.

2) “Amending state law to define “homeschooling” and setting standards for instruction.” This is simply to combine the second and third options of

Section 22-275.1. Once more, this imposes a statewide pattern of conformity, deadening the variety of educational options, such as apprenticeship or flexible schedule programs—a pattern “protecting” us from a societal problem which is not there, and bringing in eventual dullness to our citizenry.

3) “Banning homeschools supervised by parents”; “Mandating all education in formally defined schools”; “Mandating education for parent-tutors, specifying hours and days of school.” I am sorry, but this is not the Kremlin. My wife has her Phi Beta Kappa, also is certified from the University of Heidelberg. I myself have over twenty years of formal education in American schools. Yet neither of us finds the conventional patterns of education desirable for our children whom we bring up as we see fit. The work by which I support my family I learned entirely in on-the-job self-teaching. My education was not helpful in the slightest, when it came to the practical matter of supporting myself and family. I am frankly not interested in attending any sort of school to learn how to educate groups of children, nor would that help with my own children, for whose welfare my wife and I feel solely responsible. That they will grow up to be highly valuable members of society will be a by-product of our efforts, and with those efforts the state should in no way interfere.

4) “Requiring local school superintendents to approve study curriculums, or requiring local school systems to test homeschooled children periodically.” If you don’t mind my drawing the analogy, one would as soon have one’s marital relations monitored. The only ultimately valid test of the personal affair of education is whether a child becomes a charge on society. The interests of society can demand no more than that the child does not, and no homeschooled child will ever become such a societal charge. The diploma argument is a fallacious one, and requires no comment. The parental abuse argument is covered by abuse and neglect statutes now in force.

5) “Administrative problems.” Finally, this. If students are withdrawn from the public schools, “homeschooling could have a serious budget impact on schools,” from the decrease in state aid. Can this argument be a serious one? If there are fewer students in a school, that school needs less state aid to provide the same service per student enrolled.

I realize that I have given the compelling reasons for maintaining the Virginia State Code as it now is with regard to Section 22-275, rather than explaining to you why the “homeschooling” of my and other children is so

important to us. The freedom we presently enjoy in rearing our children ourselves is a very satisfying thing. My wife and I both descend from families who lived in Virginia long before the Revolution, and we are fully aware of and prize the rights and personal privileges secured to us by the Constitution and thoughtful legislators of this state. It is for that reason that we take most particular interest when a school committee or board from some part of the state attempts to introduce legislation which would in any way and to any degree constrict or abridge any of those hard won rights and privileges. “Homeschooling” is our right and our privilege—and, we believe, our responsibility—and we accordingly call on you as members of the Subcommittee to endorse and support the law of the state of Virginia as it now stands.

Letter to Official

An unschooler, after discussing home education with officials of the state Department of Education, wrote to the head of the department, saying in part:

It seemed from your questions at the meeting that the Department of Education is concerned with fitting Homeschooling into some classification. This would make it easier, apparently, to answer questions such as the ones you raised in your recent memo about finances, graduation requirements, criteria for approval, etc.

Some suggestions for classification were (1) consider homeschooling as an off-premise extension of the local public school. This would make the schools happy because they could receive state money for the child. (2) Consider these families to be mini-private schools. (3) Create a new category. (4) Consider homeschooling to be a viable option and do nothing more.

As I mentioned at the meeting, we don't want to see the state take any action to classify or categorize us, since this would inevitably mean we would fall under inappropriate rules and regulations. Homeschoolers already are classified under the compulsory act. The wording of the compulsory act—stating that a child could receive “equivalent instruction elsewhere than at school” clearly is meant to allow a variety of situations. The act recognizes that every possibility can't be anticipated and spelled out, and makes allowances for that fact. We are simply “elsewhere.”

This is the only category that is broad enough to cover the many different philosophies and approaches in homeschooling, and it doesn't have to be created, it already exists in the law.

We would like to see the department satisfy their curiosity about our activities *so that it can decide to leave us alone—and then advise the public schools that they should do the same*. Homeschoolers would like to exercise their right to teach their children without being intimidated or harassed by their school officials, which they too often have to endure now. I'll come back to this point later.

I think that categorizing homeschoolers as part of the public school system would be a particularly serious mistake. Homeschooling parents choose this alternative because they disagree with public schools on some issues. (The

issues vary with each family.) These differences of opinion would be aggravated by placing homeschooling under the jurisdiction of the public schools.

The schools tend to want to set guidelines for homeschooling situations. If they were given the authority to do this they would be almost sure to consider some of the following: families must observe public school hours or the public school calendar, must use only approved textbooks or approved correspondence courses, must have a certified teacher do the instruction, must have parent instructors tested to prove competence, welfare workers must pay periodic visits, principals may visit the home “classroom,” children must take the standardized tests given to public school children at the end of the year.

These demands have all been made of parents in this state at one time or another, although there is nothing in the law which says the schools can demand any of them. Each of the above represents some aspect of schooling which homeschoolers dislike. Requiring any or all of them as conditions for approval would result in many, many court cases. I myself would go to court rather than accept any one of them.

Only the firmest, most determined parents have negotiated with their school boards long enough to get approval. Others have been intimidated by the reactions of their school officials and have backed off. Many times the problems seem to stem from the school officials telling parents flatly that homeschooling is illegal, before they check on the facts. When the school attorney tells them that it is legal, they seem to settle on giving the parents a hard time about details, apparently to “save face.” This seems to me a shabby situation, when people are bullied out of doing something which it is their legal right to do.

The private school system in this state seems to enjoy the kind of respect for individuality and parents’ rights that homeschooling parents want. Parents who choose, and can afford, private schools are allowed by the state to put their children in a school with different hours, texts, philosophies, and requirements than public school. They are allowed to choose schools where there is no testing and there are no certified teachers. A private school doesn’t have to satisfy any requirements of the state or of the local public schools. It must only satisfy the parent who sends his child there. So parents are, in effect, already in charge of their children’s education when they remove them

from public school to put them in a private school of their choice. It seems no different to me to let the parents be totally in charge, with the same freedom from restrictions that the private schools enjoy. If parents are allowed to have uncertified strangers teach their children in this unsupervised (by the state) manner, they should certainly be allowed to do it themselves.

I was surprised to see you list under unanswered questions “What are the legal and constitutional rights of a parent to withdraw a child from school?” it seems to me that this question has been quite firmly answered by many court decisions. . . . I can provide more information about these at another time if you are interested.

We feel we’re an important part of the education picture in this state right now and a vital source of information for schools and communities of the future. The Department of Education could do us, and education, a valuable service by acknowledging our contributions and supporting our rights, loud and clear.

List Of Magazines

Mark Satin, author of New Age Politics (Delta, 1979), which has good things to say about homeschooling and GWS, has sent an announcement that may be of interest to GWS readers who are involved with organizations, publications, etc.:

I have prepared a mailing list of more than 750 alternative, New Age, citizen, and transformation oriented periodicals. . . . Each address is being checked with each periodical. I will be selling this list on self-sticking address labels, in zip code order, for \$35. Checks to Mark Satin, P.O. Box 3262, Winchester VA 22601.

GWS in Bookstores

Until now we have not tried to do anything about having single copies of *GWS* sold in bookstores and newsstands. As much as I liked *GWS*, I didn't think that many people would be willing to buy it at the cover price we would have to charge in order to be fair to our subscribers—\$2 an issue now, more after the end of the year.

But as more and more interesting material has come in about home-based education (maybe we should say “life-based education”) the magazine has grown big enough so that I think at least some bookstores and newsstands might be willing to carry it at the above prices. Since issue #15, *GWS* has had 20 pages, or about 36,000 words, half the size of most books now sold for \$10 in cloth and \$5 in quality paperback. And it looks as if later issues will be even bigger.

In short, I think *GWS* has become large enough so that at least a certain number of bookstores, newsstands, health food stores, etc. may be willing to carry it, and able to sell it. We would sell copies to bookstores, etc., at half price, paid in advance.

If you know of any bookstores, newsstands, health food stores, etc., in your area that you think might be willing to carry *GWS*, would you show them some of our recent issues (from #15 on) and ask them. This might prove to be a great help to us. Thanks so much, and please let us know what kind of response you get.

On-Demand Books

There are many books that I like and believe in very much and think that many of our readers will find interesting and helpful. Most of these we simply add to our list, hoping (as usually happens!) that enough readers will find them worth buying to make it worth our while to stock them.

But there are some books that, because of their cost, or slightly unusual subject, we don't quite dare add to our regular list unless and until we know that at least a certain number of readers want to buy them. We don't want to get stuck with quantities of books that no one wants.

We are going to call these On-Demand Books, and from now on, along with our reviews of books that we have added to our list, we will also review some on-demand books. If you would like to buy one or more of these from us, let us know. If enough people tell us they want to buy a given book, we will add it to our list and announce that in the next GWS.

If you are particularly eager to get one of these books, and would like to know as soon as it becomes available, please send us a self-addressed return postcard saying "(Name of Book) is now available for order." If we add the book to our list, we will mail your card as soon as the books arrive, and you can send in your order right away. Please send a separate return card for each book you want to know about. And please don't send any money until we say that the book is available.

Here is our first on-demand book:

The Toothpaste Millionaire, by Jean Merrill (89 pages, \$7.25 post). This delightful story is in many ways exactly the kind of book I have hoped to find. First of all, it is set in a modern city. Most children's books I have read with a background of "real life" I have not liked much. They are real enough, but there is nothing in them but reality—kids worrying about being fat, being timid, being popular in school, etc. Many children apparently like them—they sell well, anyway—but I can't get excited about them. There is nothing in them of hope or vision or romance or exciting possibilities. There are plenty of people to "identify with," but none to admire. Not so *The Toothpaste Millionaire*. Like *National Velvet*, this is a modern fairy tale—without the fairies. We want to believe, and (while we're reading, at least) do believe that it might really happen.

In the second place, this book is in large part about the economics of financing, starting, running, and expanding a small business. It is full of useful information—what many economic terms mean, what kinds of problems business people have to solve, what sort of ethical questions they have to deal with. The book not only answers a lot of little questions, it raises some big ones.

The teller of the story, and one of the two central figures, is Kate MacKinstrey, about twelve. Her family has just moved from the Connecticut suburbs to East Cleveland. There she meets Rufus Mayflower, also twelve, black, energetic, resourceful, and competent, the hero of the book—and a very likeable and believable one. One day Rufus refuses to pay 79c for a tube of toothpaste which, he figures, could only have cost a penny or two to make. He gets the idea of making toothpaste himself and selling it at a fairer price. And so the story begins.

Many children's books are written these days to preach various kinds of sermons about equality between races, sexes, etc. Most of the ones I have seen, *judged as books* (which is what counts), are terrible. This book has some of those sermons, but the story is so well told, and the people and their talk so lifelike and lively, that we don't mind. In fact, we hardly notice—the story sweeps us along. It really is great fun, and I think GWS readers, young and old, will enjoy it as much as I do. I certainly am going to look into Jean Merrill's other books—if they are anything like this, we have many treats in store.

Drawing Book

Drawing On The Right Side Of The Brain, by Betty Edwards (\$8.00 + post). When I was about six or seven I used to draw yachts and ocean liners with huge funnels and hundreds of tiny portholes, but from the age of eight on I never drew any more or thought I could. Until I read this book, I thought (like many people) that to be able to draw things, and above all people, so that they looked real, was a mysterious talent that a few were born with and that the rest of us did not have and never could get. People who could draw well seemed to me almost superhuman. In this book Betty Edwards, who teaches drawing at Cal. State U. at Long Beach, completely convinces me that anyone who will spend a little time and thought on it can learn in a *couple of months* to draw well, including life-like portraits. Not only does she convince me that it can be done, but she shows how to do it. She also shows some absolutely astonishing before/after drawings done by her students, who began drawing even less well than I do and were able in a month or two to draw portraits that look like the work of skilled artists.

Over the years I have looked at many books about how to learn to draw, hoping to find one that would explain the mystery. None of them gave me the slightest feeling that I could learn to draw well, no matter how much time I spent on it. This book does, because it explains, in a way that I know to be true, *why* most of us can't or don't draw well and then tells us how we can get past those obstacles.

Perhaps the best way to state the central point of this remarkable book is by quoting something from the delightful chapter on children's drawing:

Say that a ten-year-old wants to draw a picture of a cube, perhaps a three-dimensional block of wood. Wanting the drawing to look "real," the child tries to draw the cube from an angle that shows two or three planes—not just a straight on side view that would show only a single plane, and thus would not reveal the true shape of the cube.

To do this, the child must draw the oddly angled shapes just as they appear—that is, just like the image that calls on the retina of the perceiving eye. *Those shapes are not square*. In fact, the child must suppress *knowing* that the cube is square and draw shapes that are

“funny.” The drawn cube will look like a cube *only* if it is comprised of oddly angled shapes. Put another way, the child must draw *unsquare* shapes to draw a square cube. The child must accept this paradox, this illogical process, which conflicts with verbal, conceptual knowledge. (Perhaps this is one meaning of Picasso’s statement that “Painting is a lie that tells the truth.”)

If verbal knowledge of the cube’s real shape overwhelms the student’s purely visual perception, “incorrect” drawing results. . . . Knowing that cubes have square corners, students usually start a drawing of a cube with a square corner. Knowing that a cube rests on a flat surface, students draw straight lines across the bottom. Their errors compound themselves as the drawing proceeds, and the student’s become more and more confused. (Ed.—She shows some vivid examples of students’ failure to draw a cube.)

On the basis of “incorrect” drawings such as the cube drawings, students may decide that they “can’t draw.” But they *can* draw. . . . The dilemma is that previously stored knowledge—which is useful in other contexts—prevents their seeing the thing-as-it-is, right there in front of their eyes.

This is the heart of the book. We know so much about how things are shaped, how they “ought” to look, that we cannot see how they are actually shaped as they appear before us. We draw what Ms. Edwards calls “symbolic” shapes that we have stored in our minds, just as children draw their “knowledge” of how cubes are shaped. This stored symbolic knowledge is what Ms. Edwards and many others now call Left-Brain knowledge. What this book teaches us is how to get that knowledge out of the way, so that we can see what is there and draw what we see, and it is wonderfully ingenious and effective at doing this. I have done a few of the exercises in the book; they are fun to do, and they work.

One trick is to draw something, looking only at the object you are drawing, keeping the page on which you are drawing well out of sight. Another trick is to copy a drawing upside down (which is how forgers copy signatures); copying an upside-down drawing, in which nothing looks “real,” we cannot use symbolic knowledge, but must copy the shapes as we see

them. And these are only a few of many useful tricks and tips.

This seems to me a most fascinating and important book. Learning to draw well is something that many children, alone or with their parents, would find very interesting and exciting to learn to do, and that might help them in many ways. Many years ago, in *How Children Learn*, I wrote about why I thought art, and in particular realistic art, was an important tool with which children could look at, explore, and understand the world, and I feel this even more strongly now. One of the great plagues of our time, not just in our schools but in every part of our society, is over-abstraction. What we think we know about reality becomes a wall between us and that reality, so that we no longer see it fully and truthfully, and this can cause us to make some very serious mistakes.

But, long-run benefits aside, drawing is exciting and satisfying for its own sake—one more source of joy in life and the world. For many people, young and old, this book can be the key that unlocks a great treasure.

Books for Young Children

A Baby Sister For Frances by Russell Hoban (\$1.75 + post). Frances, the little badger, thinks that her baby sister Gloria is getting altogether too much attention, and that no one cares about her any more. What she does about it, and how she finds out that she is missed and wanted, make the story of this book. Wonderful badger illustrations.

Bread And Jam For Frances by Russell Hoban (\$1.35 + post). One day Frances makes up a song (which she likes to do) about why she does *not* like her breakfast eggs, and wants nothing to eat at every meal but bread and jam. Her loving and sensible parents do not scold or fuss, but *give* her bread and jam—at *every* meal. Frances thinks this is wonderful—for a while. Another good (and true-to-life) story in this delightful series, with illustrations to match.

The Bear's Toothache by David McPhail (\$2.25 + post). A small boy wakes up in the middle of the night to find a huge bear with a terrible toothache outside his bedroom window. He tries to cure this toothache in several ways before he hits on a plan that works. Very funny illustrations by the author; I particularly like the expression on the faces of boy and bear after they knock the boy's night lamp over.

The Train by David McPhail (\$2 .00 + post). A little boy loves trains more than anything else in the world, so much so that he wears an engineer's hat all the time. One evening, as he is repairing an engine which his baby brother has accidentally broken, it becomes time for bed. His parents tuck him in his bunk, with his engineer's hat still on, and there he has a wonderful dream. More lovely illustrations by the author, who catches the spirit of little children about as well as anyone I know.

Madeline by Louis Bemelmans (\$2.45 + post). The story, told in rhyme, of a little orphan girl who lives in Paris with eleven other little girls in an orphanage run by a nice old nun, Miss Claudel. One night Madeline wakes up crying, feeling very sick. They rush her to the hospital in an ambulance, and the book tells about her further adventures there. This is the first in a series of Madeline books (all illustrated by the author in ink and water color in his vivid and dashing style), the only books left in print of the many written by one of the best and most famous writers and illustrators of the '30s and '40s.

(His others are well worth looking up in the library.)

What Do People Do All Day? by Richard Scarry (\$4.50 + post). One of my favorite Scarry books—it not only gives children a lot of useful words, but gives them a lot of very interesting information about the work that many people do and the ways in which many things are made or used. In one of the first stories, “*Building A House*,” we see workers using a steam shovel to dig a hole for the foundation of a new house; masons building the foundation and a chimney; carpenters framing the house; plumbers putting in all the piping; electricians wiring the house and roofers putting on the roof; painters painting; appliances going in, etc. Other chapters: Mailing A Letter; Firemen to the Rescue; A Visit to the Hospital; The Train Trip; Wood and How We Use It; Building A New Road; A Voyage on a Ship, and so on. In all these there is an astonishing amount of information, enough to answer many children’s questions and lead to many others.

As in other Scarry books there tend to be divisions between men’s jobs and women’s, but since in the illustrations the animals doing this work are sexless except for their clothes, it would be easy enough for any adult reading the stories to make the steam-shoveler operator a woman, etc. And as in other Scarry books, though many words are labeled, many others are not, and so parents and children can add many more word labels of their own. A colorful, lively, funny, informative book.

Fairy Tales By Hans Anderson (\$5.40 + post). This is an amazing bargain, twenty-four of the best of Andersen’s tales, in hard cover, handsomely printed on good paper, with many beautiful illustrations by Arthur Rackham. Many of these are in the soft earth colors for which he is famous. Others are in pen and ink, some black and white silhouettes, some elaborate full-page drawings, some quick sketches. One of these sketches, illustrating “*The Princess and the Pea*,” is one of the funniest drawings I have ever seen. It shows the Princess, sitting on her pile of mattresses, disheveled and furious, after not having slept a wink all night. Anyone who has had a bad night will know how she feels.

The book is a joy, to look at and to read. I don’t know how, these days, they do it for the price.

Other New Books Here

Oxford Picture Dictionary Of American English by E.C. Parnwell (\$3.55 + post). For a long time I've thought it would be helpful for children learning to read if they had a collection of word cards, each with a word on one side and on the other a clearly recognizable picture (if possible, drawn or at least chosen by the child) of what the word represents. From such cards children could get what they get by hearing someone read aloud to them a story, known by heart, while they look at the words. Over and over again they hear what a word sounds like and at the same time see what it looks like. The sound and the written word join together in their minds, and soon they begin to intuit how the letters combine to make the sound.

On the same principle, parents have put signs on well-known objects around the house—door, chair, table, etc.,—so that children can look at each of these written words and know what they mean.

The Richard Scarry books (one already on our list, another reviewed in this issue) do this—give children a large number of written words, with pictures to make clear what the words say.

This *Oxford Picture Dictionary*, though written for adults learning English as a second language, does the same thing. It includes over 2000 common English words, with pictures illustrating them. The words and pictures are grouped in familiar scenes: Clothes; In The City; In The Supermarket; At The Post Office; The House; The Kitchen; The Bed room; The Bathroom, etc. There is no plot or story line, just pictures and names of things. To a child who already had a small reading vocabulary, it could be very useful.

A Journey Of Poems edited by Richard Niebling (\$1.50 + post). This is one of my favorite collections. The editor taught English for many years to high school students, and chose these poems not just because he liked them but because he had found that they were the ones his students liked best. It contains some famous poems by famous poets, but also quite a few poems that you are not likely to run into anywhere else. Four of these are among my favorites of all poems: "*The Somerset Dam for Supper.*" a very funny and true-to-life story of a talkative family around the supper table, everyone with more to say than time to say it. Each impatiently waiting for his chance, but

the father in the end outtalking them all; “*Requiem*,” by Kenneth Fearing, which faces or at least raises the fearful (to most people) possibility that death is nothing more than the end of life; “*The Choice*,” by Hilary Corke, a very moving poem about human courage in the face of certain death; and Archibald MacLeish’s “*Eleven*,” a portrait of an eleven-year-old boy that might have been written for GWS, so perfectly does it say about children what we are trying to say.

A splendid collection.

Far Tortuga by Peter Matthiessen (\$2.65 + post). The sea has inspired many great novels, and this one, written in 1975, is one of my favorites, on a par with *Moby Dick* or the finest works of Joseph Conrad.

It is about seven men, each in some way a victim of bad luck and/or his own weakness, who sail in a small schooner from Grand Cayman Island in the Caribbean to fish for green turtles in the dangerous, reef-filled waters to the south. Though there are a few very beautiful passages of descriptive writing, the story is almost entirely told in the words of these men, as they speak among themselves or with others they meet on their voyage. Their speech is in Caribbean dialect and now and then vulgar or profane, but it is strong and direct, quite often even poetic. These ordinary, “uneducated” men, raised in an oral culture not yet overwhelmed by the canned, fake speech of the mass media, love language and use it well. Through their words we come to know them, and feel almost a part of their dirty, worn little ship, even as we did of Thor Heyerdahl’s raft in *Kon-Tiki*.

In this, as in all his books, Matthiessen shows how when we humans ignore or despise our connection with nature, and think only how to exploit and conquer her for our own benefit, we end by destroying what we most value in our culture and ourselves. The Cayman Islanders once raised most of their own food, and built fine houses and ships from trees grown on their own islands. But they destroyed their trees and their soil even as they overfished the turtles on which their economy depended. Now their shipbuilding skills are gone and their seafaring skills dying out, and their young people must be satisfied to work as waiters and bartenders in Cayman’s tourist hotels. The men on the schooner do not read papers or watch TV and know only their small corner of the world. But they know that in all important ways that corner of the world is getting worse—poorer, meaner, uglier. “Modern times,” they say now and then, and none ever mean it for a compliment.

All in all, a most heroic, beautifully told, and unforgettable story, full of the mystery, loneliness, and power of the sea. (If you find you love it as much as I do, look in a library for Matthiessen's *At Play In The Fields Of The Lord*—now out of print.)

Friendly School Districts

We are printing a list of school districts that are willingly and happily cooperating with homeschoolers, and who are willing to be listed in *GWS* as doing so. We will run this list in each issue.

One reason for such a list: I want to encourage and reassure school officials who may be hesitant about approving homeschooling, and let them know that there are other districts enjoying good relationships with their homeschooling families. Also, families who are willing to move to escape a difficult situation with school officials would have at least some ideas about where to go. There are of course many more schools that are cooperating with parents than are listed here, but they are hesitating to make it public.

We will only list these school districts under the following conditions:

1) The family has to be not just satisfied but *pleased* with the cooperation the schools are giving to their homeschooling efforts. 2) The schools themselves have to be pleased with the relationship with the family. 3) The family has to be happy with the idea of asking the schools whether they want to be included in this list. If they feel that listing the schools, or asking the schools if they want to be listed, may endanger their good present relationship, then they shouldn't ask. 4) The schools themselves have to be happy about being included in the list. If they are uneasy about it, or fear that it may get them in trouble with someone, we'd rather not subject them to that risk.

So—if your district is cooperating with your homeschooling, and you would like them to be on this list, ask them, and let us know if they say to go ahead.

By the way, we would also like to hear from schools that would *like* to help homeschooling families, but have not been able to do so because no families have yet asked them.

Editor—John Holt
Managing Editor—Peg Durkee
Associate Editor—Donna Richoux

Growing Without Schooling 18

December 1980

We are trying out a lighter grade of paper for this issue; it allows us to increase the number of pages without costing us more in postage.

My homeschooling book is going to be called *Teach Your Own*; publication date is set at June 12, 1981. We will of course be selling it here, and we hope that as many readers as possible will buy it directly from us—but then again, we also hope you inquire for it at your local bookstore and try to get them to carry it. Not sure of the price yet.

I am about to leave on my California trip, which now includes stops in Santa Rosa, Mill Valley, Santa Cruz, San Jose, San Francisco, and Redlands. Our thanks to the GWS readers who helped put this trip together. And to those who were interested in having me speak but who could not be fit into the schedule: perhaps we could work on arranging another West Coast trip.

When I spoke at Normal, IL Oct. 29, I was surprised and delighted to see an overflow crowd of more than 700 people in the room. It seems to me, from talking with people on my travels as well as from the mail I get, that there are quite a lot of people in this country who are *seriously* considering teaching their own children; they may not be quite ready to do so, but they're on the verge of deciding.

Mary Bergman (MO Dir.) tells us she has gotten “hundreds and hundreds” of letters in response to Paul Harvey's newspaper column and radio show on the National Association of Home Educators.

The state legislatures in Louisiana and Wisconsin have recently passed new laws that mention the option of home education—more details in this issue. And a Colorado homeschooling family told me on the phone the other day that they had a great deal of co-operation and support from the State Dept. of Education, even though their local school district had been giving them trouble. They said they would write us about it soon.

About the move in the Virginia legislature to tighten the private school “loophole” (see GWS #16), Abbey Lawrence writes: “The subcommittee has met twice thus far. Rose Jones tells me that, according to the reporter who

covered the first, half the members seem to want to leave well enough alone, and have seem to want to do something, but don't know what. I'm optimistic."

A volunteer has just made an index to Issues #1–8 of *GWS*, and we should have copies available soon. Also, other volunteers are putting together a resource list of all the addresses of the organizations, periodicals, materials, etc. that have been mentioned in *CWS*. If it's short enough, we may include a copy of this list with *GWS* #19.

—John Holt

Making of an Unschooler

From Karen Franklin (AL):

My 5th grade class was very interested in the Bicentennial in 1976. After several days of discussing the American Revolution, Boston Tea Party, Stamp Act, etc., I gave the required quiz. One of the questions, was: “What is a boycott?” Now, this was a 5th grade in an all-black school in Birmingham, Alabama. Out of 30 kids, only two explained the word in terms of the Stamp Act and American boycott of English imports. The other 28 said—and I quote—“It’s when you ain’t gonna ride the bus no more.”

For about two minutes that answer puzzled me, then it hit me—what else would you expect black Alabama 11-year-olds to say? They have heard about the Montgomery bus boycotts that helped start the Civil Rights movement since they were born. Of course that’s what it means. I grabbed the chance to use it and we compared the 1770s to the 1960s and I saw eyes all over the room light up—the ah-hah! look. It was wonderful.

I was so excited about it, I told the whole story in the afternoon faculty meeting. Everyone, including the black principal, was much more concerned that the students didn’t answer the question “RIGHT.” I was instructed to mark 28 answers wrong so they would learn to pay attention and “get their lessons.” I didn’t do it; instead I quit in January before the birth of our first child and decided then and there both of us would stay home. We’ve been learning together ever since.

Travel Networks

From Elaine Andres, 2120 W. Cashman Ct, Peoria IL 61604: My husband John and I would like to offer another idea for unschoolers which is similar to the Learning Exchange idea in *GWS* #16. We would like to start a Network for Educational Travel (NET) for unschoolers. Anyone interested in having some other homeschooling family visit their part of the country can send us their name and address. We will put this information on a card. When a family wants to visit some place they can write to us (or names of families who are willing to host them during their visit. The two families can then work out the details of the visit.

We are willing to provide floor space for sleeping bags, a kitchen for cooking their own meals (each family furnishes its own food), a bathroom (bring own towels, soap, etc.) and our ideas on what to do and where to go in Central Illinois.

Our area has many interesting places to visit and experiences to offer. I'm sure every part of our country has unique sights to see and places to explore. We hope others would be willing to share their homes with us as this would be an inexpensive way to educate our children together. It would be a lot of fun sharing ideas, too!

Many thanks to Elaine for her good offer. It will be exciting to see what comes of it.

We have also heard of a similar on-going organization for world travel: U.S. SERVAS, 11 John St, Rm 406, New York NY 10038. With the dollar in decline, many people from other countries are visiting the US, and this might be a good way for CWS readers to make friends with them and perhaps learn their language. From the SERVAS brochure:

SERVAS is an international cooperative system of hosts and travelers established to help build world peace, good will, and understanding by providing opportunities for deeper, more personal contacts among people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. Have you ever wished you could get beyond the tourist attractions and know the people where you travel? SERVAS may be the answer. You plan your own trip using lists of hosts in

the countries where you wish to go. These lists give the hosts' addresses, phone numbers, languages spoken, activities, and interests. You share the everyday Life of the family whom you visit. Stays are usually for 2 or 3 days. There is a small contribution to cover SERVAS expenses. No money is exchanged between travelers and hosts.

SERVAS invites you to be a host. "For those of us who can't travel," says one host, "SERVAS brings the world into our living rooms through the visits of friendly, enthusiastic people from every continent."

Hosts share their family meals with travelers and provide accommodations that will fill simple needs. SERVAS travelers are expected to arrange the visit with you beforehand by letter or phone. Hosts are urged to avoid accepting travelers when they are planning to be away, or if the arrangements would interfere with important plans.

To obtain a traveler and/or host application, send SERVAS a long-sized self-addressed stamped envelope.

An Unschooling Co-op

From Laurie Davis (MI):

We have been unschoolers for nearly three years, and have recently become part of a group of “home” schoolers with the addition of four families.

Perhaps you would like to know how we are operating on a group level. We five families take turns meeting one day a week at alternating homes for a “school day” which consists of a variety of activities hosted by one or more adults and usually includes eight children ages 5-11. We have done things like potato-printing art, writing or dictating autobiographies, fruit harvesting at a commercial orchard, having sandwich concession at a local art fair, and opening a bank account with the money well-earned. (The money will be used for supplies or for future field trips, possibly to the Chicago Museum of Natural History, which is quite a trek for 22 of us from northern Michigan!) We try to focus on developing and maintaining positive self-images; to do quiet, thoughtful things together like yoga and brief meditation; to talk about feelings and interests—really trying to notice what goes on inside as well as outside of ourselves.

One trip to a small local zoo prompted a follow-up trip to the library where we did research on a chosen animal, discovering its *real* habitat, how natural life differed from zoo life, how the zoo could be changed to be more accommodating. The children really enjoy the field trips and the chance at interaction, sharing fun and learning. The once-a-week socializing is far superior to what they would get in school on a daily basis.

Other main focuses are environment, health, and conservation, and there is always lots to do as a group in those areas: visiting Michigan’s last remaining virgin forest, or preparing a meal from scratch, or recycling old clothing into new garments. A few of these we haven’t done yet—we have such a long exciting list. Basically, we as a group have resolved to do reading/math-type work at home on an individual basis, and group or community projects weekly or whenever something special comes up which would be enjoyed by most. We find by remaining fairly informal, open, and honest, there is very little concern with group dynamics or decision-making type stuff. We may be able to use our local elementary school gym for playing in the winter time. It

is open for public use as long as advance notice is given and it's not already being used. Same goes for the school library, audio-visual aids, etc.

As far as how we have all managed to take our kids out of school: we are very fortunate to have amongst us three certified teachers, so the question of where do we get our tutors is automatically answered. There have not been many questions by local authorities concerning this arrangement. We'll be sure to let you know of further developments in this area. We try to have regular meetings with the adults of the group to discuss our homeschooling experiences, and to share ideas, support, doubts, and fears. We are all getting to know each other better and find the "safety in numbers" element a definite plus, as opposed to being unschoolers alone.

Some of us have our doubtful moments: "Am I doing the right thing?" "Is X really going to learn how to read all by herself?" It really helps to have each other (*and GWS*) for reassurance. And we have to remind ourselves not to come on as in the traditional teacher-student situation. You can tell when you're getting "structured"—the kids clam right up! You have to stop and think why the kids are at *home* instead of in school. If you really trust them, I think they can feel that and it really adds to their self-confidence.

The Middletons (see Dir.) would be interested in exchanging letters with other home schoolers who might consider a kid exchange in the future. They have pre-teen and teenage daughters. Maybe an exchange could be initiated by "pen-pals" getting to know one another and eventually arranging a meeting. Most of the parents I have talked to seem to have reservations about *actually* sending one of their kids to the home of a *stranger*, unschoolers or not. Maybe the whole thing does need to be tossed around awhile before anything positive comes of it. We may be building our house next summer and it would be fun to share the whole experience with someone to whom it would mean a lot. We would probably live in a tent or other makeshift shelter during the building process. We will be anxious to share ideas with others out there—anybody could write us. Also, I think it would be wonderful—at our house at least—if we could get a foster grandparent somewhere, part- or full-time. It is something we have given thought to many times; we are so limited within our nuclear families. Children (as well as myself) always seem to be in awe of older people, and there would be so much to share. I'm sure there must be many lonely and talented older people out there who would just love to have a family. In all the advertising and

recruiting I have seen for intentional communities, there have never been any requests for grandparently types.

Even a teenager who likes younger kids and would be interested in spending time with us as a mother's/kids' helper in exchange for room and board or something equitable would be considered. It could be for a week or two or a month or more.

Live-Ins Wanted: NC

From Shelley Dameron in NC (GWS #17, "Learning Exchanges"): Two articles in *GWS* #17 caught my eye. First, I read "Live-in Babysitters." You may remember that I wrote that it was difficult to find a job where my baby would be welcome. Having a live-in babysitter would be a good solution, but the problem would still be money. The article following that one on the idea of a Kids Exchange, sparked my thought: How about a combination of both? That is, teenagers living with a different family for whatever reason, might be willing to help out with the babysitting.

We live in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. In the winter months, I "m told we have good skiing, and in the summer there are many outdoor activities. I would be interested to know if any young people or parents among the *GWS* readers would be interested in our particular situation. Perhaps someone could come to be in this area for a week or month or whatever and stay with us. The babysitting itself would be minimal.

.And VA

From Connie Schwartz, Golden Horseshoe Inn, Stanardsville VA 22973:

After 16 issues of *GWS*, I have come to the conclusion that perhaps we have something very valuable to offer to others. First, we teach our four sons at home (ages 1 ½, 3, 5, & 6 ½). Second, home is an old brick/ frame house located on the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, adjacent to the Shenandoah National Park. We own approximately 20 acres and a motorcycle sales and repair shop. We live a life as nearly self-sufficient as possible. We raise sheep, ducks, rabbits, bees, chickens, fatten some pigs and just recently acquired a milk cow—a long desired dream. We breed, raise, fatten, slaughter, butcher, and preserve all our own animals. We also do extensive gardening, starting our own plants and preserving all we don't eat.

I feel we have a large variety of experience to offer. Mechanical, farming chores of *all* kinds (fencing, worming, feeding, loving, etc.), gardening (we practice organic), food preservation and storage, cooking (we make most things from scratch including bread and butter), complete building construction, logging and woodcutting, beekeeping, homemaking, actually the list goes on and on. We are currently looking for a spinning wheel and floor loom so we can spin and weave our own wool.

Our children are included in all of this and we'd like to share it with others who haven't the chance otherwise. No age limits, but they'll either have to do enough work for their keep, or pay some room and board. We have no TV or radio, but *lots* of books and the bookmobile comes literally to our front door twice monthly. We have an endless list of projects to be done and never enough time.

We are willing to share our home and the life we love in return for the labor and knowledge of another. Witnessing the reaction of a newcomer to this type of life will also be enriching. This would have to be arranged on a personal basis with anyone interested, of course, but we are looking for people of clean living habits. We feel a bit shaky making this offer, as there are all kinds of kooks and weirdo's in the world, but we still feel that there would be many benefits to all parties. For further information please contact us at the above address.

And WISC.

From Gretchen Spicer, Rt 1 Box 85, New Lisbon WI 53950: We would be interested in both a live-in babysitter and the kid's exchange. We live on a farm with two other families. Altogether there are nine children at the farm ranging in age from 6 weeks to 10 years. We have goats (for milk) and a very large garden, apple trees, grapes, raspberries. Etc. We also have a T-shirt screening business. We do maple-sugaring in the spring. We would be glad to have kids of any age on an exchange basis.

We could offer a live-in babysitter room and board and \$50 a month for about 10 hours of babysitting per week. We have four children ages 10, 7, 6 and 2. The 2-year-old is the only one that actually needs to be "watched." The three older children only need someone around if they need help. A young person living with us could also make additional money babysitting on an hourly basis for the other two families here, besides some part-time work in the T-Shirt business. Other part-time work on neighboring farms might be available from time to time. Anyone interested could call us collect at 608-562-3969. I was interested in the comment from Louise Andrieshyn (GWS #17, "A Singing Painter"). She mentioned that her daughter did not start singing until she left her alone. I noticed recently that when I was helping my kids with their reading that I sometimes found myself getting up and doing household chores, in which case I did not hear their requests for help, or I would try to put them off until I was finished with what I was doing. On the other hand, if I sat right by them and watched what they were doing, I found myself jumping to explain things that they could surely have figured out and worse yet, becoming bossy and impatient.

Quite by accident I found the perfect solution one day when I was engrossed in a novel that I couldn't put down and they wanted help with their work books. I just sat close at hand and continued reading. I was right there and available when they wanted help, but not so bored that I was sticking my nose into their business all the time. Best of all, there I was actively enjoying the very skill that they were working to master. Now I really look forward to sitting down with them to work on reading.

What Geniuses Need

A reader sent us an article, "The Childhood Pattern of Genius," which appeared in Horizon Magazine, May 1960. The writer, Harold G. McCurdy, describes the childhood of twenty notable "geniuses," including John Stuart Mill, Goethe, Pascal, Coleridge, and Voltaire. The article concludes: In summary, the present survey of biographical information on a sample of twenty men of genius suggests that the typical developmental pattern includes as important aspects: (1) a high degree of attention focused upon the child by parents and other adults, expressed in intensive education measures and, usually, abundant love; (2) isolation from other children, especially outside the family; and (3) a rich efflorescence, of fantasy as a reaction to the preceding conditions. It might be remarked that the mass education of our public school system is, in its way, a vast experiment on the effect of reducing all three factors to a minimum; accordingly, it should tend to suppress the occurrence of genius.

Info Source: NY

From Harold Ingraham, Independent Family Schools Resource Center (RD 1, Smyrna NY 13464; 607-627-6670): Please feel free to refer any family to us. A few of those who read of our center in the Directory of GWS #15 called us just to chat and lift their spirits. I think sometimes this is the best part of the services we provide. There is nothing like talking to a trusted colleague. The resource center is far from being like the standard social center. We aren't trying to save the world. We just feel that our experience can be a help to parents getting their feet wet. Since we won our case in the courts, there has been a steady stream of cases that we have helped.

I have listed what we have done in the way of helping families. The experiences go like this:

1. How to meet with a public school official
2. Dealing with lawyers
3. A run-down on NY education laws
4. Recognizing the unique individuality of a child
5. Help in writing up a curriculum to present to a Board of Education
6. Referral to legal help
7. Simply a shoulder to lean on when the going gets tough
8. Training workshop in using a library
9. Correspondence with family school students who like to write and be written to on interesting topics
10. Suggesting a reading study list in classical literature
11. A do and don't list of how to break the news of new-found educational independence to society
12. How to use the news media effectively when in court
13. A list of available correspondence, private, and Christian schools
14. Referral to good private tutors
15. Workshops in teaching reading and math skills
16. Textbook selection and resources for good books (like the GWS list)
17. Publications that help a family school get started and give good advice, like GWS
18. Planning and preparation before starting a family-school, such as getting the idea across to the children

And here are a few things we would like to do:

1. To finish our NY educational law manual which states the law and how to comply as a family school, with practical advice on how to deal with public school officials
2. Provide a guideline for writing a curriculum
3. Provide more workshops for parents who want training in teaching skills to their children.

And NJ

Meg Johnson (337 Downs St, Ridgewood NJ 07450; 201-447-4044) writes: I established the Home Education Resource Center this summer, at the request of several friends around the country. I have a considerable amount of information and ideas on homeschooling and wish to share it. (The only problem being I can't afford this venture.)

I'm offering a booklet including "A Preliminary Guide for Preparing to Teach Children at Home," and "Do Children Really Need Peer Group Socialization?" for \$3.00. I also have a list of books for people interested in home schooling, a list of home study courses, an address list (or sources of materials, a packet on how to set up a support group, a sample of an academic program accepted by a local school district.

Donations of any amount would be appreciated as materials will only be sent out as there are sufficient funds. Handling, printing, and distribution costs 20¢ per page or more.

School in PA

From Sandy Hurst at Upattinas School, RD 1, Box 378, Glenmoore PA 19343 (215-458-5138): We are willing to have ourselves listed as a school which takes home study students. We are developing independent study courses which have been successful with some students, and others use the Pa. State University Extension courses for high school. We like to work with each student individually according to his/her needs.

One child is severely brain damaged and his mother works so well with him that we do not interfere. We simply keep him on our rolls. This way his public school doesn't have to cope with him and his family can have him at home. This particular mother had all sorts of difficulty with the schools until she told them that the child was enrolled here, and I wrote them an official letter. Neither of us has heard from them since.

Last year we had a waiting list for our school and had several students doing work at home so that they could get out of bad situations in their local schools while waiting for space in our school. One girl just needed to get a few credits so that she could save face to go back to her old school. So you see, we are pretty flexible as to what goes. We do recommend that students become minimally involved in the school if it seems possible—they come to meetings sometimes and help out with special affairs. We charge \$75.00.

So far we do not feel any pressure to be secretive. We feel that we will simply continue to do what we're doing and if the authorities ask questions we'll deal with that when it happens.

Correspondence School

From Mrs. Carol A. Christopher of the Bethany Homestead Christian Resource Center (RFD 1 Box 220, Taylor Rd, Thompson CT 06277; 203-928- 0453): We have heard of your work and have read some of the recent magazine interviews concerning your program. The Bethany Homestead Christian Resource Center is also an organization supporting home schooling. We are a small Seventh-day Adventist self-supporting group providing school books, materials, schedule helps and, when necessary, a support umbrella if school authorities inquire.

Our curriculum is a combination work-study program set according to individual student's needs. We offer two correspondence-type programs to aid parents who teach at home. We serve families all across the United States, Canada, and a few foreign countries. The cost for enrollment is \$100 per family for one year—September through June. If more than one family has joined together to form a school, the cost is the same, since all information is being sent to one location.

More “Cover School” News

From the Michigan Coalition of Alternative Schools Newsletter: The Home Based Education Program was started officially in August, using office space at Clonlara (1289 Jewett, Ann Arbor MI 48104; phone 313-769-4515) and directed by Pat Montgomery (Dr. Pat Montgomery now, mind you!) Of course, there is no way of knowing how many Michigan families are doing home study but the number who are actually enrolled in H.B.E.P. now is 32 students. Another 115 have made inquiries.

From Bonnie Williams, Oak Meadow School (PO Box 1051, Ojai CA 93023, 805-646-4510): We presently have 55 students enrolled from all over the US and so far so good. We recently had a case in Northern Calif. where the sheriff visited a mother and told her to report to school. She approached the Superintendent of schools and told him that she was enrolled in our home study program and wanted to make it legal. He merely sent her down the hall to fill out an affidavit and the people in the office even helped her to fill it out.

Ed Nagel tells us that the Santa Fe Community School (PO Box 2241, Santa Fe NM 875011 has enrolled over 200 home-study students since 1976 —115 in 1980—81 so far.

Other schools that have told us recently that they are willing to help home-schoolers:

Home School, Manuela Schreiner, 849 Drake St, Cambria CA 93428; (805) 927- 4137.

Jonathan’s Place, Pat & Marshall Martin, 4301 Harrison, Kansas City MO 64112; (816) 753-5392 or 444-3168.

Holt School, Ann Bodine, Box 866,
New Providence NJ 07974.

Halvi School, H. Baer, 124 N Paredes Line Rd, Brownsville TX 78520; (512) 546-1449.

The John Holt Learning Center, James Salisbury, 8446 S Harrison St,
Midvale UT 84047.

Home Study in Alaska

A reader in Alaska writes: There is an elaborate homeschooling correspondence course in Fairbanks. When we enrolled our daughter this spring, they offered no objections—in filling out her forms, we were simply asked to give a reason for using the correspondence school and I had the feeling that they would have accepted any reasonable-sounding explanation. They took the form and handed us five big boxes of materials—workbooks, art materials, books to read. The workbooks are boring and stupid but required. According to the correspondence teachers, there are about 50 children (all grades) in the Fairbanks school district who use the program. This Fairbanks office is only for students within the school district—the “bush” students’ work through Juneau, the head office.

LD. Article

My friend Merritt Clifton, who publishes a small literary magazine, *Samisdat*, recently wrote a long article called “Learning Disabilities: What the Publicity Doesn’t Tell.” It is quite extensive, thorough, and skeptical of the whole notion of “LD”—good ammunition for any who are concerned with fighting this battle. It was printed in two issues of *The Townships Sun* (Box 28, Lennoxville, Que. J1M 1Z3), which, Merritt says, “is a good, family-oriented monthly newsmagazine focusing on alternative energy, handicrafts, back-to-the earth, and almanac-type historical curiosities.” For \$1.50, Merritt will send you clips of the article; for \$2 .50, the complete issues of *The Townships Sun*. Send US or Canadian money to him at Box 129, Richford VT 05476, or Box 10, Richford, Quebec, JOE 1JO.

CONN. Home- Schoolers

The Tromblys (CT) sent this story from their local paper: David Cole, assistant superintendent of East Lynne Schools, admitted the Tromblys' request "took some getting used to," but that now a "very positive relationship" exists between the two sides.

What Cole and other educators don't say, however, is that home education is available to practically any family who wishes to give it a try. For instance, there are no requirements that parents be certified instructors. Even the state law, which education department spokesmen declined to comment on, is so vague it is almost impossible to prevent anyone from educating their children at home, as long as they have the time.

Under Section 10-184 of the Conn. General Statutes, children between the ages of 7 and 16 must attend a public school "unless the parent is able to show that the children are elsewhere receiving equivalent instructions in the studies taught in the public schools." Thus far, no cases have gone to court regarding the home education issue in Connecticut. Where there used to be only a few correspondence schools for the interested parent to choose from, there now are many, which perhaps better than any other yardstick, measures the growth of home education programs.

Eileen Trombly added:

You might be relieved to know that, although as yet unlisted in GWS, there are many interested people *preparing* to "home-instruct." The many we have spoken with all have preschool children and want to "get it all together" ahead of time. We do recommend to them that they draw up their plans before meeting with any officials, and have a plan of action ready to submit, but not to do so until the necessary time (age 6 in Conn.)

We also have suggested agreeing to allow their children to be given standardized tests twice a year, and agreeing to instruct 180 days per year, minimum 4 hours per day. The testing is to satisfy local and state boards. This, along with a curriculum, seems to be all that's necessary to turn in to the superintendent.

As you are aware—the standardized testing is almost worthless, but it

satisfies them. We do *not* agree to any other type of testing several years back an incident came up where by a teacher administrating the tests gave her own type of test—asking the girls questions that indicated to her that they were “unhappy because they missed their school friends.” Her personal opinion on this whole idea was given at the conclusion of the test in writing. We stopped this.

Anyway—as more people get involved in the actual instruction process, they will include their names in the directory. They are *anxious* to.

Letter From Calif.

From a reader in California:

After five years in the Orient, we decided to educate our children ourselves. My husband is a writer and artist with an M.A. in Philosophy, and I have a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence. Sam and Sara spent most of their childhood travelling in Asia and only returned to America when they were seven (1975).

We bought land in an isolated part of northern California, started building our solar house and growing our own food. It never occurred to us to notify any authorities, as our place is over forty miles from the county seat and we have no neighbors to complain about the children not going to school.

I'd never taught (though my husband has taught painting and History of Art) but decided to start our, "school" by exposing Sara and Sam to everything we loved: good literature, art, and music. During the long rainy winter I spent most of the day reading out loud: The Creek, Norse, Celtic, and Egyptian myths; the Ramayana and Mahabharata; Homer, Shakespeare, Tolkien, Keats, and Shelley. We constantly played tapes of Bach, Mozart, Chopin, Vivaldi, and Indian ragas, and brought home books from the library on painting, sculpture, archaeology, and architecture, which we all looked at together. The children used to snuggle close and look over my shoulder as I read aloud, and within two years were reading on their own "The Chronicles of Narnia," Laura Ingalls Wilder's books, Howard Pyle, and Robert Louis Stevenson. We subscribe to several magazines that they eagerly read: *National Geographic*, *Natural History*, *World*, *Ranger Rick*, and the *Sunday New-York Times*. Whenever they were interested in a topic (King Tut, dinosaurs, Columbus) we'd find a book at the library and read up on that particular subject.

We had no system for teaching math, but noticed that the children quickly taught themselves how to count money, make change, and add up the cost of groceries when we made our weekly shopping trip to town. Sam and Sara drew and painted a lot, wrote stories and poems and made up their own plays with beautiful costumes. We supplemented the indoor activities with daily work on the farm: gardening, carpentry, chopping wood, cooking, and caring for our animals.

The children seemed healthy and happy except for one thing—they longed for other children and we just didn't know any, living so far out from town. Finally in October 1978 we rented a house in the town and enrolled them in a small private school so they could enjoy the social life they were begging for.

In a short time we knew we had made a mistake. The joy went out of their faces, they were constantly tired and irritable, and all creative energy evaporated to be replaced by television, “Buck Rogers,” and “Star Wars.” Their conversation at home was mostly how mean or crazy the other kids were, and who did what nasty thing to whom that day at school. We hated the change but stuck it out for two winters because this “social” life seemed so important and we thought we would all adjust.

To get an inside view of the school, I volunteered as a History teacher so I could get to know the other children, but what I saw really made me sad, and strengthened our feelings that there is something *seriously* wrong with American families to produce such neurotic children. There were only a few I found to be normal, happy children.

Now we've spent the summer months back on our farm and have definitely decided to give up school and the house in town. Sara is painting, baking, sewing, and writing poems again. Sam is sleeping well and putting on weight, losing his cranky, irritable look he got in town, and once more is singing, writing stories, and whistling as he helps us around the farm. I hope to solve the need for other children by inviting kids from town up on weekends and I'll let you know how that works out.

Personal Politics

Norma Luce wrote in the Oct. "80 Home Educators Newsletter (PO Box 623, Logan UT 84321; \$17.50/yr.):

What would happen if each of you, in your various and separate states, became personally acquainted with the legislative representative in your area, not your state, just your area? These men (Ed.—& women) need to be educated. They need to hear about what you are doing. They need to meet your children. They need to hear your views on your inalienable constitutional rights. They need to see your effectiveness. Then, when adverse legislation comes up they'll stand and say "I don't see any need for it. I PERSONALLY KNOW PEOPLE WHO ARE EDUCATING THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME. THEY ARE DOING A WONDERFUL JOB. I believe they should be left alone."

What if, after this legislator speaks, seventeen others from different areas in the state stand and say the same thing. What if three-fourths of the state House of Representatives and two-thirds of the state Senate personally know families who are successfully educating their children? It's so simple. No traveling, no big amounts of money expended. Just talk to your neighbor, the one that you have elected to represent your area in the state legislature.

Developing Skills

From Lori Smith (NY):

I have been intending to write in praise of *Growing Without Schooling* but never got around to it until this evening. Though I am thoroughly fascinated by the information and ideas contained in each issue, the fact that my husband and I have no children (yet) made me feel more like an observer, not a participant. However, Issue #17 spoke directly to me, especially “The Process of Work.”

I am 25 years old and have been grappling with the problem: what do I do with my life now that I have a BA degree in English but no idea of what WORK I should do? The struggle has been deciding between a career in “EDUCATION” (because it is a “respectable” profession) or simply puttering around learning all I can about embroidery, weaving, and textile arts in general (because I love thread, yarn, needles, fabric, and sewing).

Even though I suffered through a few education classes in college and decided that I wanted nothing to do with schools, I have recently questioned that decision, wondering if I quit because I was just too cowardly to cope with the unpleasantness of herding children through their lives.

Then I read: “Six adult teachers had all done many kinds of work before they began teaching, and all brought to the school a number of visible and interesting skills.”

And, “Adults must *use* the skills they have where children can see them.”

I realized that for me, it is important to develop the skills that will enable me to do the work that I love. I also realize how much I have been brainwashed by my own schooling (which I hated) to fit into society—doing something “respectable” like teaching.

Thank you for the encouragement I needed to finally decide in favor of learning *real* skills.

As far as-teaching, the most rewarding teaching experience I’ve had was when my nine year old niece saw me sewing and asked me to teach her. We rummaged around for a scrap of cloth, thread, and needle, and I showed her how to make a draw-string bag for her doll. We worked for hours; she had great difficulty getting accustomed to holding the needle. Her hand began to hurt and she pricked herself many times, but I was amazed at how deliberate

and careful she was to make the stitches small and even—ripping out those that were unsuitable and doing them over and over. When the bag was finished she was so thrilled and excited that she decided to keep it for herself to carry change and tissue.

As I said before, I have only praise for what *GWS* is doing for children and parents, but I am even more grateful for what I am learning about myself and my own education. I guess it amounts to un-schooling myself after 25 years.

Unusual Scientist

A UPI story from Eight Dollar Mountain, OR:

You wouldn't expect to find a space-age scientist living with computers and telescopes atop a Roadless hill on the edge of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, 30 miles southwest of Grants Pass, Oregon.

But then, Paul Lucas is a man who's spent his 33 years doing things in different ways.

As a bookwormish "extremely precocious and arrogant 12-year-old," he idolized Albert Einstein. Believing school would "lead to ruin," the 7th grader dropped out to study astronomy and electronics on his own.

When his parents didn't accept that decision, he moved out. Under the wing of a foster family, the 12-year-old became a television repairman. At 16 he qualified for a Federal Communications Commission radio television license and later worked as a radio announcer in San Jose, Cal.

At 20 he launched a career as a "street person." He earned a panhandler's living in San Francisco by sketching portraits, singing folk songs, strumming his guitar, holding bubble-blowing classes.

He switched to a research associate position at Mt. Sinai Medical School in New York. Then he pedaled his bicycle from New York to Colorado where he took a job designing research equipment for the molecular biology department at the University of Colorado:

In 1974 Lucas began work as a NASA consultant in San Francisco. He moved to his hill at the base of Eight Dollar Mountain a year later. He designed computer programs that helped the Viking spacecraft fly to Mars, and he's the electronics engineer who invented a new kind of lighting for the space shuttle.

His lifestyle (no running water, no telephones, and no roads) may seem unconventional, but he says, "I do a lot better work up here."

She Learned At Home

From Ruth Stewart (KS):

You might be interested to know that I was myself an “unschooler.” My parents became missionaries in Colombia when I was six. There were five of us children at the time (and I was the second oldest, so you can see how close in age we were!) and a few months after we arrived in Colombia we adopted an infant who was brought to our doorstep half-starved.

For our meager resources the Calvert courses were too expensive, and my parents felt strongly about not wanting to place their work before their children, hence they did not wish to send us away to boarding school as is a common practice for missionary families in remote areas. My mother had done some school teaching in the States and before we moved she procured an assortment of new and used textbooks for first through sixth grade—English, arithmetic, science, geography, history, health, writing.

She would make out a list of daily assignments for each of us, sometimes weeks in advance. We worked almost entirely on our own, coming to her only if we had questions we couldn’t find answers for by ourselves. Almost immediately I moved up to my older sister’s level, and that made things a bit easier for Mom because there was one fewer set of assignments to make. Mom would check our written work and show us any errors he had found, but she never graded.

My parents are both great readers and we all inherited it. I loved doing my reading and grammar assignments. When I was seven, one day I completed the third grade grammar book and my mother gave me the fourth grade one to look at. I glanced through it and realized that it was all review of things I already knew. Mom took my word for it and the next day I started the fifth grade book. It was that kind of flexibility that I particularly value in looking back.

Our lessons didn’t take us very long most days and then we were free to play. Needless to say, there was no television and we had few of the toys most modern American parents consider vital for a child’s stimulation. We made trains out of packing boxes and then set them on their sides and they were dollhouses. We were given some puppets and we wrote our own puppet shows. We pored through children’s crafts books to find things that we could

make to amuse ourselves. We rode bikes, played in the park, participated in church activities, made friends with neighborhood children.

Most of all, we read and made up stories: My younger sister and I wrote our own little books of poems, stories, drawings, puzzles, and jokes. We lay awake in bed at night sharing spontaneous fantasies. My mother enrolled us in various book clubs and children's magazines, and we devoured each month's offering hungrily. We found pen pals all over the world and wrote innumerable letters.

Our learning in science was a bit sketchy. My parents are more interested in the "humanities" end of learning than in the scientific end. Still, I remember a good many hours I enjoyed browsing through numerous natural history books for children. Recently I was amused to find one of these "and read on the fly-leaf, written laboriously in my eight-year-old cursive, "This is my favorite book. I wish it had ALL science in it!"

By the time I was 10 and my older sister barely 11, we had finished all the sixth-grade texts. My parents decided to send us to stay with my grandmother in Kansas City and attend a private Christian school. I had eagerly anticipated returning to the U.S.—after all, the textbooks I had studied eulogized the American way as if it were unquestionably the best way of life. It wasn't long after I began school, though, that I realized everything wasn't quite as I had expected. I was 10 years old, coming straight from the jungle, in a classroom of 12 and 13-year-old kids. Academically I was practically at the head of my class, but that wasn't very important in a setting where one had to dress right and talk right in order to be accepted. I wasn't ready to care about make-up, hose, hairstyles, and boyfriends. So I associated principally with the other misfits. I developed an awkward shyness, spent much time watching TV, grew chubby, read romances from the public library, and scored at 11th grade level on achievement tests. The next year, when my family was reunited, was better; I went to a different school and developed a few of the social graces necessary to survive in American early teen culture.

At the end of my 8th grade year, my parents presented me with the choice of staying with Grandma or returning, to Colombia. With no question I chose the latter.

We lived in the jungle one more year and I studied University of Nebraska Extension courses—I was glad to see their letter in *GWS* #14. It is a good program, offering a broad range of subjects. I whizzed through English and

social studies and dallied over math and science. In fact, biology was the only course that I remember as being thoroughly unsatisfactory for me. The study of living thing is of course much best done in direct interaction with those things; working from a book, for lack of a personal guide, is utterly uninteresting.

When we moved to the city I also continued the piano lessons I had begun in Kansas, and my sisters and I had opportunities to participate in choirs from time to time and to attend concerts. I even took a harmony (basic music theory) course by correspondence.

Prior to my senior year we returned to Kansas City. This time I found American school boring rather than frightening. I had been used to scheduling my own time and I resented having to sit through study halls even when I had no homework. The thought that every other person my age over the entire U.S. was rising about the same time I did, eating at the same time, trundling off to school and waiting for the sound of the bell over and over again every day, until he could finally go home again—well, it nauseated me. I wrote a poem beginning “I feel like I’m wearing someone else’s life.” Graduation was simply a relief. College was much more enjoyable because of the freedom to make many of my own decisions about what I wished to pursue in studies and lifestyle.

As I look back, I particularly appreciate two things about my home schooling: (1) the unstructured environment that, while providing me with set goals (completion of my texts), allowed me ample freedom to read, express my thoughts, and try my hand at numerous creative ventures; (2) the family bond. E. F. Schumacher in *Small Is Beautiful* speaks of the educated man as being “truly in touch with the center. He will not be in doubt about his basic convictions, about his view on the meaning and purpose of his life, the conduct of his life will show a certain sureness of touch which stems from his inner clarity.” I think it is our families who can best provide what we need for “inner clarity,” and mine certainly gave me a strong, stable sense of personal identity. Of course, homeschooling was just one of many factors there, others being the type of work my parents did, their love for God which they communicated clearly to us, and my father’s beautiful, loving “fatherliness.” As far as I can tell, he was a member of a rare breed among American men. Most of my American friends remember their fathers as detached, remote. Mine adored us and made sure each of us knew he or she was very special in

his eyes.

My husband and I began *seriously* talking about homeschooling after hearing the interview with you, Mr. Holt, on NPR's *Options in Education*. J. D. went through a very traditional education in western Kansas but asserted that evening, "Well, if you're a typical product of homeschooling then I'm all for it." Sweet, eh? J.D., by the way, is a paleontologist, a real nature-lover, and our daughter Claire and I have already learned a great deal from him. I will certainly have no doubts regarding the quality of my children's opportunities to "do" science!

And So Did He

From David Baker (NY):

It was with particular interest that I read the feature in *The Mother Earth News*. I am now 35 years old and I grew up entirely without schooling.

I come from England, and just before I was born a bill became law that required all children between the ages of 5 and 15 (now 16) to receive full-time education. My mother had very definite views on the matter. Believing that children learn best at their own pace that it was only necessary to make knowledge available to them, not push it down their throats, she refused to send any of her seven children to school. (My parents were separated at that time—they are now divorced.) Her action resulted in legal proceedings being taken against her by the Education Board, and she appealed on various counts over a period of about 10 years. Finally, in 1961, she won the right to educate her own children.

The case generated a lot of publicity. It was said that she had made legal and educational history. Certainly the attitude of the authorities has changed considerably towards people who wish to educate their children other than by sending them to school. In the book *Children In Chancery*, my mother, Joy Baker, told the story of her legal battles which, because of financial difficulties, she conducted herself.

I believe that for a large number of children, school is far from the best way of equipping them for adult life. But even more I believe in the right of the individual to decide how his or her children will be educated. A child's education is the single most important factor in deciding what sort of person he will become.

And that must surely be a parent's responsibility.

Inventor

From the Nov–Dec. “79 Chip Chats, a magazine on woodcarving:

When my father died, he had 105 American and Canadian patents, most dealing with components of railroad freight cars and some still in use. He was unlettered and unsung, never having progressed beyond the fourth grade in school nor beyond a superintendency in a railroad-car plant. He always felt hampered by his lack of formal education—which is a major reason why I, as his eldest son, have two degrees in engineering (but no patents). His very lack of education may have been a blessing in disguise; he hadn’t been taught all the things that cannot be done, so his imagination was unfettered.

I can remember that he would sit and fish—or just sit—and suddenly burst out with some new concept, the obvious result of his musing. Other men, without patents, smiled over the time he “wasted,” kept asking “Where do you get these ideas?” Some of the ideas were well ahead of their time, and some, I or others, on the basis of education, convinced him were impractical—until someone else invented them later and made a fortune.

Escape From High School

From Lavonne Bennett, 637 Bennett Rd, Ionia MI 48846:

As the years flew by, friends and neighbors proclaimed my son a mechanical and electronics genius, but his high school teacher called him a “stupid dummy.”

Rather than tolerate the name calling, we sought alternatives to that particular class for our son. When he was 14, he began taking a college class at the community college. There, he found that instructors did not find it necessary to call students belittling names. From then on, high school became intolerable because he’d seen how good learning can be!

Many afternoons, he came home from high school angry at the verbal and physical abuse by teachers to other students as well as to himself. Rebuilding his self-esteem after each high school day became a monumental task.

We took him out of high school in the middle of his junior year. He’s 17 now and has managed two stores for an electronics-product firm, parlayed a \$150 clunker car up to a classic sports car, has bought equipment for his recording studio, has been a mentor for an eight year old boy, helping him to organize model-train layouts, and has given guitar lessons.

All those wasted, institutionalized years! He learned from private lessons, college classes, role-modeling and from life the skills he’s using now.

What School Is

From New England:

I've never been to school before and I just went last week for a three-day visit.

The teacher's name is Miss C. The teacher was a pretty good teacher and I learned some interesting things. (But she was a little odd.) She wasn't a very strict teacher but she did get mad when the kids fooled around too much. We passed notes but she never caught us. One day there was a substitute named Mrs. N. because Miss C. was sick. She wasn't such a good teacher and she was way too strict! Everyone in the class hated her.

Everyone thought I was weird because I was new and didn't go to school and didn't eat meat. The kids weren't being very good to the teacher. They were back-talking and wise mouthing her. They fooled around a lot too. They never bothered me much.

There was one girl that played with me all the time. I met her at a friend's party. Then met her at school again. Now she is a good friend! We are hoping that she can come over to my house or I can come to her house.

At school they taught spelling, math, social studies and we did reading and writing. A kid and I were the best readers in the class. I think that the work was very easy!

Each day there were six hours of school. There was a recess at 10:30 a.m. then there was a recess from 11:30 a.m to 12:30 p.m. and the last recess was at 2:00 until 2:30 so we only ended up doing 4 hours of school. Sometimes you'd get done early and have to wait for the other kids to get done.

What School Could Be

From the Boston Globe:

Wayland To Recycle A School—With public school enrollment dropping dramatically in Wayland (Mass.) from 4100 students in 1971 to 2600 this year, it was inevitable that yet another elementary school would be closed.

But while school closings in Massachusetts are no longer unusual, the action of the local school board and selectmen regarding the Loker School, closed in June, is a novel approach to the reuse of a public school in an era of declining enrollment.

Instead of accommodating more than 350 students this fall, the Loker School, now the property of the Board of Selectmen, is about to become a cultural center for the town.

The school will be leased to four groups, with the largest tenant an organization called Arts-Wayland. Mardee Nordberg, chairman of Arts-Wayland's space development committee, says availability of the Loker School will enable approximately 40 group members to set up studios, galleries, and classrooms to practice and teach visual, performing, and literary arts.

Also renting space at the 21-year-old facility are an after-school day care center, a dance and gymnastics school, and The Education Collaborative, of which the Wayland school system is a member, and which would rent office space and provide some classes for special needs students.

"I think the whole concept is exciting and challenging and it's a creative use for an abandoned school building," said Wayland School Sup. William Zimmerman. "It puts the emphasis on serving the local community, but in a different way than an elementary school would."

Herbert Odell, chairman of the Board of Selectmen added: "If we boarded up the school and didn't use it for anything, it would still cost about \$20,000 just to insure the building."

Testing Compromise

From Nancy Wallace (NH):

For the past two years, the school people insisted that Ishmael take the Stanford achievement test. They acted as though they couldn't possibly understand why I was so opposed to this method of evaluation, since after all, it only tested kids on the bare minimums and everyone knows that Ishmael is very advanced for his age. Through vocal outrage and obstinacy I did manage to get them to allow *me* to administer the test to Ishmael at the school, which made things a bit nicer, but that's as far as they would go.

This summer, though, we got a new superintendent and some other new staff and so once again we raised our objections to the standardized test. This time the superintendent listened more closely and he even seemed to agree with us. He nodded when I said that the test only measured how good you were at taking tests; that the score was meaningless unless it was averaged over a number of years and then compared with the scores of kids in similar situations; that from the test, I couldn't discover Ishmael's areas of strength and weakness since there were too many variables involved in the actual phrasing of the questions and the process a child must go through in order to mark the correct answer on the answer sheet; etc.

When I was done, he told me that not only did he agree with me, but that many of the teachers in the school district agreed with me. And then he added, "but I think Ishmael should take the test anyway." It dawned on me that the school people are primarily concerned with Ishmael's ability to be like everyone else, if need be.

I proposed a compromise, which the superintendent happily accepted. Ishmael would take the test once a year, but I'd give it to him, here at the kitchen table, and it would be used *only* as test-taking practice, a little dose of "reality." The school people would see the results of the test and would get an idea of how ordinary Ishmael was, but they couldn't use this information against us. Our evaluation would be based solely on our portfolio (my daily log, a list of the books Ishmael reads from Sept.-June, his stories, etc.) As an extra touch of normality, I asked that I be shown a copy of the test whenever I felt like it, since all classroom teachers have that privilege, and the superintendent agreed to that too. So if I feel like it, I can prepare Ishmael in

advance.

Two Punishment Victories

An AP. story from Albany, NY:

The state's education commissioner ruled Friday that schools cannot discipline students by lowering grades unless there is a definite connection between a student's misconduct and academic performance.

In his ruling, Commissioner Gordon Ambach charged that the Galway Central School District had reduced the grades of one of its junior high school students purely as a disciplinary measure.

"A grade is intended as an educational evaluation," Ambach said. "In view of the other disciplinary measures available, the school board may not subvert the purpose of grading by arbitrarily reducing a student's grades as a means of imposing discipline."

However, Ambach said there were instances, such as cheating on an examination, where grade reductions might be acceptable.

The commissioner said that on March 7, 1980, a 7th grader at the Saratoga County School "was involved in an incident in one of the boy's lavatories" and was subsequently suspended for five days. The student was allowed back into school, but school authorities, in accordance with district policy, ordered that he not be given any grade above 75% for the term. (even though) he actually had achieved grades of 90, 79, and 78, Ambach ordered the grades restored.

From The Last ? Resort, Sept. "80 (977 Keeler Av, Berkeley CA 94708; \$10/yr.):

In 1977, headlines across the country screamed "SUPREME COURT OK'S SCHOOL SPANKING." Whether this was greeted with groans or grins, few doubted the finality of the decision.

We were wrong.

Gertrude M. Bacon of Parents Anonymous of New York, said at the time and still believes that the case of *Ingraham v. Wright* was inadequately argued and was lost, essentially, by the attorney for the children, Bruce S. Rogow. "He continually and persistently narrowed

his argument to one issue—cruel and unusual punishment—and did not allow himself to be led by the pertinent questions posed by Justices Marshall, Stevens, Rehnquist, and Brennan. They kept opening the door, and he kept closing it—or I should say slamming it shut.”

James Wallerstein said: “There were a number of positive implications in the majority decision which the Civil Liberties groups should have jumped on:

Where school authorities acting under color of State Law, deliberately decide to punish a child for misconduct by restraining the child and inflicting appreciable physical pain, we hold that the Fourteenth Amendment liberty interests *are* implicated (p. 221).

“This means that school corporal punishment *is* a federal question, and not just a State one.”

The 1980 decision *Hall v. Tawney* which, in effect, reversed the Supreme Court’s decision of 1977, was greeted by the news media with a dull thud. Education newsletters and journals carried the information but made little of it.

The three children of the Hall family, Mervin, Linda, and Naomi, each in turn were severely hurt by 7th grade teacher G. Garrison Tawney. He had a handmade paddle fashioned from a hard rubber home-plate used in playground ball games. He swung this vicious weapon indiscriminately and with such force as to put Naomi in the hospital for ten days.

The lawyer, Daniel F. Hodges of the Appalachian Research and Defense Fund of Charleston, WV, did his homework. He went to the Federal Courts. When the case was dismissed on the basis of *Ingraham*, he appealed and the 4th Circuit US Court of Appeals upheld his contention that the “*due process*” *clause of the 14th Amendment, in its substantive aspects, did protect children against*

brutality even though it was administered in school and in the name of discipline.

“Substantive due process” is a difficult concept for non-lawyers to grasp. There are rather rigid rules about the rights of a suspect and the manner in which he may be taken into custody. For example, forcible use of a stomach pump by police, and the unprovoked beating of a pretrial detainee by a guard, have been held to be unconstitutional. Teacher brutality was held comparable to police brutality. The judgment states:

The existence of this right to *ultimate bodily security*—the most fundamental aspect of personal privacy—is unmistakably established in our constitutional decisions as an attribute of the ordered liberty that is the concern of substantive due process.

The decision is a landmark in that cases may be tried in Federal courts when there has been an injury or when the punishment is demonstrably greater than necessary to maintain order.

Tone-Deaf Choir

In regard to the “Tone Deaf” section in Never Too Late (GWS #16), Lisa C. Coffey, 2128 Memorial Av, Las Vegas NV 89119, wrote:

Every year on the anniversary of the founding of the school I went to, it was traditional, among many festive activities, for the junior class to present a humorous skit. When I was a junior, we decided to do a skit which was a parody on “chapel.” We impersonated the headmaster, the teacher, etc., and burlesqued the whole routine.

Our chapel services always included a choral response sung by the choir, a very select and prestigious organization consisting of twelve of the best (or *the* twelve best) singers among the students. Naturally, for our humorous skit, we put together a choir composed of the twelve “tone-deaf” students.

I can remember very little of the skit (which was a smash hit) but I will always remember the choral response. It didn’t occur to me that it was a rare event to hear twelve “tone-deaf” people sing together unabashedly a piece of music from start to finish. There was a strange organic beauty to that song and my memory of having been privileged to hear it is a treasured gem.

Whenever I meet someone who claims to be “tone deaf” I try to get them to sing for me, but they never will. Maybe they would if they thought I wanted to laugh at them, but I guess the thought that I find it unusual and beautiful throws them for the proverbial loop. Oh, well, at least I got to hear it once, and it really was glorious.

From J.P.'s Mom

More from Kathy Mingl, IL ("Meet J. P.", GWS #16):

The discussion of art materials in GWS #16 interested me. After reading about acrylics in GWS #9, I had dug out some old paints I used to mess around with in the old days when I had time for such things, and presented them to J.P. (age 21). *He* was very enthusiastic about the whole business; his mother mostly came out feeling rueful and philosophical. That kid has some kind of natural talent, all right, but I think it's for house painting. His technique involves mixing all the colors thoroughly together, scrubbing them on industriously, and covering up every bare spot of paper. His favorite color seems to be black. I felt obliged to offer some diplomatic suggestions, but it's not easy—he may not be a Michelangelo, but he's awfully touchy. (One time when he was using his watercolors, I interfered somehow—insisted he wash out his brush or something—and he got upset. When I asked him if he was going to paint some more, he said, "No, I'm too sad of it.")

What I finally got him to do was to paint *gently*, which seems to just about cover the situation, and I told him that you look at what you're doing as you go along, and when it's pretty, you stop. I wouldn't insist on that "pretty" bit, of course, but that's what J.P. is into right now. It's probably something more like "when it looks like what you want it to."

My excuse for imposing my notions of order on J .P. is that *I'm* the one who has to clean up after him if he makes a mess. I tell him that when he can clean up after himself he can make all the messes he wants, but in the meantime he can learn to do it *my* way. He does accept that, in general, unless I get too heavy about it.

By the way, one thing J.P. loves is soap paint. I mix Ivory soap flakes with water to make a paste, and then combine it with food coloring in a plastic ice-cube tray to make as many different colors as I can. J.P. glops it all over himself and the bathtub, and then sluices everything down with the shower hose. He gets to make "pretties" and gets praised for cleaning up the bathtub all at one shot. I don't have to wash him at all, and it keeps him occupied and out of trouble for an entire afternoon. I don't put any water in the tub, so I can go off and do other things and not worry about him. I do have to come back and admire his artwork periodically, and sometimes I make him rinse the

bottom of the tub if it looks like it's getting too slippery, although he's usually pretty careful about that.

Another thing I've used food coloring for is ink for a toy stamp-pad set. I cut a piece of foam rubber to fit in a covered soap dish and soaked it with several colors. They work real well, and they should be pretty well non-toxic, although I *don't* use them in food for the most part.

I get most of J.P.'s art materials from garage sales, especially paint and paper. I just paid 50¢ for a slightly used set of artist's water colors in tubes. I like them better than acrylics because the colors are reusable after they dry in the mixing pan. We've thrown out most of the little-kid cheapie sets J.P. had though—once you've used the real thing, those colors look yucky.

One thing I've noticed about correcting J.P. is that it's easy to overdo it because there's no instant response to show he's gotten it, and you think he's not listening. If I force it on him he gets crazy, and if I persist beyond that, he cries. If I just matter-of-factly mention that this is how you do that thing, he'll apparently ignore it, but then spontaneously come up with it later, and *get it right*. I think it's really a lot easier to explain things to little children than you think—it's just that it takes much longer for it to sift through to them than you'd expect, especially if they've got a lot on their minds just then. It doesn't speed up the process any if you get them all upset, either.

Another thing that interested me in GWS #16 was the section on music. It reminded me that when J.P. was smaller we used to sing together, especially in the car. He would croon some sort of random tonal pattern—I hesitate to call it a tune—and we would admire his "song," and then he'd really belt it out. Maybe a true musician would have tossed him out of the window instead, but his doting parents liked it. Then I'd get into the spirit of things and sing along with him, which mostly involved trying to anticipate and match his notes. Gradually he got more predictable, and we also made up a game where he would suddenly hold some note and I'd have to match it and hold it with him. Just now he's more interested in the words of songs than the music, but I notice that when he sings, the tunes are getting more recognizable. I fully expect that one of these days he'll find out that *he* can match the notes other people sing.

J.P. has gotten very thoughtful these days. He asks, "What is a ___?" and "What do you call that?" a hundred times a day, and in between questions, he puts it all together as busily as a little computer. I think the wheels go round

in his head even when he's sleeping because he's been muttering to himself in his sleep lately.

I have trouble answering his questions clearly enough to satisfy him, without going into complications that create more mysteries than before. Even when you think you've come up with the perfect reply and that's the end of that, he mulls it over and two days later suddenly questions your answer. Slow motion dialectic, right?

J.P. has recently become interested in books. He likes me to read to him before bedtime, and I think I can see a pattern emerging already. During the day he's busy *doing* things, and at night he likes to think it over. If he's come across something interesting, he likes to see a picture of it in a book, or hear about other people doing the same things. I think evening is a much more natural time for study than sitting around in the daytime. During the day, if J.P. picks up a book, he reads it to *me* ("Once upon a day ..." upside down) but he's *doing*, he's not interested in listening.

I had heard that you should read to children from the time they're born, to "saturate" them with it and make them smart. Well, that might work with some kids, but J.P. never cared for it. He liked music, but he only started to respond to stories after he had begun to use his own imagination in playing, I think. He's vaguely interested in letters and numbers—I made him a set of large wooden numbers and the alphabet, and he traces the outlines with his crayons, but I think he mostly just enjoys the different shapes.

I'm starting a special fund in my desk drawer for J.P.'s education—books and materials now, and any training he might want later—out of whatever money I can make myself. One idea I had was that your other GWS readers might be interested in the patterns and directions for making the wooden alphabet set out of 1x4. It's really neat, if I do say so myself. I'll sell a ready-made set, too, if anyone wants one, but I'd have to charge about \$10, plus \$2 shipping. I could sell the plans for \$2—the idea they can have for free. I also made J.P. a number set, 0-10, which I could sell readymade for \$5. A simple cloth bag to hold the sets would be \$1.50.

Learning Italic Writing

Sherrie Lee (NY) writes out each issue of the *Homesteaders News* in calligraphy. We asked her some questions about learning calligraphy, and she wrote out her reply so beautifully that we thought we'd reproduce it directly in GWS. (This appears here reduced from the actual size.)

Dear John Holt:

I know of no book on italic writing for children. In teaching children in my classes I've found helpful Peter Rudland's *FROM SCRIBBLE TO SCRIPT*, which contains some examples of 10 & 11-yr-olds' writing as it improves with skill in italic.

Modern day script evolved from imitations of the copper engravings of the 1600's and 1700's. The curls and loops were very attractive, but not adaptable for most people using pen and paper. But this was the only method taught in the schools (the "Palmer Method" descended from it); the millions of "failures" had to make do with scribbling. Rudland says the copperplate imitation style is a "thoroughly unnatural writing technique . . . largely responsible for the decline of handwriting."

The advantage of the italic hand is that it can be written fast (with practice) without losing legibility. The italic style is based on an oval, rather pointed shaped letter. Grown-ups have to unlearn their rounded habits of script; a handicap children aren't burdened with when taught italic from the beginning.

I have the student begin with a pencil, then with two pencils bound together with a rubber band after I shave some wood off to bring the points closer together. This gives them experience with pen angles and variations of line thickness. They then find the first lesson with ink and nib exhilarating since the results are so pleasing. But italic lettering is very beautiful even when written with felt tip or ball point pen.

Enclosed is a page of italic letters which I use in classes which include children. After mastering these forms, using a Speedball C-2 pen (point is $\frac{1}{8}$ inch wide) the student is gradually given narrower pens to make smaller letters suitable for everyday writing.

What you are now reading is the formal italic hand, which I use for the quotations in *Homesteaders News*. Enclosed are two examples of italic hand as written by individuals for everyday use.

I will be offering italic writing for both children and adults at the 4th Annual Homesteaders Festival here in July.

Sherrie Lee Lovler
RD 2 Box 151
Addison, New York 14801

(In a later letter, Sherrie said she'd be happy to send the page of sample italic letters to anyone who sends a self-addressed stamped envelope. She also suggested another good workbook, *The Italic Way To Beautiful Handwriting* by Fred Eager, \$3.95 from Pentalic Corp., 132 W 22 St, NY 10011.)

Reading Music

Folksinger Pete Seeger said, in the Music Educators Journal, 2/80:

People should not learn to read music until they have a good repertoire of songs they like to sing under their belt. When they know what kind of music they like and how they want to sing it, then they can learn to read. One wouldn't teach a child dance notation before the child can dance. One never teaches a baby to read before it can talk. Music notes tend to freeze the musician into thinking these notes are the "way it MUST go.

Taping Books

From Ann Bodine (NJ):

One idea I've worked out to cope with diverse reading interests of oldest and middle child—whenever I read my oldest a longish children's novel that is beyond the comprehension of my middle child, I tape-record it so that my oldest can hear it again. (See also "Tape Recorders," GWS #17.) I do the same with the books I read my youngest which are too young for my oldest. Along the same line, I have just discovered the tape recordings of children's novels which the library carries. Listening to them makes up somewhat for the books I used to read my oldest which I no longer have time for.

Numbers As Objects

From Jeannette Baumgardner (CA):

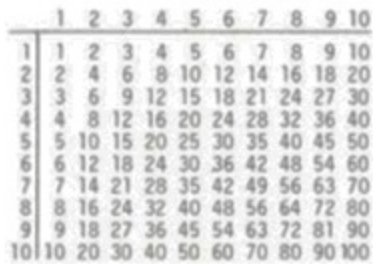
I now have further insights on math block—or numbers as gnomes (See “On Counting,” GWS #1.) I’ve tried to understand math in terms of analogies. That’s why I stare and stare at an algebraic equation with total incomprehension. It doesn’t look like anything. Finally I get it. . . . the letters are symbols for something else. Could numbers be only symbols?? No wonder I have trouble adding; numbers are objects to me. Multiplying is insane if “elevens” are noodles to you and “eights” are smug, fat, bald people.

Those Easy Tables—2

In GWS #17, we suggested one method for becoming more comfortable with the multiplication tables. Another thing you could do is simply to give the child a 3 x 5 card with a grid with the table filled out in pencil, and let the child keep the card handy, and use it whenever s/he had multiplying to do. You could say, “Whenever you don’t need a product on the card, erase it, so you only have the ones you’re not sure of.” As time went on, more and more would be erased. This would be a smart thing to do even in a school classroom. Less worrying about remembering would result in more learning.

If I were working with children who had never learned to be afraid of numbers or to think that the tables were hard, I would let them discover the patterns in the tables themselves. But with children (or adults) who had learned to think that the tables were hard and mysterious, I would probably make an extra effort to show them that the tables were easier than they thought.

For example, if you look at a



	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
3	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	30
4	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	40
5	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
6	6	12	18	24	30	36	42	48	54	60
7	7	14	21	28	35	42	49	56	63	70
8	8	16	24	32	40	48	56	64	72	80
9	9	18	27	36	45	54	63	72	81	90
10	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

filled-out multiplication table (or if you fill it out yourself), it’s pretty clear there’s a lot of repetition. 2×3 is the same as 3×2 , 4×9 is the same as 9×4 , etc. In fact if you were to fold the table down a diagonal line from the top left corner to the bottom right, the two halves would be mirror images. (And along the line itself are the “perfect squares,” 1×1 , 2×2 , 3×3 , etc.) This means we really only have to bother about roughly *half* as many products as it would appear at first glance—actually 55.

I would let the child be the one to decide whether or not to erase the penciled-in products. But if s/he decided to, what a relief it would be to see almost half that chart disappear. It might work best to have *two* filled-out tables, a permanent one-for looking at patterns, and one for the child to erase.

And that’s just a start. Next I might suggest, “Now we probably don’t

need to worry about the 1 row or the 1 column, or the 2 row or column, or the fives, or the tens, right? Because it's easy to count by ones, or twos, or fives, or tens. So we could leave them out." If she agrees, we're down to 21 products left.

But it's just about as easy to count by threes as it is by twos; you can do that in your head. So we don't really have to worry about the threes, we can leave them out. Perhaps some children wouldn't accept this at first, but with some time and practice, they would become confident about the threes.

And the four row and column are even easier, because they are just twice as big as the two row, which is easy. So all you have to do is double the products in the two's column. If we know, say, $2 \times 7 = 14$, then 4×7 is just twice that much, or 28. Nothing hard about that, so we can leave out the four row and column. Only ten products left to think about now.

But if you're good at doubling numbers mentally, most of these are easy, too. If to get from the two row to the four row we just double everything, to get from the four row to the eight row we just double it again. $4 \times 7 = 28$, so 8×7 has to be twice that much, or 56. In the same way, the six row is just twice as much as the 3 row. $3 \times 7 = 21$, so 6×7 must be twice as much, or 42. So we can take out the six and eight row and column, and that means there are just three products left.

Actually the entire nine column (or row) turns out to be pretty special. For example, as you go down the column, the left-hand digit in each product gets one bigger each time, and the second, right-hand digit gets one smaller. Another pattern: the two digits in each product always add up to 9: 18, 27, 36, etc. Furthermore, 3×9 is 27, 7×9 is 63, etc. the first digit is always one less than the number that is being-multiplied by 9. One way to understand that: if 7×10 is 70, 7×9 will be a bit less than 70: sixty-something. Sixty what? Well, it can't be, say, 64, because $6 + 4$ isn't 9. It must be 63.

So the only product left is $7 \times 7 = 49$. There's no particularly easy way to remember it. Of course, you can always figure out 7×6 , which is 42, and add 7 to that. But you'll probably find that after you've looked up 7×7 a few times, you'll know it as well as all the others.

Let me repeat: I would not do all this heavy-duty explaining to most children, because it is much more effective and exciting for them to discover these patterns themselves. But for adults or older children who had never gotten to know the tables, these facts can make them a lot easier.

You'll probably notice other things we haven't mentioned here. Work with the patterns; let the numbers help you.—JH & DR

At Home in VA.

More from Connie Schwartz (VA):

Actually none of our four boys have been in public school, although Bj. (Benjamin, 6) went to a Montessori school for a year when he was 3. We have been working with the boys for the last two years, Bj. and Aedin (5), that is Baron (3) and Nathaniel (1 ½) still do their own thing.

Bj. can read anything, does basic math including multiple column addition and subtraction, multiplication, division, and some fractions thrown in for kicks. He can do the math himself and is improving his methods all the time, finding faster, easier ways of doing more of it in his head. Aedin can read anything he wishes to, but at a slow pace yet, and does addition, subtraction, and some multiple column stuff.

I equate learning math with learning to reason. When I first started Benjamin on math, I used crayons or blocks, anything physical, to illustrate to him what was happening. I firmly agree that children need to physically see the concrete before they can understand the abstract reasoning. From this, Bj. went to a bit of finger counting and then to making dots or marks on scratch paper and using them to compute his work. I was just beginning to get a bit concerned with his long use of these marks when he decided *for himself* that it was too slow and awkward. One day I gave him 8×8 as a problem. Instead of dots, he said, “8 plus 8 is 16, plus 8 is 24, plus 8 is 32,” etc., until he had the answer. The very happy part of this is that he did each part in his head.

Now, just a few weeks later, he does nearly all his work in his head. Things are a little bit different with Aedin; he has a child’s toy with beads which he uses as an abacus. I know that they both understand what they are doing because I have heard them working together and with friends and explaining, not just the answer, but the reasons for getting there.

They also do lots of carpentry, building some pretty amazing things. I let them do it all, the sawing, the measuring, the hammering, and even the salvage of nails to use from old things. Bj. just recently spent some of his own money for the first time and bought some new nails.

They are also doing a lot of woodcutting this fall, with a pruning saw and clippers; they are cutting down 4–6 inch diameter trees about 10–15 feet tall

and cutting them up to woodstove length. They cart it in on their wagon and stack it on the porch to season and I know that they derive great satisfaction from this.

The sheep belong to them and as they get older they take over more of the care of them and are learning a great deal of animal husbandry. They help us in all the chores and work in their own capacity. We do insist that each one does what they are capable of, not just what they may happen to feel like doing. The little ones carry little sticks of wood and the big ones carry larger ones.

The older boys each look after those brothers who are younger than they, and are very responsible children. My husband is a volunteer fireman and one day when it was out of the house the fire monitor went off. Bj. got a stool, dialed the phone (I didn't even know he knew our shop number), and told his father that there was a fire in a certain place and what type of fire it was. He had never used the phone before, never been shown or told to do anything like that, but he knew that it was important and so pulled out the information from his computer-brain that fit the need and did an exceptional job.

We were both impressed! We have been trying to be very low-key about keeping the boys home. We live in a small mountain community though, and as three of the local women are bus drivers and two are teachers in the local school, we didn't expect to get by too long. Lots of folks knew that we were teaching the boys. Someone, intentionally or otherwise, turned us in to the school this year. The two oldest were supposed to be enrolled. We wrote that we were keeping the boys home and educating them here as our religion prevented sending them to school and we also wished to protect their mental and moral well-being. About the time we began to wonder if the letter had been lost in the mail, we heard from the school social worker. She indicated that this was the first time the school had been confronted with this situation and they had contacted the state authorities before getting back to us. The school board decided that they wanted no trouble over this as long as the boys were being educated at home they were happy.

I wasn't easy in mind until we got it in writing. Now I feel safe in letting others know what has happened to us. We have not been asked to meet any criteria or supply any information about the "curriculum" we're following. The social worker did make an "unofficial" visit to meet us and we showed her some of the material we had compiled from various sources; she asked to

see some of the boys' work and was visibly impressed. I just hope that this attitude of "hands off" on their part continues.

I firmly believe in letting the boys saturate themselves in something they are keen about. Why kill the enthusiasm by making what they are interested in seem unimportant, by insisting they go on to something else now?

They love mazes and hidden words and often design their own. They also make up math problems for us to do, and are very proud of us when we get the right answer. My sons love to play games, but not just to win. They play checkers for the sheer joy of being jumped and want you to give them some more men so they can move them and be jumped again! A friend of theirs can't understand or tolerate it. He gets really frustrated that they aren't out for blood as he is. This friend goes to public school and has constant colds all school year, which drastically affects his hearing.

Bj. helped me can all my peaches this year. He stood at the sink all day for two days peeling peaches, and we were able to keep up with a 9-quart canner—while alone I was unable to keep up with a 7-qt. canner. So you can measure the amount of help he truly was.

4-Year-Old Carpenters

I found this clipping in my files, from the Toronto Star of 3/26/72:

Carpentry is child's play to the junior kindergarten class at Kew Beach Public School. Adult-sized hammers and saws are deftly handled by the pint- sized 4 year old girls and boys as they build houses, trucks and airplanes from scrap lumber.

The children create wonders in wood. Many of their creations end up in Principal Shirley Simons' office, where they are proudly displayed to parents and friends.

Mrs. Simons, whose husband is a builder, supplies the wood and nails. The children supply the muscle, and parents often come in to lend a hand with the heavy work.

Young Professional

From the Boston Globe, 10/24/80:

The opening concert of the 10th anniversary season of Jazz Celebrations will have Roswell Rudd and the Flexible Flyers. Rudd has played with Archie Shepp and several other groups, and has been named No. 1 trombonist in the *Downbeat Critics' Poll* for 1975, 1978, and 1979. His 10-year-old son, Chris, plays percussion in the band.

Sharing One's Work

From Jenny Wright (NH):

As two families of our friends send their children back to school this year, I am struck by how important one's profession and *whether one's children share it* it is to the homeschooling picture. If Vanessa wasn't a real active member of our apple crews, appreciated by everyone, feeling herself responsible for getting in the crop, listening to and sharing her opinions in the discussions of problems that come up with group living, I doubt she'd feel as she does: that her life, though different, is just as exciting as most other people's lives.

Kids On The Job

Letters from two readers:

I'm happy to have a job where I can bring my 6-year-old son. He either helps me or finds activities. I'm a janitor in the afternoon for a public school. He also enjoyed going on truck runs with a friend of ours when she worked in a cooperative trucking company. He thrives on being part of the work crew.

I was glad to read about babies and children at work with parents. We live on my in-laws' Christmas tree farm and nursery. Forest was born 9 months ago and has been out to the field with us on many different jobs including shearing trees, inventory, and sizing trees.

This fall we're going to try baling and painting the trees with him along. Before he was on our backs in a carrier. But now he is quite active and I hope we'll be able to continue to work with him nearby.

A 3- Year-Old Learner

More from Karen Franklin (AL):

Since my children were born, I have gradually developed a way of life that fits in with all you've been saying for years. Before you can teach anyone anything, they have to have the maturity to learn it (physical maturity and emotional maturity) and they have to have the need to learn. For example, I decided long ago that I wouldn't put a lot of effort into potty training. I figured most people learn. I wasn't going to be the one trained him. ("Do you need to go to the potty, honey?") One day, Adam (now 3 ½) announced that he wasn't going to wear diapers, he was going to wear big boy pants. He's been trained since that moment.

He goes to bed when he's tired, eats when he's hungry. Meal time and bedtime is without conflict around here because we respect him and feel he can usually make these decisions himself. I don't mean that we don't have any rules, I just mean we don't have arbitrary rules. I think the ideas expressed in *The Continuum Concept* fit in here.

One thing that has worked well for us is to remove as many of the "Nos" as possible. There are some things of mine that I feel special about; if they were broken I would be unhappy. The obvious solution is to put them away for a while until Adam or Jessica is old enough to hold, look at, or use them. It makes no sense to have a crystal dish on the coffee table and be constantly saying "no-no." The things that are out are safe to play with and explore.

About right and left (GWS #3). I'm left handed. I remember my fifth grade teacher telling me to raise my right hand. I held up my *write* hand. The one that I wrote with. Everyone laughed, and I didn't know why. For some reason something was wrong—no one told me about "right" and "write." I still have trouble with right and left. After that day, I used to remember which was which by putting my hand over my heart as though I was going to "Pledge the Flag."

I knew that was supposed to be my right hand. When my son Adam was almost three, he told his father, "My cold leg hurts." His dad asked, "Is your leg cold?" Adam said, "NO! My cold leg has a scratch on it and it hurts right there" (He pointed to his right knee.) If you don't understand the logic of what he was trying to say, go to the bathroom sink and turn on the cold water.

Our bathroom is right by the hot water heater, and it is very important to know which hand turns on which faucet. At times when he can't understand right and left, we use "hot side" and "cold side" he gets it every time.

Adam has learned a lot about letters by "playing" with the typewriter. He asks me to type a line, and he tries to copy it.

We play a rhyme game every time we get in the car. I say, "I'm thinking of a word that rhymes with TREE, its part of your leg and it's your ..." and Adam shouts "KNEE." As many rhyming words as there are, this can go on forever. The game has evolved another step: I get as far as "It rhymes with ..." and Adam tells what word to use. Sometimes it's pretty hard to think of another word and definition that fit his choice!

Adam is coming to know that a library and book are where you can find out almost anything you want to know. Mt. St. Helens prompted a recent study on volcanos, which led to his latest interest, dinosaurs. I personally am sick of dinosaurs since we've had every book out 3 or 4 times and bought a few at the book store. I still don't know which one is which, but Adam does. At supper tonight, he told me he didn't have to eat his vegetables because he was a Tyrannosaurus and they only eat meat.

We've also used the library to find out about chicken pox (for obvious reasons), bees (after a sting), dromedaries as opposed to camels (do you know the difference?), why the sky is blue, what is a half moon, do birds cry, and how do you make pretzels. Our family has become involved with recycling because we read a children's book called *What Happens To Garbage?* The money we get when we go to the recycling center just barely pays the gas, but we feel we're teaching moral responsibility.

Adam doesn't read yet, but he is beginning to figure it out. He's always asking what words say. He has a favorite book or two memorized and if I skip a word, he knows. He has begun to compare words, and wants always to be the one to turn the pages. I feel like he'll teach himself soon, but if he doesn't, we'll continue to read to him. We haven't done anything to teach him to read except expose him to lots of books and show him in subtle ways that reading is an important skill.

At our house we have a quiet time in the evening. Usually Richard (my husband) and I read. Adam is welcome to stay up, but must do something quiet if he is going to stay in the room with us. Sometimes he chooses to play in his room, sometimes he lies on the couch and falls asleep, sometimes he

plays with crayons or puzzles or blocks or other toys, sometimes he asks to be read to. But more and more, he uses his quiet time to look at his books and ask questions.

Like you, I once tried running my finger under the words as I read. Adam told me to “Just read.” However, one day we were talking about signs, and Adam wanted me to make a sign that said ADAMS ROOM. Over the next few days we made signs for each room of the house, for the door, light, table, etc. I don’t think I’d have done it if he hadn’t asked a little too much like shoving it down his throat, if I had started it.

We take the kids to places where you usually don’t see kids; they usually do fine. If one of them really talks too much or seems to be disturbing others, we can always take them out. We have a small museum, a zoo, state parks, library, civic ballet, little theater, and farms, dairies, swimming holes, places to “pick your own” food, a friend who is a beekeeper, hot air balloon races, ice rink, antique shops, craft fairs, factories that give tours, free outdoor concerts, etc. I don’t think where we live is especially unique.

We couldn’t afford to go to most places if we had to hire a babysitter. The other reason we take them is because we’re all happier. I obviously can’t leave Jessica, a nursing baby, for long. Adam is old enough that he doesn’t misbehave (meaning that he can act like a “little man” so he doesn’t offend others—at least any more than by just being there). The children like to be with us, and we like to be with them. Richard and I aren’t really comfortable around people who don’t welcome our children.

Tools Versus Toys

From Barry Kahn in Maine (“Another Teacher,” GWS #16):

I don’t think Baby Joe (Jocelyn, our almost-one-year-old) is going to let me type very much, but I’ll give it a try. What I need is a silent invisible typewriter.

Speaking of typewriters, last night Heather (3) called me over, pointed to the letters she had typed, and said, “Daddy, these (on the paper) aren’t the same as these (on the keys).” She had discovered upper and lower case letters—and she wasn’t too pleased about it. So I showed her the SHIFT and LOCK keys and she went happily back to work on her name.

I think children instinctively recognize objects (and people, perhaps) of special power. I am thinking of musical instruments in particular, but probably fine tools, etc., would evoke the same reaction. I picked up my fiddle case this evening and Jocelyn, who has not seen the fiddle for at least two weeks, crawled across the floor like a sprinter before I had it half unzipped. She communicates at a very high level both with noises and body language, and when she saw that violin come out of the case she was “shouting”: SPECIAL TOY—Let me try it!” Which of course I did. Then Heather had a turn, and then I got a chance. They react to the guitar the same way. Heather, being older, is now becoming more interested in subtleties: how I hold the bow, how I strum the guitar strings. But the basic reaction of intense interest is the same in both kids. Believe me, they don’t react to plastic toys like that.

I think they know, somehow, that guitars and violins are in a special class of objects which last, which remain interesting forever, and also which demand something special of them. Heather checks herself on the fiddle like she does with the doorknobs around the house which she still can’t turn by herself—just a quick little self-test to see if the previous day’s growth has made any difference. She wants to be big, but she accepts that it will take time. She’s clearly confident, however, that when she is big, she will be able to do anything and everything all the adults she knows can do. It’s that confidence that I would like to keep alive and well.

Beneath the Himalayas of bull which the education industry produces every year, I perceive one fundamental belief: children can’t be trusted to

learn; they must be taught. And underlying the unschooling movement is the belief—which I fervently share—that children are curious, self-motivated learners-by-nature. I have faith in my children. A lot of folks don't. After watching Heather for three years and Jocelyn for one, there isn't a shred of doubt in my mind that my children not only are capable of directing their own learning, but that they have been since birth. We can help greatly, we can hinder terminally, but at least in the beginning the potential for children to learn and grow in tune with their own natural rhythms and readiness is present.

You have written about how hard it is to do no teaching, to let the learner, the child, direct things. I agree completely. We either have faith in children—or we don't. The consequences of no faith are visible everywhere. The consequences of faith, I submit, are beyond the imagining of most adults because neither they nor anyone they know was allowed to grow up in trust and faith. I certainly wasn't. In fact I can only imagine what my children will be like in ten or fifteen years if they pursue their own interests and aren't forced to sit year after tedious year waiting for something to happen, learning to be good test-takers, learning to psych out their teachers, etc., ad nauseam. Life is too short to spend it in classrooms.

Good News From Texas

From Sally Wilson (TX):

All the people who have contributed to GWS have meant a great deal to my family. You have sparked our interest, given us faith in our project, supported us. I would like to share our story.

We moved to the country three months ago looking for “The Good Life,” fresh air; independence, hard work, freedom. We found all these things. Our boys, John (9), Jimmy (5), and Davey (3), have gained an inner peace, a beautiful sense of wonderment, and a freedom that was unobtainable in the heavily populated suburbia from where we came.

John and Jimmy were eager to start school. Determined to learn. Excited to work. The second week of school I received a mimeographed form letter from Jimmy’s kindergarten teacher which read: “Your child has committed the following infraction of school rules: Throwing a cookie at a boy who threw one at him. As a result of this action, your child was reprimanded and spanked.” This was his first infraction of the rules. The spanking involved being taken from the classroom and swatted three times with a paddle in view of another adult witness. The offense took place at recess time.

Rather than confront the teacher, I called around to see what other parents’ feelings were on this subject. The poll was unanimous—whatever the school does is right.

I cautioned Jimmy, but told him that I did not agree with his teacher and would find some way to prevent this from happening again.

I read John Holt’s article in *Mother Earth News*. Suddenly, it seemed important. I ordered GWS and read all six issues. My husband and I, well aware of the system’s resistance to change, decided the change had to be ours. We had big plans to do thorough investigations of laws, children’s reaction to home schooling, and our own skills. We had experimented with small scale home learning. The boys loved it, and so did we. It worked. But our plans were to be slow, careful, leaving no stones unturned.

Meanwhile, John had developed severe headaches and stomach pains. He cried all one night because he had forgotten his homework book, and begged to stay home the next day. We tried to find put the boys’ problems, but they would not open up their feelings. About all we could do was give them some

feeble reassurance.

I was pleased when John's teacher asked me for a conference; I thought this would be an insight to our problem. I will let the conversation speak for itself:

Teacher: I want to speak to you about John's attitude. He says you do not want him to be spanked in school. If I am going to have any control I need your cooperation.

Me: Are you asking if I will allow spanking? I will not.

Teacher: I cannot make the children do anything unless I spank them.

Me: Are you saying the way to learn is through fear and punishment?

Teacher: It's school policy, you do not have anything to say about it.

Me: I have something to say to the principal. I want an appointment with you for me and my husband.

The principal was in the hall and I questioned him on leaving the classroom. He said, "It is school law, state law, and federal law. There is nothing you can do about it."

Oh, but there was something I could do. We were not prepared. The whole idea came to us suddenly and not much time has passed. We grasped at straws, determined the boys would never go back to that school.

We knew so little about our state laws, as learning about them was a project we had intended for the future. I called people in the GWS Directory; they were very concerned and helpful. One man in particular led us to the decision we finally made. My husband called lawyers, government agencies, anyone, and everyone.

The Texas State School Board was helpful. They said we could take our children out of public school at any time provided we enroll them in a private or parochial school. There are none in this area. This is a point in our favor. My sister owns and operates a private school fifty miles away and has agreed to enroll my children and help us set up a home study curriculum. She will advise us and we will go to her school once a week or as needed. This is perfectly legal. We must call the public school and advise them of what we are doing—and they cannot do anything about it.

All of this—the teacher conference, the phone calls—took place today. It proves the "Where there's a will, there's a way" theory. It proves there is a hope if we will not accept less than our dreams, if we help each other. We are aware there will be setbacks and rough spots. We are not afraid because we

know this is right.

If there could ever be any regret for our actions, all I have to do is remember my son today when he came home. I told him I knew what had been happening at school and he apologized for it. Now I knew he couldn't tell me before because *he thought everything that happened at school was his fault*. I hugged him, loved him, and told him over and over, "It's not your fault. It never was your fault. You will never have to feel that way again." And we cried together, for ourselves, for the poor creatures who run the school, for relief.

Please add us to the Directory.

At Home in Utah

From Patricia Gurley (UT):

The kids love the freedom of “no school.” I am quite prone to lean toward unschooling as so many seem to be doing, but I still find myself with a tendency towards keeping the kids “on top” of math and grammar. Otherwise their reins are pretty free.

Brendan (10) is teaching himself the recorder and guitar and has always been an avid reader. Cindy (6) loves to learn, but loves to learn what she wants to learn when she wants to learn it. I’m enjoying watching where their heads are taking them—and they’re so very much happier and carefree than are school kids.

I recently took a college course in sign language and finger spelling and of course, I’m teaching it to the children. They love it. We’re using the finger spelling to learn spelling—sneaky, hmm? And they *think* more about what they’re spelling it seems, than when they just write words.

Since we live 1500 miles from our families, letter writing has become quite a tool for language and writing skills, and the grandmas respond quickly enough to make writing worth the time and effort involved.

Since we are Jehovah’s Witnesses, we lack no companionship as we go out in the door-to-door work together almost every day, and Brendan and Cindy do enjoy that. We also attend five hours’ worth of meetings per week where both of the children are enrolled in the theocratic school (as are we, their parents) and they are learning to give talks from the platform.

We are all enrolled in dancing and gymnastics classes, and go roller skating almost every week. We live in Canyon lands country right near Arches National Monument (4 miles north). We swim in a beautiful creek with every size pool imaginable, which runs for about 20 miles from Moab to the La Sal Mountains. So our lives are full and happy and we’re very thankful for your books and newsletter as a needed positive reinforcement. Brendan is reading *How Children Learn*.

Ontario Courses

A reader writes:

Ontario parents may be interested to know that correspondence courses are available free of charge from the Education Ministry, Correspondence Education Branch, 909 George St, Toronto M4W 3G2.

To qualify for Elementary School courses, one needs a medical certificate if not well enough to attend school, or a recommendation from senior education area if distance is the reason (including travel and temporary residence outside Canada.) These restrictions also apply to the high school courses. Students in grade 11, 12, or 13 at public school can also take one of these courses with the principal's permission.

What interested me is that these courses are also open to adults seeking further education or enrichment. They are free of charge to Canadian citizens resident in Ontario. Included in the high school courses are courses in Typewriting, Computer Fundamentals, Accounting, Creative Writing, Readings in Wilderness, Archaeology, Science Fiction, German, Latin, French, Investment Computations, Carpentry (lumber kit provided), Printmaking, Photography, Cinematography, Art History, and Practical Art (art kits provided or loaned.)

It seems a marvellous free opportunity for enrichment. A younger person could be "fronted" by an adult who would apply for the course if the younger person could not qualify.

High school certificates issued by the Correspondence Education branch have the same validity as those issued by Ontario secondary schools.

I have applied for French for myself and plan to include my 11 and 6 year olds in the lessons (cassette tapes, too). The next one will be Typing, then some Art, and who knows.

State Aid

A Michigan reader writes:

The local superintendent says when our children return to public school they will refuse to promote them. We are proceeding with our plans anyway and hope to keep them out of public school from now on. He candidly told me it comes down to a choice between what's best for my children and what's best for the school system, and if they let me "get away with this" then all the other parents who are unhappy with school will pull their kids out and the school system couldn't function if that happened. In this state they lost as much as \$1600 per child.

We need to do some research to find out, in as many states as possible; what are the specific laws and/or administrative regulations on state aid, so that we can find or invent ways in which schools can cooperate *without* losing state aid. We'll be grateful for any help readers can give us with this.

Calif. Unschoolers

The Sacramento Bee, 9/7/80:

Laura Joyce of Broderick, a big-eyed, intelligent 8-year-old, didn't go back to school last weekend her curious, livewire brother, 5-year-old Alex, didn't start kindergarten.

Instead, Laura, a voracious reader, spent the day with her nose in "The Marvelous Inventions of Alvin Fernald." She built some miniature furniture for her Barbie doll and swung from trees.

Alex tinkered with the old clock he's been trying to fix, zipped through several pages of a math workbook, and dug in the garden.

Together with their mother, they did some research to identify and study the Goliath beetle they had found. Their mother, Jane Joyce, has strong beliefs that school is not a good place for children to learn the lessons she believes are important for them, lessons about respect and decision-making and cooperation and Goliath beetles. She also has strong beliefs that home is a good place for the children to learn, a place where they can become proficient in all the school stuff known as basic skills, plus learn more things than a school could hope to fit into a day, a whole range of subjects and skills that educators might describe as an enriched curriculum.

Joyce believes Laura and Alex should be able to become competent at everything from library skills to cooking, without being exposed to what she considers are negative messages about competition and violence, and the drudgery of learning she believes school teaches.

So this fall, after playing hide and—seek with the compulsory education laws for much of the past three years, she decided to confront the issue head-on. Rather than refuse to allow school officials in the door when they came to warn her that she was breaking the law by keeping Laura out of school, Joyce offered a compromise.

If she would enroll her children and keep standard attendance records so the district could claim them for financial purposes, and if the staff

could test the youngsters as they wished, and if a teacher could make periodic home visits, Joyce asked, then could she teach them at home?

She petitioned the school board to approve the arrangement under a state law that allows for independent home study.

Thursday, the Washington Unified School District board made “independent study” a legitimate program at the elementary grade level within the district. And Friday, Joyce negotiated with Rudy Jakosa, assistant superintendent of instruction, about the form independent study would take for the Joyce children.

Their mother wants them at home full time, perhaps with a teacher coming in twice a week to supervise their studies. Jakosa still wants them in school 75% of the time. Usually this would mean three hours a day, until noon, but Jakosa said there would be flexibility to allow for full days off.

Monday, Joyce is supposed to report back to Jakosa about whether she will accept his offer, one she clearly doesn’t like.

Joyce first learned to distrust schools while teaching for five years in New York schools. “I kept thinking the problem was the particular school,” she recalls. “But it was the system.”

“The most loving teacher cannot possibly love 30 children,” she holds, “or know each time they are turned on or turned off. In fact, the finest teachers I know are tortured by the system they must work in, get burned out, and leave.”

Her children learn gardening and carpentry because of her involvement with those activities. Laura helps her balance the checkbook. When she goes to the library to read a rare book she’s ordered, the children find books and tapes there in their areas of interest.

Many people who find school a limiting institution in terms of academic skills and the acquisition of knowledge still defend it for its role in socializing children. But Joyce’s view of that socialization is

critical. “It’s one of the biggest reasons not to send them to school,” she said.

“I don’t want them to laugh at the weakness of others, to tease, even if that’s the norm. I want them to be able to spot cruelty, and call it what it is. “I don’t want them to be told they’re cheating if they help their neighbor. Or to be in trouble if they talk to their friends, or think that tattling on their friends is OK. I don’t want them to be trained to be good robots. I want them to be aware, to have practice in making good decisions. I want them to question authority, even if it’s mine, hard as that is. If they’re immersed in a book, I don’t want them to feel they have to stop that to go to circle time, to deny their own reality that way.”

She is working to earn California teaching credentials, a move that the district says would allow her to educate her children at home legally.

Jane Joyce (see Cal. Dir.) wrote us that the above arrangement with the local school did not work out, and she plans to establish her own private school. Meanwhile, the same school district that would not let her teach her own children at home has hired her to tutor other people’s children.

Young And Old

More from Eileen Trombly in Connecticut ("Back Home," GWS #15):

Here we are into our seventh year of home-instruction and things are going along smoothly.

There always has been and still seems to be a great deal of concern over this socialization business. Over the years I have observed enough with our own three children to feel entitled to voice my personal observations and opinions concerning the matter. Spencer and I have always stressed quality of friendship rather than quantity of friends. Our children have learned the value of having one or two close friends and the work involved in developing those relationships; as opposed to many superficial friendships. We have seen how superficial friendships have served only to create disappointment, insecurity, and distrust in their peers. Lori, Amy, and Sarah have all maintained a social life best suited to their individual needs, rather than living up to parental expectations, or the pressures and demands of a school-oriented social life. They are comfortable with managing their own social programs and involvement and have developed a confidence around people of all age groups that is simply not visible in school attending children.

For an example: Amy, 14, has taken ballet lessons from an older woman in town and has developed a unique, warm relationship with her over the years. The woman is now in her eighties, still participates in dance, and has a very interesting past which she shares with Amy. The lesson is one-on-one so there is always much time for sharing and feeling relaxed in each other's company. The teacher was once a ballerina in the New York Ballet Troupe; owned a theater with her husband, who was in vaudeville; was daughter-in-law of a former Connecticut governor; and was acquainted with Anna Pavlova. She has much to offer in the way of experiences, and her polished yet friendly manner has served to influence Amy in a very positive way.

Relationships with older people have affected all the girls in positive, creative ways. There is a depth and sincerity in it that has taught them how important human relationships really are. Trust and respect for the generations develops and the "gap" never gets a chance to start. They enrich each other's lives with the enthusiasm of the young combined with the wisdom and experience of the old. This is not to say, however, that they don't

have friends their ages, but that they *choose* to develop relationships with people anywhere from 5 to 70 years older. They feel secure in these friendships and do not fear rejection.

Lori has always been able to deal with people of all age groups and with the opposite sex, as well. She is now sixteen and has problems with older people only when she gets the feeling that they are trying to put her down due to her age. She is often expected to function as a “normal” sixteen year old and becomes frustrated when not allowed to apply her knowledge or be respected as a person.

Sarah, although only ten, has also had the opportunity to establish relationships with older people and people of the opposite sex. Her paper route, consisting of many senior citizens, has enabled her to do this. Many have reached out to her and she, in turn, has received them. The time Length of her route varies each day according to the needs of her “friends” that day. She is able to sense their loneliness and they seem to have time to listen to each other ... apart from the pressures of the younger world of fast living and continual activity. One of Sarah’s hobbies is making greeting cards. Her thoughtfulness in remembering these neighbors with her cards has come back to her in many pleasant ways. They *have* the time for her and she *takes* the time for them. This is all by choice. The girls each have their one or two “best friends” their own ages and these friends are truly sincere.

Superintendent's Fears

A reader writes:

This was my first meeting with the school principal. I had called him to make an appointment when he had “considerable time.” I told him my objectives: to take our children out of school because I consider it an undesirable situation and to educate them at home, and that the reason for my meeting with him was to see if we could do this with cooperation and communication between the school and us or if outright war was the only alternative. I made it very clear to him that it was not him personally or this particular school, but the system I reject. We talked for several hours, but I got nowhere.

Finally he asked the superintendent of schools to join us to share this development with him and get his views. Well, the Superintendent listened until he heard I intended to take the children out of school at which point he said, “Well, the law is very clear, we must report absences or we are fined. Either you send your children to school or we have to turn it over to the district attorney because I’m not going to person for you.”

Until I read this parent’s letter I did not realize how genuine was the fear of some school officials that if they allowed a family to teach their own children they themselves might get in serious trouble. This poor devil’s notion of the law boils down to this: If you try to teach your kids, I have to put you in jail, and if I don’t, someone will put *me* in jail. Untrue, and absurd but he really believes it.

First of all, the laws of many states specifically provide for something other than attendance in, school, whether this be called “home instruction” or “equivalent instruction” or whatever. As I said in *GWS #12*, “*They Have A Choice*,” the power to approve or disapprove of home instruction rests in almost all states at the *local* level; the superintendent does not have to answer to any higher authority.

But even where the law speaks only of “school attendance,” the schools still have a legal right—not a duty, but a right—to approve home schooling. As far as I know, schools have the right to define “attendance” in whatever

ways they wish. No state statute says that “attendance” can only mean bodily presence in some school building. Under the law, schools have the right to assign students to field trips, apprenticeships, job training programs, travel, or instructional programs (like the Parkway Project in Philadelphia) where for months on end students do all their work outside of school buildings. Under the laws as written, children are attending school whenever they are taking part in an instructional program, *in whatever place and of whatever kind*, that is approved by the school. There is nothing either in the statutes or the case law (court rulings) to prevent a school district, if it wishes, from assigning certain children to study at home.

Before would-be home schoolers have any kind of meetings with the superintendent and/or school board, or begin to discuss any details of their own homeschooling program, they should write the superintendent a letter making the points above. In this letter, it might also be well to add, “If you know of anything in the statutes and/or the case law that contradicts what I have said above about the meaning of the law, please let me know as soon as possible. Unless I hear from you to the contrary, I will assume that you agree in substance with my interpretation of the law.” This puts the burden on them to show (if they can) that you are mistaken. If they do not, and later try to take part in some kind of legal action against you, they will be in a weak position. You can show that you tried to find out what the law was, and that, despite their legal obligation to do so, they did not tell you.

It might also be well to send the same letter not only to the members of the school board but also (1) the county attorney (2) the state department of education (3) your state Legislators (4) the local welfare and/or child-service organizations, since the schools often use these to press charges of child neglect, and (5) the judges of the juvenile court.

After you have sent out such a letter, and waited (not very long) for a response, you can begin to talk to school people, in person or by mail, about teaching your children at home, and the ways in which you intend to do this.

If and when you write such a letters, please let us know what responses and results you get. Let me say once more that the point of all this is not that the law says that schools must cooperate with home schoolers, but only that they can if they want.

New Laws: Wisc.

The Wisconsin legislature recently passed some amendments to the education laws, which formerly made no mention of home instruction. In part:

Assembly Substitute Amendment 1, To 1979 Assembly Bill 1075

Section 10. 118.15 (1) (d) and (e) of the statutes are repealed and recreated to read:

118.15 (1) (d) Any child's parent or guardian, or the child if the parent or guardian is notified, may request the school board to provide the child with program or curriculum modifications, *including but not limited to:*

5. Home-bound study, including nonsectarian correspondence courses or other courses of study approved by the school board or nonsectarian tutoring provided by the school in which the child is enrolled.

6. Enrollment in any public educational program Located outside the school district in which the child resides. Enrollment of a child under this subdivision may be pursuant to a contractual agreement between school districts.

(e) Any decision made by a school board or a designee of the school board in response to a request for program or curriculum modifications under paragraph (d) shall be reviewed by the school board upon request of the child's parents or guardian. The school board shall render its determination upon review in writing, if the child's parents or guardian so requests.

And Louisiana

Mrs. Raymond (Hazel) Anderson, 1420 Prentiss, New Orleans LA 70122, writes:

A great victory has been won for parents in the state of Louisiana. Act 828 (complete text follows) is now a law which allows parents to teach their children at home. As of this writing, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education of the state of Louisiana is in the process of formulating how the home study curricula will be approved.

So a parent no longer has to face harassment by authorities, fines, and/or imprisonment (as one mother experienced in Monroe, La. this year). It's amazing how criminals are free to roam our cities and parents are being imprisoned nationwide for caring enough to see that their children receive a good education!

State Representative Louis "Woody" Jenkins (Baton Rouge district) sponsored the bill. I asked him to co-author it when my husband and I met him at a Pro-Family Forum conference at which he spoke in Monroe, La. in February, 1980. Since our own representative was not able to sponsor it for us, Mr. Jenkins agreed to do so as he had already considered writing such a bill himself.

We withdrew our own son from a terrible public school situation (16th grade) at the end of December, 1979, and used the Home Study Program of the Christian Liberty Academy 1203 E. McDonald Rd, Prospect Hts IL 60070).

We are thrilled that "average" citizens can get a law passed under our system government. Until this year, we didn't even know who our legislators were! If you need any more info, please write.

1980 REGULAR SESSION

DEFINITION OF A SCHOOL UNDER GENERAL SCHOOL LAW

Act. No. 828

House Bill No. 1782

Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

Section 1. Section 236 of Title 17 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950 is hereby amended and reenacted as follows:

S. 236. Definition of a school. For the purposes of this Chapter, a school is defined as an Institution for the teaching of children, consisting of an adequate physical plant, whether owned or leased, instructional staff members, and students. For such an institution to be classified as a school, within the meaning of this Chapter, instructional staff members shall meet the following requirements: if a public day school or a non-public school which receives local, state, or federal funds or support, directly or indirectly, they shall be certified in accordance with rules established by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; if a non-public school which receives no local, state, or federal funds or support, directly or indirectly, they shall meet such requirements as may be prescribed by the school or the church. In addition, any such institution, to be classified as a school, shall operate a minimum session of not less than one hundred eighty days. Solely for purposes of compulsory attendance in a non-public school, a child who participates in a home study program approved by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education shall be considered in attendance at a day school; a home study program shall be approved if it offers a sustained curriculum of a quality at least equal to that offered by public schools at the same grade level.

Section 2. If any provision or item of this Act or the application thereof is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions, items, or applications of this Act which can be given effect without the invalid provisions, items, or applications, and to this end the provisions of this Act are hereby declared severable.

Section 3. All laws or parts of laws in conflict herewith are hereby repealed.

Approved Aug. 1, 1980.

Class Action Suits

People in several states have talked about filing “class action” suits on behalf of home schoolers. I think these people may have mistaken ideas about what class action suits are, and if so may wind up wasting a lot of time, energy, and money.

Class action suits are used, as far as I know *exclusively*, in cases where monetary damages are sought. They don’t fit our situation at all. For example, the families of babies deformed by Thalidomide filed a class action suit against the drug manufacturers, asking for (and getting) considerable amounts of money for care and treatment of the victims.

The impression I get is that these folks who talk about “class action” are trying to get a court to rule in favor of homeschooling in such a way that it will be binding in all future cases in the state. They’d like a court to say, “Not only can *this* family appearing before us teach their children at home, but from now on *any* family who wants can teach their children at home, and it is none of the schools’ or the state’s business.”

There is no way to do this. That isn’t the way our legal system works. In our system of law, there is no such thing as a “binding precedent.” Judges may be and usually are very strongly influenced by precedents, since they like the law to be consistent. But they are not *and cannot be* bound by them.

However, if a court makes a strong decision in favor of a homeschooling family, as in *Perchemlides* here in Mass., this will do a great deal to dissuade other school boards from trying to make trouble for home schoolers. What those concerned “class-action” people could do instead is to prepare the strongest possible case for one intelligent, dedicated, and articulate family with a very well worked-out educational plan which they are prepared to defend at length, with all manner of quotes from educators, legal decisions, etc. If this family wins, later families, even those less well prepared, can then draw on that as a precedent. It doesn’t guarantee success, but makes it much more likely.

But there is no way to get a court to make a decision that will *permanently* bind other courts. If a case comes along which is sufficiently different from the case that set the precedent, there is nothing to prevent a court from saying, or a lawyer from trying to get a court to say, “The former ruling does

not apply here.” Courts have said such things thousands of times.

Home-Bound Equivalent

From an Indiana reader:

I've noticed something to be true you mentioned in your article in *Mother Earth News*. Our 8th grade boy broke his left arm and injured his left leg, and has them both in casts. He is to be home from school until the 1st of December, so we have a home-bound teacher coming each day. She doesn't come until 3:30 p.m. each day and is only here *half an hour* to help him with a whole day of school work. *She grades the papers he's done and makes new assignments and leaves . . .*

In other words, not only is this teacher in the boy's presence for 2 ½ hours a week, but during that time she gives *zero* hours of assistance or instructions. Nothing is shown or explained, no questions are answered. There is nothing done here that could not just as easily be done by mail. Indeed, many of the schools that now work with parents from a distance, such as Calvert, Santa Fe Community School, etc., do a great deal more. Yet in the eyes of the local school district, the compulsory education law is being satisfied by this sketchy treatment.

Once again, we ask and urge readers to find out all they can about what public schools in their district and state actually do with children who are home sick. This information can be very useful to families for whom the schools are trying to make trouble.

More College At Home

From Quest, Feb/Mar. "80:

Last March, Emil Berendt became a college graduate by earning a B.S. degree from the University of the State of New York. Not for another three months did he receive what usually comes first—a high school diploma.

At 16, Berendt was the youngest of more than 9,000 people who have won college degrees without attending college classes, through USNY's pioneering Regents External Degree Program. While going to high school fulltime in Katonah, NY, he had managed to earn 126 college credits (six more than he needed) solely by studying at home and passing a series of exams in different subjects. His B.S. degree cost him only \$320, plus the expense of a few books.

Students can earn credits toward these external degrees in three ways. Some, like Emil Berendt, choose to sit for rigorous multiple choice exams, which are given several times a year at test centers across the country and at military bases around the world. There are minimum acceptable scores for each test.

Other students, like John Hagan of Williamsburg, Va., may have studied at several colleges or universities over the years but were never in one place long enough to meet the residence requirements for a degree. Last January, Hagan had the transcripts of all his prior college work sent to the New York Regents program for evaluation. (Any classroom or correspondence course taken at any time, from an accredited institution, is acceptable if the student has maintained a C average.) Since Hagan had more credits than a B.A. requires, he got his degree in June—at a total cost of \$106.

James Enright learned Vietnamese during his four years as a U.S. Army code breaker and interpreter. A widower with two small children, he managed to complete a Regents B.A. last March. He combined credits from three schools, one correspondence course, some college-proficiency exams, and a special assessment of his

fluency in Vietnamese. . “The program was a breakthrough for me,” says Enright. “After a lapse of nine years, I completed all the requirements for a bachelor’s degree in about 13 months.”

New Jersey’s Edison College uses individual assessments whenever possible as an integral part of its program. George R. Meisler got his bachelor’s degree at 65, partly on the strength of his 40 years as a labor leader and editor of a trade union journal.

The Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning in Columbia MD offers free telephone information about schools all over the country that evaluate and give credit for “prior learning.” Call 800-638-7813.

In the University Without Walls program of the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, students earn bachelor’s degrees largely by designing their own courses. Most are working people who plan and carry out a project on the job, guided by university faculty and perhaps by a community adviser with special knowledge of their field. To graduate, the student must meet certain general criteria (a command of written English and the methods of scientific inquiry, for instance) and must prepare a dossier to prove his mastery of his major subject. UWW students register for full time study and pay full tuition rates (\$307 a quarter), but they also qualify for standard financial aid. They do not have to spend any time on campus. Students of the Minnesota program live in many other states as well as other countries. One British woman earned her B.A. from Minnesota while teaching in Zambia.

One of the important new ventures in off-campus education is the University of Mid-America, based in Lincoln, Nebraska. Its radio and TV courses for home study can lead to a degree from one of 11 participating Midwestern universities located in seven states.

(For more about College At Home, see GWS #9 & 14.)

Possible Resources

Issue #66 of *The Mother Earth News* (PO Box 70, Hendersonville NC 28791), page 122, announces the formation of local chapters of *Mother Subscribers*. It seems to us that many GWS readers might want to take part in this, as a way of getting in touch with people who are not only likely to be sympathetic to home schooling, but probably also skilled and resourceful. Annual dues are \$25, in addition to the cost of subscribing to the magazine (\$15/yr.).

Another group that may have people sympathetic to unschooling, as well as much valuable knowledge, is *La Leche League International*, 9616 Minneapolis Av, Franklin Park IL 60131. They have local chapters, a national newsletter, and books and reprints on natural childbirth, breastfeeding, midwifery, nutrition, etc.

By the way, another source of information on these topics is the book catalog of the *Childbirth Education Supply Center*, 10 Sol Drive, Carmel NY 10512.

Offer

From Ken Maly, Rt 2 Box 78, Rushford MN 55971:

I am a bookbinder. Anyone who wishes to have the GWS newsletters bound should simply send me the ones to be bound, \$10.00, and name the color of cover they want, and I will bind them and send them back. They should allow four weeks (not because it takes four weeks to do it, but because it may take me three weeks to get to it!).

We Need You

Discussing why some people don't renew their GWS subscriptions, a reader writes:

I wondered if it was that at least some of those folks don't *need* GWS anymore. I know that when my daughter first left public school my anxiety level was so high that I would literally grab GWS from the mailbox and read it from beginning to end before I went to bed that night. That was almost two years ago—and it's all been so easy, so smooth, so satisfying that I can't imagine why I worried so much. Now I scan GWS over a week's time.

I'm sure she's right. I think a lot of people did need GWS very much at first, and that after a while they reached a point where they felt they didn't need it. That's good; all good teachers, and GWS is a kind of teacher, want to help their students get to the place where they don't need them anymore. But even when our readers don't need us, *we need them*, so that we can keep on putting out GWS for the people who do need it. To people who no longer need GWS and feel they have too much to read, I'd say, instead of a subscription, why not send us a contribution?

Of course, there are many reasons for reading GWS that have nothing to do with need. It's a good place, probably the best place, to find out how the home school movement is going, and growing. Also, we keep reviewing new books for our list, and parents who can't afford to buy many of them can always look for these books in a library. We have had much more stuff about music and art in recent issues, and will have still more about them, and many other subjects, in issues to come. We will always be looking for ideas and information, and will print any we find, about ways in which young people can join adults in serious work. Finally, through the Directory and other kinds of networks that are beginning to spring up, home schoolers will be able to meet more and more people who feel as they do about children and schooling, and how to help young people make their way into the world.

Well, if people don't want to read about all that, that's fine. Help us with contributions instead. We have a very long way to go before home schooling, which has become easy for some, becomes easy for everyone.

On Roy Masters

From Gary Arnett (NS):

I was not surprised to see in *GWS* #15 one of the letter-writers (Valerie Hilligan, “At Home in Illinois”) mentioning that she practiced the meditation taught by Roy Masters and found this strengthened her convictions toward unschooling. The group of parents who started the “school” I have written you about (*GWS* #13) practice this meditation also. I am sure there must be other *GWS* readers and/or unschoolers who use this meditation, and have also gained insights concerning schools and the destruction of children by adults through listening to Roy Master’s radio programs and reading his writings.

Roy has written a number of articles concerning education (“Why Education Fails,” “The Deception of Education,” “The Letter Killeth”) that might be of interest to *GWS* readers. I know of no one else on syndicated stations across the continent who so openly and forcefully advocates unschooling and explains the harm being done by the schools. His address is The Foundation of Human Understanding, 8780 Venice Blvd, Los Angeles CA 90034.

Imposing Values

Stephen Arons (GWS #12), writing in 1978 about the Perchemlides case, put an important issue very well:

The family's suit contends that the school committee's standards for approval of home education must be minimal. Since the family's rights of privacy, conscience, and belief are at risk in government regulation of education, the suit seeks to require that any regulation of the right of home education in Massachusetts be justified by a compelling state interest. Most important, the Perchemlides call for *an end to the practice by which education standards and truancy laws are used to impose the educational philosophy and political and cultural values of the school bureaucracy upon individual families.*

Seeks Community

From Christina Lloyd, 2369 Van Horn, Memphis TN 38112:

My husband is currently a senior medical student. We are trying to figure out where to do a residency. A large factor of where to do it is whether I can find other parents who believe as we do that we can share teaching in the home.

I think it is very important to have age peers to share learning with. Other children learn best from group experiences of learning (some of the time anyway.) It's more like sharing learning and teaching helps. My six year old teaches a great deal to my 4 and 2 year olds, including reading and numbers to the 4 year old; the 4 year old teaches color names to the 2 year old, etc.

I like using games like *Scrabble* (with 5 and above) or *Chutes and Ladders* to teach numbers. It has been frustrating at times, but it was really rewarding when my oldest read his first book to me. He just turned six and recently read me an "I-Can-Read-It" book (60 pages!), *Mitchell is Moving*. Science experiments are fun and easy to do. My husband contributes with anatomy and medicine lessons. Writing letters to friends is my best trick for practicing writing.

Well, I can hardly wait to get the magazine. Can I put an ad in it so we can find a favorable town to live in?

Extra Booklets

Now and then it happens that we have more booklists printed up than we need for our mailings, speaking engagements, etc. If any *GWS* readers would like to have some of these booklists to mail to friends, distribute at meetings, etc., we would be happy to send them out. Please tell us your name, address, and quantity desired (25, 50, 100, etc.); we will keep your request on file and send the book—I lists when we have extras to spare.

End-of-Year Sale

We have seven hardbound copies of the *Guinness Book Of World Records*, 1980 edition, that we want to clear out as soon as possible, so we are making this special offer: we will sell them *for what we paid for them*, only \$5.97, plus postage (60¢ for 1 or 2 for 25¢ each for 3 or more). These books have a publisher's retail price of \$9.95. Hurry—when these seven are gone, we will have to refund any other orders.

New Books Available Here

Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior, by Ed Clayton (\$1.35 + post. This is the story, told well and simply for young readers (and well illustrated by many pencil drawings), of the life and work of a great American and human being. It begins with the story of his father, a remarkable man in his own right, who grew up the son of a poor sharecropper, went to Atlanta when he was fifteen, and after eleven years of heavy labor during the day and study at night, got his high school diploma. Five years later he graduated from Morehouse College and became a minister.

The book goes on to tell the story of young Martin's growing up in Atlanta, his struggle over his own impulsive nature, his love of language, his education and call to the ministry, and finally of his leadership of the non-violent Civil Rights Movement, his winning of the Nobel Peace Prize, and his murder.

Those heroic, hopeful, and in the end tragic years seem very far away today. It is hard even for those of us who lived through the Civil Rights years to remember them clearly, and there may well be many children growing up who do not even know about them—which would be almost as much a tragedy as Dr. King's death and the decline of his non-violent movement. This book will help keep the memory of those days, and of that man and his vital work, alive.

Just So Stories, by Rudyard Kipling (85¢ + post). These famous stories are fables, written for English children and set against the exotic backgrounds of Asia, Africa, Australia, or the sea. For those who may never have heard of them, they are about such things as "The Elephant's Child," "How The Leopard Got His Spots," "How The Rhinoceros Got His Skin," "Why The Sea Is Salt," and so on. They are a delicious combination of story-with-moral, myth, and nonsense. And (like *ROOTABAGA STORIES*) they are full of the kind of repeated rhythmical long words and phrases, like "the great gray-green greasy Limpopo River," that children love to hear read aloud.

Mixed in are the original strange and fascinating illustrations by the author, and some delightful light verse, of which I will quote a bit, for parents of young children:

I keep six honest serving men;

(They taught me all I knew)

Their names are What and Where and When And How and Why and Who.

I send them over land and sea,

I send them east and west;

But after they have worked for me,

I give them all a rest ...

But different folk have different views;

I know a person small—

She keeps ten million serving men,

Who get no rest at all!

She sends “em abroad on her own affairs,

From the second she opens her eyes

One million Hews, two million Wheres,

And seven million Whys!

Voyage Of The Dawn Treader, by C. S. Lewis (\$1.75 +post). I realize that I made a mistake in GWS #16, calling one of the Narnia books “*The Voyage of Prince Caspian*.” The third book in the Narnia series is *Prince Caspian* (\$1.75), in which the English children go back into Narnia in a different time and help a young prince escape his murderous guardian and regain his throne. In this fourth book. *The Voyage Of the Dawn Treader*, the children return to Narnia some time later, and go with Caspian (now King) on a long sea journey to the very edge of the world, with the usual exciting adventures on the way. Another fine story.

A Wizard Of Eathsea, by Ursula LeGuin (\$2.00 +post). This is the first of three books (we will add the other two later) about Earth sea, an imagined

world of islands in a huge ocean, in which magic is a widespread and accepted fact of life. On these islands, young people with special talents and desires train to be wizards just as in our world they might train to be scientists or priests. But with their special powers come special responsibilities and duties—wizards are assigned to duty in places that need them, places to which they might never have chosen to go. And there are many limits to their magical powers. One of the first things young wizards must learn (unlike so many modern scientists in our world) is to use their powers responsibly and sparingly, no more is than necessary.

This book tells how a boy, Ged, finds out he has magical powers; how he goes to the school for wizards to get his training; what happens when he uses his new powers wrongly, boastfully, just to show he has them; and how he atones for this nearly fatal mistake.

I love the Earthsea books. In some ways they are like the Tolkien books—the worlds they describe are pre-industrial, full of natural beauty and skillful work in other ways they are very different. The Earthsea books are much shorter, there is little or no fighting in them, their world is an ocean world, not a land world, and they are much less crowded with creatures, speeches, and events than the Tolkien books—they are quieter, more reflective. The Earthsea world is if anything even more real to me than the Tolkien world—I felt completely a part of it, and felt it as a real world long after I had finished the books. I look forward eagerly to reading' much more of LeGuin's work.

Until recently, and perhaps even now, we had cultures on earth in which magic was a reality. A very good book about one of them is called *We Chose The Islands*, written by a British colonial officer named Grimble. See if you can find it in a library; it appears to be out of print.

Famous Ghost Stories, Ed. by Bennett Cerf (\$2.65 +post). This contains some of the great classic stories of the supernatural, including, "The Beckoning Fair One," probably the best of all haunted house stories, "The Monkey's Paw," about magic wishes we would be better off without, and the very short story "August Heat," which I (and many others) consider perhaps the finest of all ghost stories—though no ghost appears in it. There are also two of the best stories by M. R. James and "Saki" (see our list), which will give a taste of their work to any who may not know them.

A Pocket Book Of Short Stories, Ed. by Edmund Speare (\$2.75 +post). When I first taught English in a school, in 1953, I used this collection, and

I'm delighted to see it still in print. It still seems to me the best general collection of short stories I know. Every story in it is a classic and a masterwork, many of them would be hard or impossible to find outside this collection, and they have great variety and range.

I am particularly glad to see saved in print three of my special favorites: Anatole France's "The Procurator Of Judea," which is about Pontius Pilate, and whose last line is one of the great surprises in literature; Thomas Mann's "Disorder And Early Sorrow," a very touching portrait of a little girl and her adoring father; and my favorite of them all, R. L. Stevenson's "A Lodging for The Night" (which I have not been able to find anywhere else), which is about the medieval French poet Francois Villon, who, at the end of the story, has a long argument with an old nobleman about right, wrong, honor, and duty, that raises questions that are still not easy to answer.

Wonderful stories—many of them good for reading aloud.

Five Stories, by Willa Cather (\$2.65 +post). These stories are a good introduction to the work of an American woman who wrote a number of sensitive and loving books about what might seem the harsh and unforgiving country of the Great Plains and the Southwest, and about the people who settled there.

One story, "Paul's Case," is about a teen-aged boy so overcome by the glamor and luxury of wealth that his everyday "real" life became unreal and intolerable to him. Written before TV had brought the dream world of wealth and success right into everyone's living room, the story seems more prophetic than Willa Cather may have realized.

Of the other stories, one is about the Southwest, the others about the Great Plains, all of them very gentle, slow-paced, and affectionate stories about "ordinary" people, the kind who are usually not much written about, but are here brought very strongly to life by her writing.

Robert Frost's Poems (\$2.00 + post). This is a collection of the best poems of a great American poet and my favorite of all poets who have written in English—I can't think of any other who has written so many poems that I really love.

What appeals to me most about Frost's poetry is the power and depth of thought and feeling that he gets from such simple words. Take "Fire and Ice," a special favorite of mine. It is only 9 lines long—49 words. 6 of these words have two syllables—all the rest have only one. Yet with these short words

Frost says as much about human life as most poems, or even books. In “The Death of the Hired Man,” an old farmhand, worn out by a life of hard work and too old to do any more, comes unexpectedly to the house of a young farm couple who used to hire him. The man wonders why he has come there, instead of going to relatives who live close by. In reply his wife says, “Home is where, when you have to go there, they have to let you in.” How could it be said better?

If some of the poems are somber, others are very tender and lighthearted, and some—like “Departmental,” very funny in Frost’s dry New England way. I’ll close with a quote from another favorite, “At Woodward’s Gardens.” In this a boy takes a burning (magnifying) glass to a zoo, and uses it to focus the sun’s rays to a pinpoint of heat with which he teases a couple of chimps. One of them grabs the glass away from him, and the two of them take it back into their cage, where, trying without success to figure out what it’s for, they only demolish it. Then they come to the front of the cage to look wryly at the boy again, and Frost ends the poem with these very useful words:

They might not understand a
burning glass.

They might not understand the sun
itself.

It’s knowing what to do with things
that counts.

The book is illustrated with many beautiful woodcuts of the country about which Frost was writing. A lovely collection.

To Kill A Mockingbird, by Harper Lee (\$2.65 + post). The film of this book has made it so well known that some might think they don’t need or have no reason to read the book, since they already “know what it’s about.” If so, they would miss one of the best novels ever written about children growing up, and perhaps the best about growing up against a background of social conflict and change. The story is told by Jean Louise Finch

—“Scout”—who is about six when the story begins, and who lives with her older brother Jem and their widowed lawyer father in a small town in the Deep South in the 1930s. The author is unfailingly good at seeing the world as a child that age would have seen it; Scout is not a wise adult disguised as a child, but a real child, who notices a lot of what the adults do but still can’t make much sense of it.

No need to say much here about the plot. But there is much more in the book than the film. Atticus Finch, like Thomas More in *A Man For All Seasons*, is very much a man of his place and time. He has lived almost all of his life in the same little town in Alabama, plans to live the rest of his life there, and hopes his children will do the same. He is not itching to turn the place upside down. He is willing and even glad to take his world much as he finds it, and again, he wants his children to do the same. But there is a line he will not cross, even at the risk of his life.

The book is in important part about how a civilized parent (with the help of neighbors and friends) slowly civilizes his beloved but barbaric little daughter. For Scout, like all healthy young children, is a barbarian, like a Homeric Greek: brave, impulsive, fierce, proud, passionate, and vengeful. Not for anything would her father break her proud spirit—he knows that a truly civilized person is the very opposite of a cowed savage and resentful slave. He civilizes his children, makes them more patient, generous, tolerant and compassionate, mostly by his own example. His virtue is a magnet to his children even as it is a burden and nuisance to them—though it often makes their lives harder, it pulls them irresistibly in his direction.

I never get tired of reading this book. What fun it would be to read aloud.

The Pocket Book Of O. Henry Stories (\$2 .25 + post). Here are many of the best and most famous of O. Henry’s unique and delightful stories—wry, witty, cynical yet sentimental, full of ingenious and convenient twists of plot. No great studies of character here, but much pleasure, and great fun to read aloud.

Guide To Home Energy, by *Mother Earth News* (\$3. 60 +post). This is a collection of many of the most important articles on home energy that The Mother Earth News has carried over the past few years. It covers, among other things: bio-gas plants, compost water heaters, woodstoves, hybrid poplars (this article alone is well worth the price of the book), heaters, different kinds of solar homes, solar furnaces, wind generators, small scale

turbo-generators, the New Alchemists, etc. An incredible bargain.

A Reverence For Wood, by Eric Sloane (\$3.60 +post). This is another beautiful and informative book about a too-little known part of our history and heritage, a good sequel to *Diary Of An Early American Boy*. It is about wood and its uses and importance in the lives of earlier Americans, and how the colonists built or made almost everything they needed from it.

In these words Sloane says much about a quality of life and an attitude toward living that we seem largely to have lost—but that we may be starting to regain:

In 1765 everything that a man owned was made more valuable by the fact that he had made it himself or knew exactly from where it had come. That century of magnificent awareness preceding the Civil War was the age of wood. Wood was not accepted simply as the material for building a new nation—it was an inspiration. Gentle to the touch, exquisite to contemplate, tractable in creative hands, stronger by weight than iron, wood was, as William Penn had said, “a substance with a soul.” We can see why the early American’s attitude toward the forest was reverent, and why when the colonies sought an emblem of independence for their flags, it was a tree.

Like his *diary*, this book is filled with Sloane’s beautiful pen and ink illustrations, which often tell us far more than any photograph could.

Readers might be interested to know that for many kinds of loads laminated wood beams are not only stronger than steel beams of the same weight, but are far more able to withstand fire. And not long ago (and perhaps even now) a very small company in England built sports cars with a wooden chassis, which they claimed was stronger and more shock-resistant than a modern steel chassis of the same weight.

Muddling Toward Frugality, by Warren Johnson (\$2 .65 +post). Now that this book is in paperback, I’m happy to add it to our regular list (I’d been thinking for some time of adding the hard- cover edition to our On-Demand list). It is a very hopeful book about the difficult times we are living through, which make so many people feel hopeless. What we as humans and as Americans are going to have to learn—or rather, re-learn—is to live frugally, within our natural means. Johnson says, first of all, that this is a good thing in itself, that living more frugally will make our lives not worse but better. He then points out that this change to a more frugal way of life is one that we are in fact *already* making. And he shows very convincingly that the rather

fumbling, bumbling, haphazard way we are doing this is not only the best way to do it but may be the only way we *can* do it—that if we tried to make this change happen through some giant, sudden, top-down plan we would create more problems than we solved.

In support of this it's worth quoting an astonishing fact from an encouraging and important article by Amory Lovins in the Nov. "80 issue of *New Age*. He points out that in the years "72- 78, of the *new* energy that became available to the countries of the European Economic Community, only 5% came from much well publicized sources as nuclear plants, North Sea oil, etc. 95% came from people using energy more efficiently. The EEC energy bureaucrats to whom he pointed this out could hardly believe it, even though his figures came out of their own books—they had been working so hard to get that additional 5% of energy supply that they did not even notice that the people of their countries, acting quietly, individually, in small groups, or as organizations, were nineteen times as good at "finding" energy as they were.

In the U. S., for the same period, 72% of new energy came from conservation—and the figure is surely much higher now, as we are beginning to build much more energy-efficient houses, burn more wood, drive smaller cars, etc.

One of the ideas that would alone make this book well worth having is the idea of *ecological* history, of seeing the history of any given country or region in terms of the raw materials and energy sources available to it. In some early chapters Johnson does that, and tells me many fascinating facts and connections between facts that I never knew and would never have guessed—and would certainly never have found in any conventional history books.

There are a few ideas I don't altogether agree with. Johnson is 100% right in saying that as a country, we should be paying replacement cost for our oil—that is, for every barrel we use we should pay what it would cost to add an additional barrel to our capacity. If we did this, it would greatly speed our move toward frugality. But if we do this through "the market" alone, it will work the greatest hardship on the poorest people. Not only is this unjust and unfair, it's also politically unwise, for these people, in desperate self-defense, will find (indeed in such cases as returnable bottle bills, already have found) ways to resist and block the changes that sooner or later we will *have* to

make.

But this is a very minor criticism of a very good book. Most books that help us see more clearly where we are, make us feel worse about it. This one makes us feel better.

Hiroshima, by John Hersey (\$1.75 +post). Soon after the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, John Hersey went there and wrote this report for *The New Yorker*. It may well be the most widely read piece of journalism ever written; the book is now in its 50th printing.

Instead of trying to describe the results of the bomb in any overall way, he let six survivors, five Japanese and one German Catholic priest, tell what happened to them when the bomb fell and in the days following. He kept out of his story his own shock, horror, and fear, but simply told, as matter-of-factly as if he were describing an everyday event, what these six survivors saw, heard, thought, felt, and did. This calm, detached, almost emotionless way of telling the story makes it all the more real and terrifying.

When I first read his article in *The New Yorker* I was horrified by the vastness of the destruction and my strong feeling—which still remains—that in dropping the bomb we had not only committed a kind of crime, but had created far worse problems than we had solved. Insofar as I thought about the people of Hiroshima, it was only as pitiful victims. Today, reading Hersey's account again, and with the wisdom of hindsight, I am astonished at the patience, courage, unselfishness, and endurance shown by the Hiroshima survivors as they struggled to recover from their great disaster. If an atom bomb were to destroy an American city, would the survivors here behave as well? I hope we don't have to find out.

At any rate, this account of the results of what by today's standards is a very small and primitive atom bomb is something we all ought to read now and then, just to remind us of what we are messing around with.

The Word For World Is Forest, by Ursula LeGuin (\$1.60 +post). In this story, a ruthless space colonizer—and we may be sure that if we ever colonize space, we will do it as ruthlessly as we have colonized Earth—invades a rain forest world of gentle tree-worshippers. He uses them as slave labor to cut down all their trees to ship to Earth, which has destroyed all its own trees. When this world is treeless and barren, he plans to abandon it and look for another. But as this story shows, his plan does not work out as he hoped.

The story is in part based on fact. As many of you know, the rich countries' of Earth are right now clear-cutting the rain forests of the Amazon Basin and the East Indies, forests which, once cut down, will be destroyed forever. The people who happen to live in these forests will be out of luck. For they don't have the powers of the people of LeGuin's forest world. If our colonizers are to be stopped from laying waste our world, we are going to have to stop them soon.

There's some rough language and violence in this story, and we don't recommend it for our younger readers. But other sections are lyrical and beautiful, and they, as well as the message, make the book worth reading.

A Death In The Family, by James Agee (\$2.25 + post). This very perceptive and moving book, Agee's only novel, is about a family—a young couple, their two little children, and their various relatives—and what happens to them in the few days following the sudden death of the father in an auto accident.

In part, the book is about families themselves: the complicated tangle of their lives and emotions, their loves, likes, and dislikes, their envies and jealousies, their deep understandings of one another, and their equally deep misunderstandings. In part it is about Mary, the young Catholic mother and widow, her heartbreaking struggle first to accept and then to bear the death of her loved husband, and the way in which her religious faith, which only her aunt shares and understands, helps her to do this.

But most of all the book is about the effect of his father's death on six year old Rufus, who even more than his mother is the central character of this book. Agee takes us into the inner world of this little boy, makes us see the world as he sees it, and feel as he feels. In all the books I have read there are very few if any portraits of the inner life of a young child to compare with this one.

School does not come into the book at all, but in one scene Agee shows us the pointless cruelty of the school-centered peer-group or child mob. In a flashback, we see the four-year-old Rufus, standing in his yard every morning enviously watching a group of older boys going to school. Day after day this mob of children, any one of whom, by himself, might have been happy to be kind to Rufus teases and humiliates him. They do this in a particularly terrible way, by using his natural trust of people and his desire to be liked by them to get him to tell them things about himself, and then making fun of

him, in a way that makes it impossible for him to be *completely* sure whether or not they are trying to hurt him. The art and the fun of the game was “to see how mean they could be to Rufus without killing his hope that they really liked him. It is a truly horrifying scene, and a powerful indictment of the “socializing” done by and in school.

In the book Agee also shows us something of the inner life of Rufus’ four-year-old sister Catherine, and it is remarkable how clearly he shows us the difference between a four-year old and a six-year-old, and beyond that, the difference between Catherine and Rufus as people—for they are nothing alike. From what we see of Rufus, we can guess that he may have a hard enough time growing up; but from the even less that we see of Catherine, we guess that she will have it much worse.

All in all, a most beautiful and remarkable book, for adults and older (13+?) children. (If children younger than that read and enjoy it, I’d like very much to hear about it.)

The Family Bed, by Tine Thevenin (\$4.50 +post). This book argues very persuasively for the “continuum” idea that children should not be left alone at night until they want to be. When young, children should be able to sleep in the same bed with their parents, and even when they are older, at least until they want a private sleeping place of their own to which they will), they should be able to sleep in the same room.

Until very recently, and perhaps still, virtually all child “experts” furiously opposed this, using various Freudian arguments which never made much sense to me, since children have slept with adults in most human cultures that ever existed. People who think that for children to sleep with their parents is a bad, immoral, unhealthy, dangerous, etc., idea will not have their minds changed by this book and should probably leave it alone. But people whose instinct is to want to have their children close to them at night, but who may have been intimidated by the “experts,” may be encouraged by this book to let their children sleep with them. And people who are already doing this, but are getting criticized by relatives or friends, will find here much useful argument and moral support.

Note that the book is not only written but published by the author. I hope it has the success it deserves.

Editor—John Holt

Managing Editor—Peg Durkee
Associate Editor—Donna Richoux

Growing Without Schooling 19

February 1981

Still very busy here in the office. The mail slackened a little during the holidays, but not much; our newest volunteer, Tim Chapman, has put in many hours helping us cope with it.

Latest news from Delacorte is they will delay the publication of *Teach Your Own* until August, so they can promote the book on radio and TV during September, which is a good month for that. My editor just showed us what the cover will be like—a great photo of the Van Daam family.

An AP story in the Jan. 8 *Boston Globe* says that the new U.S. Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell, is “a devout Mormon who believes that the desires of parents should always take precedence in the education process.” He has been commissioner of higher education in Utah, on the whole a good state for homeschooling—though he may not have had anything to do with that. Let’s hope that homeschoolers may find a sympathetic ear in Washington.

People magazine recently ran an article on an unschooling family, Charles and Eva Webb and their two sons (So. Calif. directory). Charles is best known as the author of *The Graduate*, and has written us a number of good letters.

Some readers may be surprised to find in this issue letters they wrote a year ago or even longer. While cleaning up my office in December, Donna found some wonderful letters that had been earmarked for GWS but overlooked in the general confusion.

Good news this time from Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Nebraska, and a number of other states.

—John Holt

Learning Swap

Anne Perkins (MA) writes:

Grace has company this year, as the Idoine children started homeschooling this fall. Grace and Gilly spend at least two days a week together and I thought you would enjoy hearing about those days.

On Tuesdays, they ride bikes or pony/bike (weather permitting) to a friend's house who is a weaver. There, in exchange for work they do (childcare, stacking cordwood, etc.) they learn spinning, carding, dyeing, and weaving. Grace has been doing this for 1½ years, and having Gilly along has increased her interest. She sometimes teaches what she's learned, thus learning it better herself.

On Thursdays, they are driven to the stables at 8 a.m.. There they feed horses and muck stalls for two hours, in exchange for a one-hour riding lesson. At noon they take a bus to the university. They walk up to town, go to the library, picnic on the common, shop—have “city” time. They catch another bus at 3:00 to a gymnastics school where they have a class. They are picked up there at 4:30. It's a rich day for them—both 12 years old.

The other days are spent closer to home, usually. Grace spends hours reading and at the piano—she's just memorized the first movement of Beethoven's “Moonlight Sonata.” Homeschooling is perfect for her!

Discovering Reading

Juanita Haddad (BC) writes:

I'd like to tell you about Nicole's reading (she just turned two.) Her favorite book lately is *The Friendly Book* by Margaret Wise Brown and pictures by Garth Williams. For some time now, Nicole has "read" the title and various lines inside while running her finger under the words as we do when we read to her. We've assumed she spoke from memory although she usually underlines the correct words as she speaks.

Yesterday, however, I put on a T-shirt for the first time that says *friend* in big red letters across the front (until then I'd hated wearing anything that spoke for me!). On an impulse I pointed to the word and asked Nicole what it said. Without hesitating she said, *The Friendly Book*. I somehow knew she'd say that but I was so excited anyway my eyes filled with tears and I grabbed her up in a big hug. She thought it a big joke and was ready to get on with other things but I remained ecstatic over the episode.

Nicole got magnetic letters for her birthday. As she stuck them to the refrigerator for the first time, we suddenly realized we were taking it for granted that she put them all on right-side up. Oh, this is such fun.

This all comes from nothing more than having plenty of books around since Day One that we've shared with her, memorizing nursery rhymes, etc., at her instigation. This is the way I want her learning to continue. If I can only hold back my excitement enough to keep from "helping", we'll do fine.

Ohio Court Ruling

An important story from the Cleveland Plain Dealer, 12/31/80:

Ohio's compulsory education law cannot interfere with parents' rights to send their children to religious schools, even though such schools do not meet minimum state standards, the Ohio Supreme Court said yesterday.

The ruling was in the case of a Knox County man who had been convicted of violating the statute. James Olin was charged because he did not send his daughter, Jennifer, to a school certified by the State Board of Education. Instead, he sent her to Kopper's Corner, a one-room Amish school near his home.

The Olins are not Amish.

Records in the case showed the religious school was without plumbing, and that the teacher, although having had 14 years of experience, had gone no further with his own education than the eighth grade. But there was trial testimony in which school officials said Jennifer's showing on certain achievement tests ranked fourth grade and higher when she was 7-years old.

Although the high court said deciding the case was "a delicate risk," it was done without dissent.

"Until such time as the State Board of Education adopts minimum standards which go no further than necessary to assure the state's legitimate interest in the education of children in private elementary schools", the court said, "the balance is weighted in favor of a First Amendment claim to religious freedom."

Reader's Digest Story

On the front cover of the Jan. 1981 *Reader's Digest* is a picture of a child and, in large letters, the words: "Is your child's teacher fit to teach?"

Inside, the magazine has reprinted excerpts from the *Time* magazine cover story of June 16, '80, called "Help! Teacher Can't Teach!"

Below that title appears this sub-title: "The crisis in our public schools grows worse and worse—at least in part because many teachers ace themselves undereducated, unmotivated, and incompetent."

These words, and parts of the story itself, may provide many unschooling or would-be unschooling families with useful ammunition, for their homeschooling proposals, for their legal briefs if they are forced to court, or perhaps for letters about homeschooling that they may write to legislators, editors, etc.

A word of caution about using this material. As we said in an earlier GWS, you must be careful not to put judges (or educational officials) in a position where, by approving your proposal, they will seem to be giving official support to the position that the public schools are no good. If judges or officials think that giving approval to your plan is going to be seen by the public as a sweeping condemnation of public schools, they are not going to approve your plan. So don't put them in that spot.

What you can say, and with some hope of success can ask judges or officials to support, is that such criticism from *Time* and *Reader's Digest* shows that the performance of the public schools does not justify their saying, with respect to your homeschooling plans, that if you don't do it their way you can't do it at all. And you would probably be wise to add the point that it is, precisely those methods of instruction and evaluation which the public schools try to impose on homeschooling parents that are among the primary causes of the schools' bad performance. You should say that you are not asking judges, etc., to agree with this statement as such, but only to agree that the right of parents to teach their own children loses most of its meaning unless the parents have the right to use methods of instruction and evaluation which may be very different from those used in the schools.

If any of you put such a statement into a homeschooling proposal or legal brief, we would very much like to see a copy of it, particularly if your

proposal is approved.

GOOD NEWS

From Bruce and Diane Hintze, Star Rt 1 226, Woodland Park CO 80863:

For the school year 1979-80, we chose to teach our children at home. Though totally ignorant of the process in the beginning, we visited a law library, looked up Colorado's laws, and then proceeded as pioneers (we felt) through school board meetings, etc. We were given approval, finally, and had a delightful year at home with our three boys, ages then 7, 9, and 11, using the excellent Pensacola Christian School Correspondence Course.

This year we chose to cry a Christian School, new in our town, but our experience with home study was so neat (though hard work!) that we may do it again.

If anyone wishes to correspond with us, they may. We received about one inquiry per week last year!

A California reader writes:

I just wanted to mention that a "concerned" neighbor reported our children as truant to the local school board. We were paid a visit by the principal and the health nurse last week. When I told him I'd filed a private school affidavit, he said that was all he needed to know. He then gave us an open invitation to use any of the school facilities we cared to use—any time we cared to use them! I was pleasantly surprised—not to mention relieved!

From Jeanine Lupinek (CT):

I'm enclosing a check for subscription renewal. Thanks to your help in sending a sample legal brief and a list of homeschool material suppliers, our five-year old daughter is ours again!

My husband presented our written request for school board approval yesterday. The superintendent was very friendly and helpful, even suggesting that we use the facilities at the elementary school (library) and let Mary participate in special programs they have if we desire.

We're using ABEKA books advanced kindergarten materials (just books, not curriculum). The cost is under \$100. There are three other unschooling

families in our area we know of.

Teacher as Mind Reader

A reader sent us an evaluation sheet that her 6th-grade son had to fill out after a classroom art project. The boy wrote the answers in the blanks; the teacher then wrote remarks on the form in red ink shown in italics.

1. Did this activity add to your store of knowledge? No. *I trust you mean, yes.*

2. Did your individual project(s) stimulate your thinking and creative imagination? No. *If yes, how? Because I was using wood Yes, because you developed an idea around the materials that were available.*

3. Did this activity increase your awareness of and of sensitivity to design in nature? No because it was a coat rack. *Mitten rack! Because you needed to use something from nature as your design.*

4. Did it offer you an opportunity for creative expression? Why? Why not? Because I cut my finger. *Because you were free to create with materials you enjoy.*

5. Did this activity stimulate your curiosity and desire to explore materials? Explain yes. Because I have learned how to make a coat rack. *Yes, because you had to figure out how to use the available materials.*

6. Has this activity increased your confidence in your ability to express your ideas? Explain yes. Because we got to use wood. *Yes, because you feel now more able to create something useful.*

Success in FL

Patricia Ann Mordes (FL) writes:

My husband and I were threatened by the school board this week. We had thought they would leave us alone because my husband teaches at the local junior college, and has been there for 22 years. He has more than 30 hours above his master's degree. The school board members are his former students and "friends." They are only doing their job, they say.

We went to Tallahassee yesterday, to the Department of Education. My husband thought he could register as a tutor with the state of Florida. He found he would have to take 26 extra hours in elementary education and be recertified for that. No way!

I went to the office of Mr. James Kemp, Room 275, Knott Building, Fla. State Dept. of Education (Tallahassee). He was very polite and cooperative. He said that anyone in the state could register their homes as schools. The many different religious groups had lobbied to get very flexible laws passed regarding education, so they can run their own schools without being certified and without worrying about separation of church and state. Kemp said that what applied to them also applied to anyone else in the state. We cannot be discriminated against just because we are uncertified or just "small fish." There are no regulations regarding content, certification, or minimum number of students. One must keep a roll of students, and they must attend 180 days per year. That's it. Kemp agreed with me that a child could get a sound education at home.

I am sending you a copy of the one-page form required for legality in this state. As of tomorrow I will be legally registered as a private school. Terrific!

Another Florida reader just wrote:

We are listed as a private school here in Fla., since last October. After writing the Dept. of Ed., asking about laws on correspondence schools, I was informed that the state does not approve nor does it regulate private elementary and secondary schools. I was worried about not being a certified teacher, until I dug a little deeper in some books I have and found a clause that states the requirements to hold a Fla. certificate to teach do not apply to

private schools.

So I held my breath and decided to call the Dept. of Ed. to see what they suggested. Imagine my surprise when the person I'd written a few times knew exactly who I was and was so helpful that there wasn't a doubt in my mind that there still are some real people in some of those departments. When I said that he was well informed on this somewhat awkward matter, he said he's talked with many other parents wanting to teach their own children (but not as far back in the boonies as us).

According to him I've fulfilled my legal requirements for a private school by filling out the one page registration form he sent us in October. He'll send us one each year afterwards until we decide to discontinue our private school. And if anyone questions our legitimacy, have them call him and he'll confirm that we're a registered school. He said call again any time if we have any problems or just to talk, and if we could collect a pile of paperwork such as attendance records, etc., someone would have a very hard time disputing our school.

I've done a lot of research and written a lot of people when it wasn't necessary, but I'm glad to have all the knowledge I've gathered under my belt. And now I have a lot more time to give to my daughter in helping her with things she wants to learn. She visited her friends down the road for the first time since summer. Their mother, the local first grade teacher, was glad to hear we were on our way with our school. We should be seeing more of them now, Jennifer to play and myself to swap ideas with the teacher

Making Baskets

Jeanne McDougall (AR) wrote:

We three have just returned from leading a very successful two-week basket-making seminar, held in an open air tent in a hay meadow in the beautiful Ozark hills. The environment is so relaxed, congenial and so conducive to learning in a no-pressure atmosphere; we are continually amazed and delighted with the results. The baskets our students are able to make in two weeks are comparable to those it took Doug and me two years to make on our own (back then there was no available instruction).

There were a few children in evidence, as the seminar is termed a learning vacation, but many of the students are retired. But with the exception of one nine-year old boy who was enrolled in watercolor, none of the children were students. His proudest painting was a gift to my 3-year old daughter, Plum Blossom (self-named). It was a simple, lovely watercolor wash of a single red plum. Who else but a child?

The young boy of another instructor hung around the basket class, with many questions, dying to make his own material and basket from a tree. We worked with him during lunch until he had woven his own.

As for Plum, she had a wonderful time, wandering freely and visiting with everyone, often successfully conning forbidden sweets. Her favorite class was the woodcarvers, as she watched fascinated as a Raggedy Ann appeared from a solid block of wood, and then, miracle, was given to her!

Almost everyone there talked of their children and grandchildren, whom they missed while on this “learning vacation”, and how well their children were doing in school, etc. Knowing how far back in the woods we live, many asked me what we were going to do about school for Plum. When I replied that she would remain at home with us, we became even more of a curiosity, and the familiar threatened look appeared in their eyes. So, cautiously, I pointed out to them that if Plum could attend “learning vacations” such as this seminar, I would be all for it. To which they replied, “This is not school.” No, this is not school, as you know it, I thought; this is a far cry from prison. This is a learning environment as it should be. Why is this environment available, all across the country, to parents and grandparents and so rarely to their children? I know that they would refuse to believe that they but not their

kids could learn anything in such a relaxed atmosphere. Apparently learning vacations are a luxury for mature adults. I would love to see seminars such as this for children—I would prefer to see a mixed group: children and their parents on a learning vacation together, working side by side. Unfortunately, it seems that many are also on a vacation from their children.

The upshot of all this and discussions with my husband is that we shall request that next year's seminar brochure state that we would welcome children in our class.

From a later letter:

Since I have been reading so much in *GWS* about children at work, I want to pass on that Plum has been involved in our basket making for all of her 3½ years, since this is how we support ourselves at home. Instead of being jealous of baskets for having taken up so much of our time, as I once feared she might, she loves them, has many of her own, and loves to go to shows with us when we exhibit them. She understands that we make many of them for sale and this is how we make our money.

She feels that the weaving is too difficult yet for her to attempt, so I'm not pushing her, and she is content (usually) to play and work alongside of me. But her father works outside, splitting the trees and making the material (actually much more difficult than weaving) and this past summer she jumped right in on this aspect of the process.

After she struggled for days on her father's shaving horse, he took the hint and built one her size. She was given a very sharp drawknife with brief instructions in the art of handling it. Although one draws the double-handled knife toward the stomach and it looks very dangerous, the nicks and cuts are only suffered while picking up and putting down the knife. For about a week her chief delight was in the amount of wood shavings she could pile up, but her interest never flagged and she eventually turned out some beautiful pieces of wood. She was given soft wood at first instead of oak, but now knows the difference and disdains anything but the hard stuff. No one said a word to her about manipulating her tools; she had been watching her dad do it for three years and she figured she knew all she needed to give it a try.

We have watched her learn skills and techniques that simply cannot be taught, they have to be a personal discovery. These are things that I, as the weaver, know very little about, for I have not spent much time with these

tools. This is a source of pride to her, for she knows that she is adept at something through her own efforts—and though she may not be as adept as dad, she is more adept than mom in this area. So she is comfortable in this non-competitive place because we three are undivided in our endeavours, yet individuals in our accomplishments.

As we often do, we sent Jeanne a draft of the parts of her letters we wanted to use in *GWS*, and she wrote back:

When I read a “success story” in *GWS*, I always think: “Wow, what a fine job those parents are doing, and what wonderful children they’re raising”, etc. I delight in and learn much from such accounts, but often sense my own shortcomings as regards parenting. One letter made me realize I was doing a lousy job helping Plum learn about money, for example. Thus, my letters seem to convey the same prideful sense that we are very far-out parents doing a terrific job. That’s OK—we are all bound to want to share the “best” with others, and as the “money” letter did for me I hope mine will enlighten and encourage others. But I would like to say that though we are doing our best, it often falls far short of perfection, as it must. There is so much for a child to learn and only so much we can do to help them. They, like ourselves, must eventually search out, discover, and learn the important truths on their own. With this in mind, I try never to be too discouraged and continue to do my best.

Children Help Out

Mary Bergman writes in the Home Educators Newsletter (which has changed its address to Star Route, Smithton MO 65350):

Paul Harvey gave us extensive coverage on his radio program, TV, and newspaper column. We understand that the broadcast was heard as far away as Japan. This has brought a deluge of inquiries and requests for information. There were days when I dreaded going to the mailbox because of the heavy load of mail which was being delivered. (I truly felt like the Little Red Hen taking grain to the mill.)

But, through it all, who have been our staunchest supporters? Who have taken over many of the responsibilities which I formerly carried? Who made meals and tucked little chick into bed while mother hovered over the typewriter or talked on the phone? Why, it was my children, without ever so much as a complaint. They took over where they were needed so graciously that I never realized what had happened. The kitchen stayed clean, I was called to meals, the bathroom stayed reasonably tidy, and everything was managed much better than it had before.

Response to Calligraphy

Sherrie Lee (RD 2 Box 151, Addison NY 14801) writes:

The reproduction of my letter in *GWS* #18 brought so many requests for the page of sample italic letters I offered that I am encouraged to offer lessons in the italic hand through the mail. These lessons are adapted for homeschoolers—both children and grown-ups—from the calligraphy classes I am currently offering in the area. The first lesson is free to *GWS* readers (enclose self-addressed stamped envelope). We will explain payment details to apply to subsequent lessons. Homeschoolers may even go so far as Advanced Calligraphy if they choose, or merely develop a good italic hand. Early lessons require only a felt-tip pen like the 79¢ Flair.

News From Canada

From Wendy Priesnitz (Ont.):

The Ontario Education Act is being revised with hearings next spring, so we'll be making a presentation just to make sure it stays as positive for homeschoolers and other unschoolers.

I must stress that the Ontario correspondence courses (mentioned in GWS #18) must be acquired "subversively;" the Ministry is very strong on homeschoolers and unschoolers not using them.

I'm now receiving requests for info from school attendance counselors, principals, etc.! We've got about 250 members in our Canadian Alliance of Homeschoolers.

Ed's Busy

Ed Nagel writes from Santa Fe:

The demand here on my time from all around the country has been unprecedented so far; I have corresponded with many more people directly, conducted more telephone calls/conferences, consulted with more parents/schools/lawyers about legal problems with educational alternatives, done more research/outreach on laws/cases, taken part in more meetings/conferences, workshops and worked successfully for more proposals for more funds in the past year than I have ever attempted over the last five years total; this, despite having the regular assistance of a paid person doing research and miscellaneous office work.

A New Tactic

Pat Montgomery reported in the newsletter of the National Coalition for Alternative Community Schools:

Last month a man in Michigan tried a new tactic. In order to comply with the law that says that your child can be tutored at home by a certified teacher, he found out that there is a rule that if a public or private school advertises three times in state universities for a position and no one applies, then they can hire a non-certified teacher. So they advertised for “elementary certificated teacher for home education program, 2 students, salary \$10 per month.” No one applied, so the parents can hire themselves.

Good News from Arizona

Hal Lenke (AZ) sent this clipping from the Prescott Courier, 11/20/80:

Reversing a decision of several months ago, the Humboldt School Board has approved a request by a pair of Prescott Valley parents seeking to teach their child at home.

In a 3-0 vote, the board said Howard and Karen Sheldon may take their child out of school in January.

Board President Gerald Caton said the fact the Sheldons had found a state-certified teacher for their child was a key factor in the board's change of heart.

Caton said the board motion will allow home instruction for the Sheldons' child on a one-semester trial basis. Many of the texts the student would have used in his regular class at school will be used in the home instruction program, Caton said.

The Sheldons' request is based on their claims that their child has failed once and would fail again if kept in school.

Mrs. Sheldon credited their success this time around to educational consultant Hal Lenke who made a presentation before the board.

Lenke said the child will receive regular weekly instruction from former Humboldt School District teacher, Pat Robichaux.

Hal added, "I'm told it's the first victory in the state. I got into the act, phoning the parents after reading the front-page story and suggesting I might be able to do some good. Meetings with lawyers, the school superintendent, the parents, and others followed. I boned up on Arizona law and drew up a proposed course of study. I smoothed the way behind the scenes, kept the lawyer out of the picture, decided to exhaust administrative remedies first, and to go at it as an exercise in community relations. I decided to avoid any issue over who the teacher would be by getting someone a I ready state-

certified, even though the law only says the teacher has to be qualified. Then I had to deal with one of the board member's objections that the boy would suffer socially by being home and not in school. Etc. Etc."

Advice from NY

From Harold Ingraham of the Independent Family Schools Resource Center (RD 1, Smyrna, NY 13464—see GWS #18):

We are now becoming more involved with families who are contacting us before notifying public school officials of the removal of their children. This is wonderful because with this approach the parents are able to sit down with us and review their situation before ruffling the officials' feathers. Therefore, we can aid them in outlining their curriculum from which they can work out their own family based plans of instruction. Often we review their write-up when they're done and work out the kinks.

We are finding that the pre-preparation of curriculum is making it much smoother for the parents to deal with the school officials. By having a full understanding of the NY law the parents are able to take a strong, articulate position at the initial contact. Also, the school officials are somewhat disarmed when they witness a layman's understanding. I always instruct the parents in the fact that they are not asking the school official's permission to teach their child at home. Rather, they are merely notifying him in person (which is not required by NY law—the mail would suffice) of the transfer of their child from his school to their home in compliance with the truancy law. Doing this in a mannerly and gentle way seems to have the best results.

Also, when the parents stress that they are going to teach their child at home in order to give him or her the best possible education, the officials invariably lean toward helping instead of resisting. This attitude is also reinforced by the parents not insulting the public school system by alluding to their sundry failures. By ignoring the negative and stressing the positive we are getting much better results.

The one fact parents must remember is that the less they scrap with the public school officials, the stronger and more effective their appeal.

Finally I would like to say: by the parents doing their background homework in legalities and curriculum, they are in effect letting the officials know of their ability to fight a good court case. Of course they are not giving all of their best shots at once, but only as the need arises. Once an official backs down or compromises, there's no need to use the remaining ammunition. Save it!

Nebraska Homeschoolers

Rog & Judy Duerr (NE) sent the following article from the Lincoln Star, 11/12/80:

School is a daily event at the Duerr home on Adams Street in north Lincoln. At about 8:30 a.m. 10-year old Jenny, 12-year old Eric and 14-year old Randy flip on the living room computer and gather around the fireplace with their mom and dad to begin a day-long education process that has replaced the public classroom in the first state-approved homeschool in Nebraska.

Both parents are former teachers in Lincoln public schools. Mrs. Duerr had to renew her elementary teacher certification before the state would allow the couple to educate their children at home.

The State Department of Education and Lincoln public schools helped the Duerrs set up their homeschool. "As long as a family has a certified teacher and can meet fire marshal regulations, there's not much problem in setting up your own school," said Veri Scott, consultant for the Education Department which has certified the Duerrs' homeschool.

Lincoln School Superintendent John Prasch offered supplementary materials and said the children could attend school part-time.

Besides a teacher, the state requires any elementary school to have a place and a program. The teacher can choose the subject matter. Mrs. Duerr must report regularly how she is meeting requirements put forth in the state's 100-page directional booklet.

"Whether or not a parent has his own school, his basic role should be to help the child buy into the idea that he's the only one who can make his education and his life succeed," says Duerr.

Although his children aren't in public schools, Duerr has kept his volunteer job as fund-raising chairman for the area Parent Teacher Association to encourage parent involvement in their children's education.

The couple admits their advocacy of homeschooling is considered heretical. Yet the time has come for homeschooling, the Duerrs believe, and they are trying to organize a statewide organization.

The idea of homeschooling is "obviously threatening" to many parents of public school students, Mrs. Duerr notes. They often ask her how her children

know what to learn and whether she thinks they're learning the right things. The Duerrs insist that children know what they are ready for, with a little adult guidance.

The children learn through jobs like changing the oil and spark plugs in the car, building a tree-house, helping with the home bookkeeping and delivering appliances from the Duerr's second-hand appliance store as well as by traditional book methods. They participate in the South Lincoln Track Club for physical education and attend weekly lectures at the university or YWCA. They regularly see educational films at the public library and take classes at the Community Playhouse. Each child creates his own weekly goals with his parents' help.

The youngsters frequently help their father and mother deliver home cleaning supplies from the home-based family business or the nearby store. They help with carpentry jobs at apartments the Duerrs own.

"We don't believe in standardized tests, but we teach our kids how to take them to prepare for the day they must go back to the public system", said Mrs. Duerr. "You can teach your child to score "genius" on tests."

Portfolios

Dave Campbell (“Helpful Prof in Action,” GWS #15) who is getting an average of 3 inquiries a week about the portfolio plan for evaluation, wrote this handout:

There is nothing new about the portfolio as a means of evaluating a person’s work, talent, ability, or accomplishment. Artists and photographers have traditionally used portfolios, as have models. Martinville College in New York was, as far as I know, one of the first to use the portfolio in an academic setting.

Portfolios for home study and private schools are intended to replace traditional testing, mostly the achievement tests.

A portfolio—simply—is a record of everything a student has done—either in a specific subject or for a period of time, e.g., one year of study. It should include:

- 1) All written work.
- 2) All trips and out-of-doors experiences, i.e., a record of them and what took place, what was learned, the questions and conversations.
- 3) Books and other items read.
- 4) The media events seen: movies, TV, radio, concerts, museums, exhibits etc.
- 5) Extended travel—a record of, and experiences.
- 6) The teacher’s comments, evaluations, reactions.
- 7) Description of activities such as: cooking and home repair, science experiments, nature studies, weather observations, hikes, observations, thoughts and interests.
- 8) When possible—photographs or other visual records of such experiences, in addition to special construction projects, should be included.
- 9) All art work.
- 10) The student’s own personal record of his/her progress.
- 11) The comments of others directly concerned: teachers, speakers, relatives.
- 12) A summary by everyone involved during the time/project/subject period.

Portfolios should be kept current (up-to-date), ready to be examined by

school authorities if required; also, a “history” of the child’s education could be kept by both teacher and child, showing progress from the beginning to the present and for use by admissions offices.

At the end of some period (six months, a year) a careful summary of the child’s progress should be included, e.g., the highest level of reading or math achieved (the latest book read and its difficulty, the latest math skill mastered).

The portfolio should be a large file (or box) into which these records and examples can be placed at any time to be arranged later.

The portfolio is intended to be a complete record of a person’s growth and accomplishment and so can include emotional and personality changes.

Learning with Joy

From Janet Williams (GWS 16):

Time is so very limited these days. I had an unrealistic idea of how life would be with home education. The constant noise from our very active lively older three is combined with the needed mothering of the younger two. It has been a draining experience on many days, but one I am learning to live with. I have shared more responsibility with the children, while reducing my perfectionist tendencies regarding the house.

Things were further complicated from September to November I as we provided day care for a migrant child. Now we have had a “multi-ethnic experience”, but the value was much greater than that, as our youngest, not yet 2, found a new friend and playmate.

All told though, every adjustment has been worth the effort. I see such inner peace within our children. They have a greater sense of personal responsibility in their own lives and in our family life. Oh, I still hear, “There’s nothing to do.” as they have not completely lost the expectation of having things planned for them. So I make a few suggestions—which nearly always are rejected because they suddenly get better ideas. Maybe all that is wanted is my caring enough to take a minute to offer ideas.

We are finding more and more people who want to homeschool. Reasons range from inappropriate education (moral or “intellectual,” from our contact with “gifted parents”) to harassment from burdensome, asinine regulations. When people see us, they begin to realize that they have another option. People who physically shuddered at the thought of home education when it was initiated in conversation six months ago, are now giving the matter very serious consideration.

I know one family who recently moved to Pennsylvania from the west. They wrote to their superintendent using parts of the Kendricks’ letter (GWS #12). The superintendent (Harrisburg area) said yes, requiring only a written program each September. They were in jubilant shock.

(From a later letter:) In August, when we first got the school books, Amy said that she *hated* math. She was so vehement about it that I put aside my fears of the Iowa tests (which we are presently locked into) and said “Just forget your math book. We will find other things to do.” Since the gifted ed.

teacher had told me that Amy was a visual thinker, I began to think of how to give her some visual math. First step was the Cuisenaire rods. I could literally see the tightness loosen. At first, when given $5 + 3$, Amy would look off in the distance, trying mentally to see $11111 + 111$. Over and over I had to focus her attention down to the rods. Gradually she learned that she could see the answer there—and this is a very bright little girl. Her head was so full of answers and formulas that she had forgotten her common sense. With time and freedom to be ignorant, she played with the rods and decided that $5 + 3$ really did consistently make 8.

I know that John has written all that over and over, but to see it in your own child makes such an impression. I also want to emphasize that in spite of the inherent learning, the rods are primarily a toy. We use them to make pictures, lines of numbers, roads for cars. The learning is incidental, not primary. And that to me is how it should be. Learning is a game, full of fun, life, and joy. It is not the work, drudgery, and pain which is all too often associated with it.

Amy and I continue to explore the world of numbers. We bake cookies in multiple batches. We play Yahtzee. Her mathematical wisdom is not always conventional, but it is *hers*. Therefore, it is unlikely that she will lose it or “forget it over the summer.” After just three months, math is now Amy’s favorite thing. I don’t know if it will stay that way, but it really does not matter.

When we first started our home ed. I shared the frequently voiced fear that “all they would do is read.” I was perplexed by my own attitude because I am an incessant reader. Then it dawned on me. The learning from reading is private. That is hard to swallow. We are so used to guiding (controlling) our little people that it takes some faith to let them take over even such a small part of their lives. Another frustrating aspect is that I can’t measure what is learned. That is really none of my business, but I had gotten caught up in the evaluation fever. The spectre of testing was ever on my shoulder, eliminating my good sense.

As ever, it was a particular incident that made me see the stupidity I had been caught up in, Jenny is studying U.S. geography. We were working on the southeast states. Our conversation:

Me. Do you know which state has the Everglades?

Jen: The what? (Looking at the map) Oh, Florida.

Me: Do you know what it is?

Jen: The map shows swamp and National Park.

Me: Do you know what animal is associated with it?

Jen: (thinking a bit) Snake? Like a water moccasin?

Me: Are there any others?

Jen: Oh, I know! An alligator! Nancy Drew was in Florida and there were alligators.

That taught me to quit worrying about what they read. I might not know exactly what information is acquired but I have learned that if they read for enjoyment, then the book will present some form of education.

I also thought about using the reading as a resource, dovetailing the curriculum with their interests. In studying Florida, I came across some ideas for Jenny. Audubon did much painting there (Jenny is an artist). Marjorie Keenan Rawlings wrote *The Yearling* (Ed.—just added to our booklist) based upon her years there. Mary Macleod Bethune was in Florida. So these are ideas for the future trips to the library for Jen since she loves art, fiction, and biographies of women. She will learn infinitely more about Florida that way than if she sat down and memorized the “important facts” in her textbook. This way I am rooted in love of Jenny, not in love of curricula.

Janet told us on the phone that she’s interested in starting a *Growing Without Schooling* group in Pennsylvania, along the lines of the New Jersey organization. Interested people can call her at 717-528-4049, or write RD 2, Box 181, York Springs PA 17372.

Growing in the Country

From the mother who wrote "Letter from California" in GWS #18:

Two weeks ago we gave up our house in town, put our belongings into the pick-up and just vanished back into the woods. This is a very poor and rural area with a lot of back-to-the-landers, 20% of the population is on welfare, and the county seems to leave people alone. So until trouble comes knocking at the door, we'll keep quiet.

Now a report on what's happening with the unschooling. This house is still being built around us so we have no regular routine which is probably for the best. Sam and Sara have loved helping with the carpentry (doing well at using the measuring tape), putting shingles on the roof, and getting in our winter wood supply. They adored the *I Hate Mathematics Book* and dip into it on their own every day. I also got *The Backyard History Book* from the same publisher and we've had fun doing family trees and personal histories.

Sammy has always been fascinated by archaeology (he's read many books on Sumer, Ur, Greece, and Egypt) and for the past two years has been digging up a burned-down homestead on our land—homesteaded since 1860 and once a stage coach stop—and now has a very nice collection of household, farm, and stable artifacts, as well as Indian arrowheads and spearheads. Last winter he had an exhibition of his finds in the county library and he's planning to build a museum on our land. This winter we plan to look up books in the library on the Indians who used this spot as one of their summer meeting grounds, and the early settlers, and write a little history.

Last week, we started *Arithmetic Made Simple* and Sara has enjoyed doing the first two chapters and is anxious to keep going. She says she loves workbooks and wants more, so I have ordered *English Made Simple* and *Spelling Made Simple*, and will report how it goes with them. She seems to need a few hours of planned work and then happily goes off to paint or play with the animals. She is now reading *Penrod* by Booth Tarkington and has recently finished *Born Free* by Joy Adamson.

Although they are twins, Sammy is very different from Sara. Sammy did Chapter One of *Arithmetic Made Simple* easily but I have to gently push him in that direction (whereas Sara asks for it). He says he hates workbooks and just wants to read and write on his own. But his spelling and handwriting

aren't that great so I want to work on them this winter. Sam also has a coin collection and spends time buying, selling, and trading coins. I've told him he has to be able to write checks and balance a check book, and that seems to give him an incentive to do math. He is reading all of Tolkien now (I read *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* out loud three years ago) and says it's better the second time. He's writing his own fantasy adventure story, doing sculpture in stone with carving tools his father gave him, and teaching himself to play the harmonica.

Originally we bought this land with five other friends, none of whom lived in the area so we've always been alone up here. But now three of the partners and their wives have just moved to the county seat, rented or bought houses, started businesses, and are spending weekends and holidays on the ranch. Between the three couples there are two children, ages 3 and 5, who are a bit too young to really play with Sara and Sam, but who bring a new energy into our lives. The partners are all planning or building cabins, planting gardens, and making plans for our future community here, and the twins spend their weekends helping in the activities or talking with them. One partner is a beekeeper and botanist, another makes videotapes, and the third is an expert mechanic, and they're all willing to teach Sammy and Sara their skills. In turn, Sam and Sara know more about this place and actual living off the land, and are teaching the grown-ups a lot. Already they are welcomed and respected by people twenty years their senior, which really pleases us.

Last but not least, an 11-year old friend from town came for the weekend and the three children had a marvelous time, gossiping and playing all over the ranch. His mother says he can come anytime. Right now life seems full and rewarding for our family, and I'll keep you posted how things progress and what we're doing and learning.

Casting Off the Curriculum

From Delores Koene in Missouri:

I am a mother of four children, ages 7-14, and we had our first unschooling experience this past year. I had my children enrolled in a Christian correspondence program. To me, it was like reproducing a public school right in our own home with me being everything from principal to janitor. While we did enjoy a certain amount of freedom and were not bothered by local school authorities (they don't even know we exist), we felt bogged down because of the demands in handling the heavy curriculum. I was always busy with paper work till late at night, grading papers and preparing lessons for four grade levels.

My youngest daughter, now 10, whom I know is bright enough, had and still has some handicaps to overcome due to her previous three years in public school. She was said to be an "A" student and often had free time to help the teachers, but alas! When she stayed home under my supervision I was appalled at her lack of basic skills. She would read a few stories to her younger brother but would not touch a library book to read to herself. After being home for one year, her favorite pastime is reading.

The more I read in *GWS*, the more I relaxed my "public school teacher" image and the more liberties I took with that curriculum. Later on, tests were not used as tests but were done with an open book for a final learning experience in that particular subject. When the children received poor grades, we no longer worried as I told them that the important thing was whether they had learned something interesting that could be useful to their lives. All in all, we had little time for things that really interested us and many unanswered questions and projects were shelved because of the burden of the "pre-packaged" and "canned" education. However, I am glad in one way to have had the experience as it brought me really close to the classroom (*en masse*) educational problems and made me appreciate unschooling even more.

This year, we are embarking on a new venture in learning as I have enrolled the children in Ed Nagel's Santa Fe Community School and we function as an extension of that school. We are all excited about it as it is like letting children into a candy store with lots of money to spend. I asked each

child what he or she was interested in learning about, and in spite of their new freedom, all their interests included some “basics.” They have already been conditioned and so it will take time for them to view learning in a new light.

In our coming school year, we will do away with testing and repetitious “busy work.” We will also do away with the study of English grammar which is one of the children’s greatest dislikes. Before my children went to school they spoke English with very few grammatical errors. After they were in school for a year, they gradually picked up and started using incorrect grammar in spite of all the drilling they were getting in English class.

I find that an interesting way for children to learn how words are spelled is to do “word search” puzzles. I am very much impressed with some of the methods you suggest in *GWS* for teaching the basics and I intend to try them in our coming school year.

I had considered teaching my youngest daughter some basic phonics this year, but after reading your article “Sensible Phonics” (*GWS* #7; also separate reprint), I am not certain if it would help her. Do you think that just having her read aloud to me and simply correcting her pronunciation would be more helpful to her?

In my reply, I wrote:

Yes, I do think it would be more helpful, and indeed I would like to urge that you go very easy even on correcting her pronunciation. A hard thing for us adults to learn is that children will catch and correct a very large part of their own mistakes if we just give them enough time and don’t rattle them. What is important is that she think that reading aloud to you is a pleasure, for both of you. If she wants you to enjoy what she is reading to you, she will want to pronounce words so that you can understand. If you don’t understand a word she has read, don’t hesitate to ask—but only if you really don’t understand it.

Self-Taught Reader

A Maine reader wrote:

In *GWS* you expressed great interest in children who teach themselves to read. I am one of those children, and would like to share with you how I got started. I am the youngest of five children, and most of us like to read. For a long time I thought that my sisters had taught me, because it was so long ago that my memories of it are hazy. They did teach me many things—they all liked to come home from school and “play school”, but after giving it some thought I realized that they did not in fact teach me to read.

It began with a little story book that someone, probably my parents, gave me when I was three or four years old. This was one of the very first books which I could truly call my own, and I loved it. It was a typical kiddy book, called “*Crybaby Calf*.” Not a very thrilling subject, you may say, but to a very young farming child, it was wonderful. For weeks I made everyone read me this story over and over as many times as they could stand it. With six other readers in the family, this made for a lot of run-throughs. Just about the time that everyone else was so sick of *Crybaby Calf* that they would gladly have made him into hamburger, I astonished them all by sitting down one evening in front of everybody and reading the book aloud from cover to cover.

I guess I was a little too smug, because it didn’t take them long to figure out that I was not actually reading, but had memorized that entire story, word for word, including when to turn the pages. Because there was generally no more than one sentence on each page, I therefore knew exactly which words were on each page. Certain words and phrases kept recurring throughout the book, such as “*Crybaby Calf*,” “*Hiram the Farmer*,” “*Jerry the Horse*,” and “*The Pigs*.” I was soon able to pick out these names and words, recognizing them in print instead of just following the pictures. The in-between words followed, and before I knew what was happening, I really was reading that book. With the beginnings of a reading vocabulary, I was able to go on to other books and, by the time I went to kindergarten, was reading very well.

Another thing that may interest you is the books I have been writing for Jimmy. Before he was born, I bought a blank book and began writing down my thoughts during pregnancy, our preparations for the baby, etc. While in

the hospital, I added a detailed account of his natural birth. Since then I have written observations of his growth, activities and self-education. I am now well into the second volume and would be glad to share pertinent portions with *GWS*. One aspect which I particularly find fascinating is how children learn from other children. We have seen many examples of this in Jimmy's experience. He has both learned from other children and taught them things that he knew.

“Continuum” Baby

From Diana Kisselburgh (MI):

I have been meaning to write to you for some time now about Abbey (16 months). All my life I have assumed that child-rearing entailed certain problems—such as eating and sleeping difficulties. How pleasantly surprised I am to find that it is not necessarily so. I shouldn't say surprised—I had a gut feeling ever since Abbey was born that there were forces at work that would carry me along if I could only resist my socialization.

Anyway, I want to tell you what an incredibly independent and capable girl she is. I work a couple of hours every morning and leave her at home with her father. She just waves and says “Bye” when I leave—no tears. When I come home she welcomes me with a smile and some holding but soon is off to her projects. We have never left her for more than two hours—and never at all in her first year. She was held almost constantly for the first seven or eight months of her life. She took all her naps on my person and slept in our bed at night. (She still does. Abbey has never slept in a crib.) All this wasn't done with the confidence of parents who know what they're doing, though. We felt guilty about bringing her into bed at first. We held her all the time because we couldn't bear to hear her whimper. Somehow, these inner forces won out.

She is in love with the world and loves to get into every act. She helps me knead bread, run the blender, put away laundry, wipe up spills and vacuum. She is also a great climber, and has never taken a fall in all her climbing expeditions.

It isn't always easy being the kind of parents we have chosen to be. It's amazing how much disapproval we face. One woman, upon seeing Abbey in her Snuggli, remarked, “What are you doing to that baby?”

One point I do want to make that I feel needs to be brought up in GWS. Although I agree that home is the ideal place for a baby to be born, I am convinced by my own birth experience that it is still possible to bond with your child and implement continuum principles right away even in the most unnatural birthing situations. Nature has to be more resilient than that. Abbey was born by Caesarean, but even with all the cold steel and strangers in green masks, we bonded so deeply that even to this day I can mentally summon the image of her eyes for those few moments. We've been friends ever since. I

just want to say that birth isn't always beautiful, and it's often very hard and painful. We tend to forget this in our fervor for things natural. But it still is possible to come out of it with a healthy, well-adjusted baby and a deep, warm relationship "The Continuum" isn't that fragile.

It is very true that Abbey's independence and self-sufficiency have come sooner than we expected. It is a joy to watch her every day. I want to thank you for your book, *Freedom and Beyond*, which opened my eyes years ago to many things. Also, thanks for *GWS*. We look forward to it accompanying us on the long road ahead.

Brothers Welcome Baby

From Laurie Davis (MI):

Little Will, now 6 months, is as much a part of all of our activities as can be and has been in the midst of things from the very start. Although he is not a continuum baby in the true sense of the word—when it is impractical (or too hard on Mom) for him to be constantly in arms, he is in the back-pack or on the floor with his brothers—we try to include him in everything possible rather than excluding him to “keep him out of the way.” We are all fascinated with his growth and every subtle change. He is quite adept at getting the kind of attention he needs or wants—without screaming or crying, although he can yell pretty loud when he needs to. It’s so easy to see, when you’re paying attention, when a baby says, “Stimulate me—take me somewhere—let me be with someone else—put me where I can touch this or taste that.”

I try to make sure Will doesn’t make a pest of himself as far as his big brothers (ages 9, 7, and 6) are concerned; it seems important they not feel burdened by his presence and it really shows in their patience and loving attention toward him. They are surprisingly conscious of his needs, moods, and changes.

The boys were very well prepared for Will’s birth to take place at home; being a lay midwife, I have a small library of obstetrical and related books which is available to them at all times. They became (through their own interest in my pregnancy and anticipation of the birth) quite accustomed to technical words and explicit photographs and illustrations—the hows and whys of normal, family-oriented, gentle birth. We also had photo albums of other home births to share, where other children were present at their siblings’ births. These guys knew more about the whole process than some women I have known! Indeed, many adults would be shocked at the information made available to these young boys. The guys all wanted a lot of details, which they got without hesitation—they had to make sure they had it all down pat.

When we had to go to the hospital toward the end of my labor, there was much disappointment and concern. The boys had to be united with their infant brother as soon as possible, and be assured that we were both OK. We have never had any problems with signs of regression from the older kids,

“baby talk” and the like. I think it is so important for children to be well prepared well in advance for the arrival of a new little one ... especially the part about how much attention he or she will require. I have never heard any crude or insensitive remarks coming from the boys regarding pregnancy, childbirth, or female anatomy. We have always dealt with such things (and all other matters of Real Life) with respect, warmth, and sometimes humor (what fun to discover how mom’s baby-feeding apparatus works—no longer a mystery!).

No Problems

Homesteaders News devoted their issue #19 to homeschooling, and printed, among other good things, this very encouraging letter from Verne Helmke-Scharf, Lord Rd, RD 2, Candor NY 13743. The same issue reprints her complete letter to the school board, a good model for others to follow.

You can get a copy of this issue of Homesteaders News by sending \$1 to RD 2, Box 151, Addison NY 14801. But if you live in the country or would like to, or are an active gardener or food raiser, I suggest you subscribe (\$8 for 8 issues). It is a very lively and interesting little paper, printed and calligraphed entirely by Sherrie Lee, who did the lovely calligraphy in GWS #18. The letter:

We wrote a six-page letter to our local school board after getting the help of a friend who is a lawyer, and contacting an alternative school in Binghamton who helped us develop a school curriculum, giving us the names of textbooks to list. We delivered the letter to the school the day before classes began and the school board reviewed it the following week.

Their reaction was one of complete cooperation and cordiality. In our case the American idea of tolerance has worked. We met with the superintendent the next week and he told us that we had more support on the school board than we might imagine.

As it has turned out, the understanding and interest in the community and among our neighbors has been a great surprise to us. It seems that we have come to know our neighbors better and that people feel free to ask us about what we are doing and they approve! It has been something which has made us feel more part of our community.

We have done many things in homeschool so far. Our younger children, 8 and 10, are completely happy homeschooling. Our daughter says she can think so much better here than at school, and she can. She still abhors social studies and is indifferent to English but has done almost all her 5th grade math and reading. She is learning to play the flute beautifully and we exchange thoughts and questionings all the time. I think that she is coming to the point now when she is asking what she wants to learn, not just what should she learn. There is a lull in outward learning at the moment but we see this as a good thing.

Our younger son, who couldn't add 3 plus 5 at the beginning of the year (he could do it at age 3) can now do any multiplication problem in his head. He is an invisible learner. Much of his time so far at homeschool has been to let out a lot of that accumulated boredom which expresses itself as a phobia for doing anything that hints of formal schooling. One day he said to me, "Mom, you're acting just like a teacher again! I'm going to go do something I want to do!" I said, "OK, just so you're doing something." And then at 10:00 that night I found him reading *Huckleberry Finn*.

Our oldest son is 13 and he vacillates as to whether homeschool is best for him. Next year he will have a choice of going back to the high school. We really don't know what the decision will be. For now we are very glad that he is with us.

From the beginning we have kept the hours of 9-11 and 1-3 as our homeschooling hours. We did this at first so that we would feel like a school and also so that I would know that the children would have my attention if they needed it. I tend to get involved in my own projects. As time has gone on we have varied the time a lot with what makes sense. It is easier to integrate the homeschooling with our lives as time goes on and we feel that the children give as much energy to all our living here as we give out for the homeschooling.

We also have a 4H club going here and so the children see a lot of other children. During homeschool time itself though they definitely do not miss other children. They are usually too busy with what they are doing. Since the feeling with the school in town is so easy we often go there for meetings and lessons (flute), and our oldest son goes to dances, concerts, football games, etc.

We're really feeling good about all of this! If anyone would like to give me a call (607-687-4590) to talk about homeschooling in New York State or whatever, I'd be glad to talk with them. I tend not to write letters; the phone is probably the best. But please don't call during homeschool hours, 9-11 and 1-3!

A Friendly School ...

A friend wrote:

My older daughter has managed to hold on to her scholarship and goes three days a week to an alternative school. My youngest, 11, goes two days and I managed to get the school to accept that this year. I just called them and said she was interested and I could afford only two days. The school OK'd it and now her teacher tells me that the rest of the kids look forward to her arrival each Thursday and Friday. She manages to find rides for the fifty mile trip there and then stays over, and finds another ride back on Friday or Saturday.

Ed. note: This confirms something I have been saying a lot at meetings, that kids who do a lot of their learning out of school are an asset to the school when they arrive because the other kids are interested in what they're doing.

... And Another

Kate Kerman (MI) writes:

I am feeling very good about Ada's first public school experience. She is presently going four days a week to a semi-open classroom—actually it is a four-teacher team of 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades and a “special ed” room of kids who are at about 2nd grade level. Several things in the talk you gave at Aquinas College really applied to our situation. Ada is going to school to see what it is like and knows she can choose to stop going if she wishes. Her big project appears to be learning how to play marbles, as part of an overall objective of making friends. We have been pretty isolated in terms of playmates for her.

Anyway, I am volunteering one hour a week in her class and really like a lot of things. The teachers use volunteers a great deal and the kids approach any adult with questions and no one's bothered by the constant coming and going of kids and adults. My four-year old, Hannah, is welcome to be there any time and there are always things for her to do. I hope to try taking Jesse (2) along as an experiment sometime.

The teachers are on the lookout for resources and I've already demonstrated spinning to the 90 kids, and will be working on a book-making project soon. So—the enrichment you talked about of sharing resources is underway here.

“I Don’t Know”

From Robert Smith, 2939 Highland Dr SE, Smyrna GA 30080:

I am fast reaching the conclusion that the only proper place to “teach” a child is in the home. I have often said children learn in spite of the school system and not because of it.

I am a high school graduate with one year of college. But I have three “non-conferred degrees!” One in journalism—I am a successful writer of over a dozen aviation books. My second “degree” is in aerodynamics, and my third in aircraft structures. I learned all of these things on my own. I use all of them in my job with FAA (Federal Aviation Administration), but am not allowed to sign any official documents as I do not officially have the degree. But, I notice the “degree-holders” all check with me before they sign any documents!

When I was in 8th grade I read a book on the P-51 fighter. There was a reference in the book that the airplane was aerodynamically superior because its fuselage was constructed with a cross-section of “second degree curves.” I asked my math teacher what this meant, and rather than tell me she didn’t know, she went off into a dissertation about designers of airplanes being so highly trained that no one else could understand them, etc., until now I don’t remember what she did say. But, she did not answer my question. Now, forty years later, I know the expression was used by the author of the article to impress the reader. “Second degree curves” have nothing to do with the aerodynamics of the P-51 or any other airplane! But the lesson I learned was not to ask that teacher anything complicated! I wouldn’t get an answer I could use.

A child *can* use “I don’t know” as an answer; it merely means he has to seek out someone else for the answer.” “I don’t know” furnishes the child with a fresh start. Of course, it is good to be able to add some helpful advice on where the answer might be found. My son Michael (now 17) has asked me questions and I have said “I don’t know,” but I added that we can look in the encyclopedia and see what it has on the subject and start from there. If that didn’t produce an acceptable answer I sent him to the library to find out what they have. Sometimes I had another book that would help. After all, I don’t profess to know the total contents of all the books I own!

Did you ever stop to think that humans are the only creatures on earth whose offspring go to school? Every other creature on the face of this earth is responsible for the teaching/learning of their young. Unless, of course, there is a “School for Young Lions” somewhere in Africa that I am not aware of, or a “Grizzly Bear College” in the Rocky Mountains that we have not yet discovered.

My wife and I talked last night about teaching children at home. She said some parents aren’t smart enough to do it. I asked myself if there are dumb lions and smart lions. All lion cubs learn to hunt. What about the cubs with a dumb mother lion? Maybe they starve to death. But, it’s my bet that even the dumbest momma lion can teach a cub to hunt and survive.

Ed. note: Many years ago, a college student asked me a question at a meeting. Knowing nothing about the answer, I said, “I don’t know, I’m ignorant about that.” He came up to see me after the meeting, amazed and delighted, and said, “That’s the first time in my whole life I’ve ever heard anyone say that!”

Charity of the Rats

In Learning How To Learn, Idries Shah quoted this story from the London Sunday Express, 7/9/69:

Dr. J. T. Greene of Georgia University took ten white rats and trained them to obtain food pellets by pressing one of two levers in their cage. One lever produced fewer pellets and was hard to depress, and the rats soon found this out and ignored it, concentrating on the other. Now the experimenter wired the levers so that when the one which yielded more food was pressed, a rat in the next cage received an electric shock.

What did the food-seeking rats do? First, they recognized that their actions were giving their neighbor pain; then no less than eight out of ten of them went over to the other lever, even though it was hard to work, and concentrated on it, saving their fellow from further harm.

Astronomy without School

In the course of an on-going discussion with me and others about the need for and purposes of schools, the editor of *Manas* magazine happened to say that a person would have to go to school to study astronomy.

Why so? There is a magazine about astronomy—called *Astronomy*—and there may well be others on the same subject. The magazine is not easy to find on newsstands, perhaps, but the index of periodicals that one can find in any library would list it, and big libraries would have the magazine. There is also a regular Amateur Astronomer's section in the magazine *Scientific American*. There are many books about astronomy in libraries. There's the *Astronomy Book Club* (Riverside, NJ 08075). Many cities have museums with a planetarium, and there would surely be people there who would know a lot about astronomy and could tell you how to find out more about it. The Boston phone book lists the American Association of Variable Star Observers, and has four listings under Telescopes; all of these people could tell you where and how to find out more about astronomy. So why do you have to go to school?

These and many other interesting questions, many having to do with important questions about the meaning and purpose of life that are so rarely asked or discussed these days—especially in schools—are regularly and eloquently discussed, in good plain English, in *Manas*, a weekly magazine (Box 32112, Los Angeles CA 90032; \$10/yr.)

Since writing the above, I have learned that there is a magazine for children about astronomy called *Odyssey*. If anyone could send us their address or a sample, I'd be grateful.

Learning Italian

*By coincidence, two GWS readers have written us about learning Italian.
From Valerie Hilligan (IL):*

We've made plans to move to Naples, Italy, at the end of the month. I am going to experiment in learning Italian in the way I see babies learning their first language—by being very attentive to people's expressions, gestures, and tones when I hear them speak. Without trying to learn it but simply enjoying the flow of sounds and feelings around me as I listen in a relaxed way, I suspect I will find it coming to me naturally what people mean by what they say. From there I will gradually pick out separate words, albeit falteringly, to express what I mean to say. I'll let you know how this turns out. But an immediate benefit comes to mind; I and my children lose the fear of failure to learn when we give up trying to learn. Then there is time and presence of mind to live more completely in this moment (whenever that is) and absorb all it has to show us.

We want to learn to speak Italian but are all "lazy" when it comes to studying out of a book. It may be unnatural and possibly unhealthy for the soul to pursue knowledge ambitiously. Ambition implies a carrot-and-stick, reward and punishment system, and wherever there is punishment there is fear, even if the fear is nontangible as in fear of social ostracism or ridicule. Could it be that *only* what comes naturally out of an on-the-spot curiosity and interest is the life-giving experience we call discovery? I'm beginning to see that this is so.

And from Judy McCahill (Md. Directory):

Dennis has to travel quite a bit in his current job (Ed. note: The McCahills are living in England.) and he suddenly decided that we should all come to Sicily with him this time. This is our sixth day away from home, and we have so far been through a lifetime of marvelous experiences (our afternoon at the train station in Milan would make a dramatic novel), but what is so thrilling to me that I can hardly contain myself is that I am learning to speak Italian. We are all learning.

Dennis is an outgoing person who opens conversations with everyone he

meets and as a result received not only countless free lessons from delighted Italians, but lovely gestures of friendship. Today when he was in a grocery store, another customer was so happy that Dennis was interested in Sicilian life that he went out to his car and got half of the typically Sicilian cookies that he had just bought for his own children and gave them to Dennis for our three bambini.

Dennis has two language books, one very thorough and scholarly, and the other a practical everyday speech kind of book, and he studies them for 20 minutes or so each day. He is just as thrilled as I am about learning to speak Italian, though our ways of going about it are different. Because I am more reserved and would rarely speak to a stranger unless he was standing on my foot, he provides the social contact I need to practice speaking (as well as meet wonderful people.).

But I want to tell you about my way of learning, which is providing a basis for the times when I have a chance to speak. I come to Italian with a love for languages, having studied Latin, French, and German in school, and having learned kitchen-and-marketplace Spanish in Spain. We were forced to lay over for a day and a half in Milan and that was when this forgotten love resurfaced. We set out for a walk to see *Il Duomo*, the famous cathedral in Milan. What a walk that was for me, and how exciting it is to be an adult who is not only learning but is conscious of the learning process that is taking place.

I was like a child. I read street signs. I read store-front advertisements. I read the streetcar-stop sign (No tickets sold on the streetcar). I turned to Dennis: how do you pronounce this? What is that word? I held everyone up while I read—aloud—a poster advertising a course on meditation at a university. I read political posters. I read posters on the front of La Scala, telling of the delights within. I made everyone stop and read with me the sign on a rubbish bin; “Not on the ground, but here!”

We came to a park which was half covered by a massive modern sculpture which was intended “not for contemplation, but to be walked through”, and while our boys gamboled and climbed on its various parts, Dennis and I read the description on a plaque nearby, walked through the sculpture, read the description again and discussed it, figured out many meanings by looking at the things described.

I was like a five-year old for whom written words suddenly spring into

life. What had all been gibberish one day, the next day had shape and meaning. I felt that hunger and impatience to learn more; surely if I could read a few words, I could read them all! Not to prove anything to anybody, including myself (which I think is the case with a lot of adult learning), but just because it was there. And not even to worry about doing it right. Doing was the thing. Dennis and I laughed about how he was doing all the work (studying the language books) while I was picking his brains, taking what I needed when I needed it, a pronunciation here, a noun ending there.

My next step was to buy a newspaper and when I've had my swim and done my bit for the peanut-butter-and-jelly brigade, I lie in the sun and read it just like a grown-up lady, looking for all the world like I know what I'm doing. Sometimes I read out loud and sometimes silently. Friends had told me about the ancient Greek city of Siracusa and when I saw an article about it, I devoured as much of it as I could. (An Italian Air Force pilot whom we met at a party insists we meet him on Saturday and allow him to show us Siracusa.) I have read articles on Alexander Haig, the Vietnamese refugees, the petroleum crisis, the Pope's appointment of 14 new cardinals. Sometimes I read slowly, milking the words of their meaning and sometimes I read quickly; sometimes I re-read, and sometimes I go impatiently to a new article. There's a lot of faith; I know that someday I will figure out *nella*, *nei*, and *negli*. There are moments of ecstasy, like when the sentence "This building was never carried to completion" leaps out of me as if I'd been reading Italian for years. There's the feeling of slogging through mud, when line after line makes no sense at all.

The nouns come first. (You say to the baby, "Do you want your Teddy?" and the baby says, "Teddy." Or: "Look at the big doggy." "Doggy!") The names of things jump out at you, and they stick. You understand many adjectives but don't remember them until you've seen them several times. You intuit the meaning of verbs but don't linger over them because of their incredibly varying forms. You know that today is not the day you'll learn the use of the reflexive. You run across certain small words that occur so often you know you can't ignore them, yet they defy you to comprehend them; eventually you understand they are prepositions and definite articles—sometimes the little devils combine in the most amazing ways (to the, from the, near the)—it keeps you humble.

Sometimes I get tired and full; I can't take any more words. I go away and

do something that has nothing to do with words. If Dennis says to me, “Do you want to review the numbers?” I stare off into the distance (figuratively speaking; he’s so good I would never deliberately ignore him)..

And that’s it; the story of my adventure.

Sewing

Helen Fox (Que.) wrote:

People who sew might teach their 4 and 5-year olds, as I did, how to use the sewing machine to make their own clothes. Real projects, producing something wearable are, of course, more interesting than doll clothes or things made from old sheets.

A trip to the store comes first, to look at patterns and pick out material. It's important to choose something very easy to start with ... shorts or pants with an elastic waist is about the simplest thing (easier than those awful Home Ec. aprons!), next comes a blouse or dress with elastic neck and sleeves. Boys' clothes seem harder, but maybe I lack imagination because I have three girls. Boys love to work the machine, as do girls. Kids might sew a Halloween costume (ghost, pirate come to mind). One 8-year-old boy dashed off a costume on my machine that consisted of many sashes. Another made a sweatband for his head.

Little kids can pin, cut, and sew with the foot pedal propped up on the sewing machine under the table. Even littler ones (3) can sit in your lap and learn to guide the material through. The next step is for the child to tell you when to stop and go with the foot pedal, learn to lift the presser foot at the corners, learn to thread the machine and make a bobbin. There really isn't that much to it. Lines drawn in chalk on the material are sometimes helpful to follow in order to get seams straight. You can do the finishing touches, and help cut when small fingers get sore. It's a satisfying project, especially if sewing is something you enjoy and do easily.

Hectographs

Two readers sent us information on hectographs, a simple kind of printing press. From Kate Kerman (MI):

A hectograph is basically a gelatin and glycerin base in a cookie sheet. This formula seems to be best:

12 packets unflavored gelatin,

¼ oz. each

¾ cup cold water

1½ cups glycerin

A squirt of detergent

Warm in a pan on low heat as gelatin dissolves. Let stand a few minutes—skim off any foam. Pour into a cookie sheet or cake pan, and let harden in a cool place. It is important to have it level so the gelatin mixture isn't too thin at one end.

After it has hardened, sponge the surface with cool water. Let it sit a minute and soak up the water so there are no puddles.

You can get pens and pencils at office supply stores which can be used simply to write your master copy on plain paper; ask for hectograph materials. Or, for up to 50 copies, we have found ditto masters to be most effective. You write on the back of the inked paper so that the copy is forwards, not reversed, on the first sheet.

You lay your copy face down on the press, smooth it, let it sit about one minute, then peel it off. The ink soaks into the gelatin mixture, with the writing reversed, of course. Then to print a duplicate copy, smooth a piece of blank paper on the press and lift it off again. You might need to lightly sponge the press if copies seem to stick too much.

You can reuse the press for something else if you let it sit long enough so the ink sinks in. You can also melt down the gelatin. Or for a more dramatic method, pour a thin layer of rubbing alcohol over the gelatin and light it!

This press is quite flexible and very easy to operate. You can do any number of colors at the same time. We are presently starting a family newsletter ... we've also used the press for making project report forms, book list forms for "school", Christmas letters, and birth announcements.

We bought glycerin at a drug store for \$6.00 a quart, which is enough for

about 3 of the presses. I'm still trying to track down bulk gelatin.

Kristin Peterson of Manitoba also sent directions for a hectograph, along with this note:

My brothers and sisters and I were fascinated by these and used them continually for many months. I believe we did have to melt them down and reset them, however, as they tend to shred and tear at the edges. Instead of "hectograph ink" (which I have never seen), we drew over the top of carbon paper of the kind used for spirit masters in schools. I am not sure whether regular carbon paper would work, but a little experimentation would soon tell.

Stamp Collecting

Nancy Allen (CA) writes:

Thought you might like to hear of the good luck we've had with the hobby of stamp-collecting that our 6-year old recently developed. I can't remember how it all started—possibly when we visited the post office and Craig noticed the small stamp album booklets for sale there. They offer a series of kits on such subjects as “Flowers”, “Birds and Butterflies”, and “Space”, containing stamps which are to be mounted over the matching pictures in the accompanying booklet. These sell for \$2 each.

This activity sparked quite an interest in Craig and we soon visited a stamp shop where we bought the *Traveler Stamp Album* (published by Harris Co., about \$7.00) which is especially for beginners. We purchased several inexpensive jumbo packages of world stamps and Craig quickly got the hang of inserting the stamps in plastic envelopes and locating the correct place for them in his album. Soon he was becoming quite selective in the stamps he bought and his memory for which stamps he did and did not have really amazed us.

In the meantime he was learning all kinds of things—geography, history, spelling, alphabetical order, attention to detail, about famous people and different cultures. Once while examining an Italian series, we were led to research Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel and then the Biblical story of creation. Another day, Craig was curious about the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* stamp, and the next time we visited the library we checked out that story along with “*Rip Van Winkle*.” (They required some editing, as they're difficult reading, but Craig enjoyed them.)

The topics opened up by stamps are practically endless and the beauty of many of them soon had our whole family interested. The post office sells a paperback book entitled *Stamps and Stories* (\$3) which lists current value of US stamps and other interesting info. Craig looks forward to hunting for especially valuable stamps and discovering the worth of those he has.

Woodworking With J.P.

Kathy Mingl (IL) writes:

J.P. has a new motivation for learning to read—I'll bet you've never heard this one before. I use a lot of chemicals—paint thinner, stripper, stains, varnishes, paint, etc.—that J.P. is not allowed to mess with. When he gave me an argument a while ago, I told him that when he was old enough to read and understand the warning labels, he could help me when I use “owie” chemicals. Would you believe that little twerp immediately began to take an interest in all the words he came across and made me tell him what they said? I think he just found out that he doesn't know how to read. Now when I read him stories, he'll pick out a word he hears and ask me which one it is. Winnie-the-Pooh didn't inspire him, but turpentine did.

One tool I'd like to recommend to parents whose kids want to make things with wood is a disc sander. All it is a motor—an old washing machine or dryer motor is perfect—and a disc and table attachment that can be bought for around \$15 or \$20 from Sears or any place that sells power tools. You buy a special glue and smear it on the disc, and when it dries, you press on a sandpaper piece that fits on it, and is supposed to be easily pulled off to change papers.

The beauty of it is that you can easily mold and shape wooden pieces, and with reasonable care, it's hard to hurt yourself on it. You can run some skin off your finger if you don't watch where you hold the piece, and you can bounce the piece off your head if you try to sand it on the part of the disc where it comes up in its revolution, instead of down—and stand in just the wrong place. For an older, responsible child it should be pretty safe, and a younger child can use it with supervision. Every kid that's tried mine has wanted one—you can round things, square things, smooth things and sculpt them, like magic. It gives you such a feeling of power over your material, especially because the results are so finished. When you're little, it seems as though you can have very little effect on things, and what you can do usually turns out so rough and awkward that you're ashamed to show it to anybody (I speak from experience). A disc sander is good for the ego.

You know, making a set of wooden letters would be a lot of fun for a child to help his parent with. You could let them drill all the holes, for instance—

J.P. loves drilling holes. You could give them a piece of sandpaper and let them smooth all the rough edges, too. You could guide their hands on the jigsaw or disc sander, and you can hold the straightedge ruler for them and have them mark along it for your cutting line (that's another thing J.P. loves to do). They might learn more about the shapes of letters from helping to make them than just from playing with some that have been presented to them. An older child would probably get a real feeling of accomplishment from helping to make a set for a little brother or sister. (Ed. note: In *GWS #18*, Kathy offered to send anyone plans for a wooden alphabet, for \$2.)

Nature Study

From two readers:

One of the things we have done is gotten field guides to plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects. We try to identify all the plants and animals we come across in our area and learn about them from other readings.

Our 9-year-old really took off on this idea of self-directed “study.” He took “trees” as his first project. What a fascinating subject it turned out to be. When “school” was “out”, he wasn’t ready to quit. With just a suggestion or two, he had a neighbor cut him a slice of one of the logs in his woodpile. He now has one side beautifully sanded (his first experience with an electric sander) and is preparing to varnish it so the rings will show. I got some library books and we tramped through our woods gathering leaves and identifying trees.

Ed. note: We are hoping to add a pocket guide on identifying flowers, trees and birds to our booklist. However, so far we have not been able to make arrangements with the publisher.

Independent Learner

A reader wrote:

I am presently under pressure from friends and family to send my son back to public school, their main reason being that he has to learn to survive the peer group and that the longer he is out of school the harder it will be for him to return. I disagree and he does not want to go to public school. I feel that if he were to adjust to public school and become a “normal 1980 eleven year old”, he would lose or suppress his greatest gifts and virtues. When people can’t act like who they really are, there is danger of them forgetting who they were; from there things go from bad to worse, and the life is wasted in sorrow and confusion.

From earliest infancy it was clear that my child understood much and was hampered by the inability to walk and talk, so I carried him about and talked to him about everything he looked at. All this attention did not make him overly attached; rather he showed great confidence and self-reliance as soon as he could walk. I began to read to him when he was four months old, and we were soon going through mountains of children’s books every week and spending at least two hours a day in that activity. We also spent about that much time checking out the town; all the backhoe workers, firemen, electric workers, and all the kids in the playground knew him well. The rest of the time that was not spent in nursing, we walked in the nearby woods.

A friend down the road had a little girl his age and we mothers took great pleasure in watching them play. He was frightened by loud noises or loud voices and would shudder from head to toe if someone raised their voice, and he still does. He shunned educational toys and demanded the real thing—except cars and trucks of course, but he liked Tonkas and avoided the pretty wooden ones.

He learned to climb as soon as he could walk and was over my head in the trees by 18 months. He never wore shoes so he knew where his feet were; he also developed personal relationships with trees. Every time I started to walk past a certain walnut tree he’d cry out, “Wanko wanko”, and we couldn’t pass on until he hugged and kissed it.

For his second birthday I built him a large easel with a tray to hold sixteen colors, as he was not content with a few. He painted daily, sometimes singing

and dancing as he did so, sometimes with a brush in each hand or two in each hand. He used scissors very well at two and made beautiful collages by cutting and gluing. He did simple sewing, could sew on buttons and embroider, get dressed, brush his teeth, bathe, vacuum the floor, sweep, dig, rake, plant, ride a trike, and talk with a huge vocabulary, over 2000 words, but only his grandma and I could understand him. He was and is daring and confident and enjoyed rope swing rides that would terrify an adult.

When he was two and a half, we made a trip by train from California to New York to visit his paternal grandparents. It was a fantastic experience; things he'd seen in picture books were suddenly appearing at the window and he gleefully identified the things. In New York, I felt like he was taking care of me, he was so mature and calm. He was still nursing and continued until three and a half, when he chose grandma's bedtime story instead. He has never yet cried himself to sleep and never feared the dark or being alone because I never left him.

For his third birthday, I built him a sturdy wood working bench and installed my woodcarving vise on it. Then I made a carry-type tool box and put in real tools: saw, hammer, plane, coping saw, hand drill and bits, screw drivers, nails, sandpaper, C-clamps, screws, and white glue. The whole business we set in the middle of the living room. He never hurt himself, but I also had to teach all the neighbor children how to use tools safely because the bench was exceedingly popular. It absorbed them for hours. I encouraged the use of glue and clamps which taught them patience and spared the constant frustration of having the wood split from nailing. I mostly kept my mouth shut and was rewarded every time I resisted the temptation to make a suggestion. Once, lacking a long board, my son put newspaper down (we had an Oriental carpet) and proceeded to glue several boards end-to-end and weigh them with books. It worked! Several kids did similar things with surprising success. They usually painted their creations with poster paint from the easel. They learned to make several things at one time while waiting for the glue to dry. I get free wood scraps and paper from printer's trash.

When my son was about 3½, we spent the summer clearing a vacant lot and preparing it for a fall and winter garden. We worked with children ages 7 to 12. It was so successful that several children continued through the summer and a church gave us another lot. The children loved using my son's pint-sized garden tools and wheelbarrow and often they just lay around in the

dirt and played cars—I let them. After a few months they actually took the garden away from me and I got to just watch. They grew twenty-six different vegetables during that winter and more in the spring. The kids ate it all because it was theirs.

At the time I took him out of school (3rd grade), he was reading a low second reader with difficulty. Eight months later he had finished four readers and began fourth grade work on schedule at home.

Until we moved to the country I could not afford to give him an allowance. He made things and sold them at craft fairs, in toy stores and door-to-door. He also collects aluminum and recycles it; lots of people even bring their aluminum to him! When he was six he bought a used mini-bike; he couldn't ride it until he was eleven. When he was seven, he bought himself a used junior-sized ten-speed bike. At nine he wanted a cat. I said he would have to save \$100 to pay for altering and shots. In four months he had it and got his kitten. When he was ten he bought a used canoe, paid for his own swimming lessons, and at 11 bought a tripod so he could make animated films with an old movie camera his grandpa had given him, and a back pack to take to Scout camp. He is now saving for a radio-controlled car. I don't much like them, but will let him buy it if he knows enough to explain to me how it works and to make minor repairs himself. He is delighted, he never thought I'd give in. He can do anything he sets his mind to; he is now starting a Christmas tree farm (live trees). I'm sure he will succeed, he always does.

Do you think this boy needs public school? What about high school? Are there any ways you can suggest that I can get him to do math and more writing?

It's Not All Roses

A reader wrote:

It makes me sad to read GWS when I see how many parents have their children to themselves and are having a successful time learning together. I had my son out for most of the 2nd grade but it wasn't a very good experience. Besides having the school authorities constantly pressuring me and a son turned off most of the time to the wonder and excitement of learning, my husband didn't support the idea, mainly because he felt our son was getting too dependent on me for everything. All in all, it didn't turn out too well. The constant shadow of not making it on only one income (my husband's) also put a damper on what I saw as the only way to live. I got to the point where it seemed that it was all my plaything and pretty unreal, so my son went back into school. Now all the close-mindedness and suffocation are again turning him into a miserable, rebellious, frustrated soul. But I'll keep looking for a solution.

On the whole, it seems to be true that for homeschooling to work, both parents (if they are living together) have to agree on it.

Doubts About Learning

A mother wrote:

Our two girls are very pleased to be learning at home and seem to have adjusted to our nonscheduled way of learning quite nicely. Our 13-year old son, on the other hand, feels upset that he may not be learning everything other 7th graders are learning. He feels that he may want to go back to school for high school and wonders will he be up to “grade level.”

Quite truthfully I am upset by this also. We do not have the money to use Calvert or Home Study Institute and I don’t feel I have the qualifications to set up a program for him. We are just doing some math, a lot of reading (which he does enjoy), and we have been using the book *Physics Experiments for Children*—even our pre-schoolers have enjoyed making the paper helicopters from this book. My husband has shown our son how to set up quite a few projects in electronics which both enjoy doing. My question to you is—is this enough?

Everyone in GWS seems to be doing so well teaching their children at home. Do you ever get letters from people like me who are not so confident they are doing a good job?

In my reply, I wrote:

About the only thing that schools manage to teach most of the people who go there is that “learning” means, and can only mean, going to a school and being made to do some dumb and boring thing by someone called a “teacher” who works there.

When your son was little, like all of us, he learned by using his eyes, ears, hands, and often mouth, to reach as much as he could of the world around him; by thinking about what he saw, heard, and touched; by watching what other people said and did and thinking about that, too; by asking questions when he felt like it; and thinking about the meaning of the answers. But the schools put a stop to all that. No more exploring, no more trying things out, no more inventing, no more asking questions. What they told him to do in school was the opposite of learning, and the worst of all the bad things they have done to him was to convince him that this anti-learning or whatever we

might call the process by which schools waste children's time—this endless sitting, waiting, being bored, filling out dull and meaningless workbooks, the whole dreary routine—they have convinced him that this school process is learning. And that the real learning he did out of school since he was born, and still does whenever he reads or does anything else that interests him, is not learning.

I can only say to your son, “Don't let them brainwash you that way, don't let them sell you that line of guff. They want to convince you that nothing of importance is learned except in schoolrooms, so that you will try to spend as much as you can of your own life in schoolrooms, and so that you will judge the worth and capacity of everyone you meet by how much time they spent in schoolrooms. But don't believe them, because it isn't true.”

Everything the 7th graders are learning? Most of them aren't learning anything. Much of the curriculum, as my nephew used to tell me year after year, is just a repeat of what was taught, and not learned, the year before, and the year before, and the year before. Few of those 7th graders could pass a surprise test in any of what they are “learning”, or even a test on what they supposedly learned in 6th, 5th, 4th etc. grades. The only way the teachers can get them to pass any tests at all is to announce the tests well in advance and have plenty of “review”, which means, teach the kids all over again what they were supposed to have learned before. And the same is true of high school and college as well. Very little of what is learned there is permanent or useful. The A students are good at remembering the material of the course until after the test or final exam; then they forget most of it, just like the D and E students.

We only learn in any permanent or useful way what is interesting, important, and usable to us. If he is doing all the stuff you tell me about, he is learning twice as much, three, five times as much, as most of the kids in school, and in the things that count—mostly reading, writing, and skill with language. He will be way ahead of them if and when he ever wants to go back to school—we have seen this many times.

Yes, I do get letters from people like you who worry about not doing a good job, and I say, “Don't worry, the chances are a billion to one you are doing a much better job than the school.” You are doing fine, your son is doing fine, and I only hope you don't let the schools brainwash you into being a part of their time-wasting, mind-killing routines.

Inefficiency of Schools

A Washington reader writes:

The waste in schooling is \$14 out of every \$15, 14 out of every 15 years (or months, weeks, days, hours, minutes). That is the ratio that consistently emerged in a learning design I ran in a well-known aerospace company here in Washington State. To the schooled in our culture those numbers seem unbelievable!

But there it was. The in-house training school used an 80-hour course to train newly-hired employees for assembling airliner airframes, but with disturbing frequency of non-success among the new workers, having the direct result of airliners or assemblies clogging production awaiting reworks. The alternative design which I was asked to produce by Headquarters Finance accomplished the intended objectives of the training course at 1/15th the cost of the training course.

This was done by means of a one-to-one facilitator-to-worker (learner) scheme, eliciting the required skills at the workplace. Cost of this method was the non-productive time (in terms of saleable product) only of the facilitator. Everything else was superbly provided for in the workplace: engineering of product, production procedures and facilities, role models, etc. No need for “curriculum,” “lesson plans,” “instructor” (had to scrap that title, hence “facilitator”). The ultimate objective of the facilitator was for him to work himself out of that job to get back to producing saleable goods, thus eliminating the constant costs of the budget-seeking in-house training establishment.

Finance was delighted with the results, the Training Establishment was not, for reasons obvious, I’m sure, to you.

My associates in the alternative design saw so clearly how schools like the in-house training school were (and are) so wasteful of material and human resources. We became certain that 1-15 are valid numbers.

Children Keep Out!

This AP story (7/12/80) reminds us again that a principal function of schools is to keep children out of adults' way—and indeed, out of their sight and hearing:

The banning of tenants with children is on the rise. One HUD survey shows that the percentage of rental units with “no-children” policies has jumped from 17% in 1974 to 26% this year.

Half the families with children in one HUD survey reported problems finding a rental home, while more than 40% said they had to settle for housing below their expectations.

20% of two-bedroom rentals ban youngsters. Other restrictions, in the form on occupancy standards based on number, sex, or age of children, affect about 55% of all units with two or more bedrooms in buildings that ostensibly accept youngsters.

”No-children” practices are most likely in newer buildings. About one-third of all units built since 1970 exclude children, compared to only about one-fifth of older buildings.

”Many people, to put it bluntly, don’t want to live near children,” said Michael Solomon, associate general counsel of the National Apartment Association.

How Schools Could Improve

People keep asking me, at meetings and elsewhere, what I think the public schools could do to improve. I seldom talk much about this, since when I talk to school people about doing anything differently they usually take it as criticism of what they are doing now, and get angry. I never reply, as I used to, by saying that schools should become places where children can explore the world around them in the ways they like best. Most school people are not ready to hear such ideas, and even those few who might agree with them are not in a position to put them into practice. Any such talk about radical changes in ways of teaching just frustrates a few and infuriates the rest.

So instead I talk about some changes in structure and administration that the schools actually could make, if they wanted to. They don't cost more money, in fact would probably cost less, and they don't require that a majority of people change their ideas about what the schools are for. They are changes in structure and administration, not philosophy or methods.

1) Schools should be smaller. 200 students should be the maximum; 100 is better; 50 is better yet, especially in the early grades. The model for the school should be the family, not the factory.

Even where, as in most places, the schools (at huge expense) have stuck themselves and the public with giant buildings, they could still make schools smaller. There is no reason why many completely independent schools could not share a building, just as many independent businesses share an office building. The people whose work it would be to keep the building running, heated, lighted, etc. would have nothing to say about the running of the individual schools, just as the people who manage office buildings have nothing to say about how their various tenants run their separate businesses.

2) Teachers should be at the top of the table of organization, instead of, as at present, at the bottom. In these small schools, the teachers, singly or together, should make all the educational decisions—everything having to do with curricula, methods, textbooks, testing, and the like. Among all the reasons why the best teachers so consistently leave the schools, the main one is that they have so little control over their own work. No serious, independent, responsible teacher, of the kind that the schools must have, is going to put up very long with having other people tell her/him what to teach

and when and how to teach it.

3) The schools should strive, not for the uniformity they usually seek and prize, but for the greatest possible variety. (In a few places this is beginning to happen.)

4) The teacher s in these small schools should be directly responsible, not to higher administrative officials, but to the parents of the children they teach. People who didn't like something a particular teacher was doing, or wanted him/her to do something different, would talk to that teacher. If the teacher agreed, fine; if not, they could look for another teacher in another school who could and would give them what they wanted.

Just these changes in the structure and administration of schools would soon bring about great improvements. More good teachers would be attracted to and held by these small, independent, responsible schools, and more bad teachers would be squeezed out, as it became clearer to them and everyone else that they could not do the work.

I believe that voucher plans, when we get them, will tend to push public schools strongly in these directions, and for this reason believe that such plans, though the schools now almost hysterically oppose them, are in fact in their best long-run interest.

New Home in Tenn.

Barb Joyner (TN) wrote:

When you wrote in September, we were in the middle of selling our home in Guam and moving to the mainland. We are now looking for some land to buy here among the hollows and ridges of Tennessee. We plan to build our own home, grow our own food, and enjoy.

We came to the area partly because of GWS. When we were in Guam we wrote to several families from the directory to inquire about laws in their area. We received an answer from the Bealls and so we wanted to meet them. Thank you, GWS, for helping us find folks we will enjoy living close to!

Cosette has had some difficulties since she was never around other children who did not go to school. But—since we have moved to Tennessee she has met many children who don't. She sees a big difference in their attitudes, values, and interests. She is delighted.

So are we. We too have noticed how nice, independent, and resourceful unschooled children are. We plan to continue our program of unschooling in Tennessee.

Unschooling in Ontario

Anna Myers (Ont.) sent this article from the Whitby Free Press, 10/15/80:

There is one family in Brooklin that has more than returned to the idea of “back-to-basics” education. Anna and Burt Myers are “homeschoolers”, that is, they have taken the responsibility of educating their two children, Drew (7), and Beth (4), upon themselves.

The Myers have gotten together with a few families to form a private school, Durham Community School, as a haven for those who wish to practice “homeschooling.”

The Education Act, the piece of Ontario legislation governing the education system in the province, provides that a parent does not have to send their child to public or separate school, If that child is getting “satisfactory instruction” elsewhere.

Mrs. Myers says that she takes her children on regular field trips to places of learning such as the Metro Zoo, the Royal Ontario Museum, the Ontario Science Center, Black Creek Pioneer Village, and the Marineland and Game Park in Niagara Falls.

Her children also do not lack for any physical exercise. Drew is involved in soccer and hockey as well as being a Beaver. Beth is involved in such things as dance and ballet.

One advantage to homeschooling, Mrs. Myers claims, is that her children’s education is not confined to regular classroom hours. “We don’t have to stop because of the weekend or the summer,” she said. “We don’t have to stop because it’s 3 o’clock, either. We can go on family outings during the week when most of the attractions are not busy.”

The Area Superintendent admitted that since the Myers have decided to open their own private school, there is nothing that he can do.

Shakespeare & Math

From a mother in Missouri:

I doubt if many people have had the joy of hearing their eight year old scream frantically, “Mom, *The Tempest* is on. Hurry, you’ll miss some!” as PBS showed the play this spring. It was excellently done. We had read the play the previous year and it’s one of our favorites.

How do I handle Shakespeare? We pick a play—usually comedy—and just read it. Sometimes we share the parts—sometimes I read it. We don’t puzzle long over parts we don’t understand, we don’t dissect anything. My daughter adores the glossary on the same page. And there’s no testing, of course. We enjoy the exciting use of words, the humor, just because Shakespeare is fun.

Someday I suppose my children will take a course on Shakespeare and dissect and get tested, etc., but never should this be anyone’s first exposure to him as is often the case. It was such with me and I never enjoyed him at all until this experience.

We do specific math—it’s incredible how much fun I’m finding that. I’ve always felt myself a math cripple but exploring it with the kids and stopping to puzzle about things I never understood—no grades, no getting sent to a low class—ah, there’s freedom to think. And my not knowing all helps the kids feel less threatened too. I’m not sure I ever realized decimals and fractions were the same, or why when multiplying decimals you move the decimal point so many places in the answer. It is fun! I think math problems arising from spontaneous situations are fantastic, but without fear of grades, etc., we find learning basic math methods enjoyable and important. We found it very stimulating to make up real-situation fraction multiplication and division problems. One wonderful thing about home study—what is tackled in a “lesson” becomes all day’s conversation.

Our eight year old writes and illustrates stories constantly and has hundreds of pages. An outgrowth of constant reading. And I think, had she been formally schooled she would never have had the time. As the junior high counselor says, there’s no time for reading or writing in school.

Our two at home will do much they wouldn’t do when they were in school. They used to resent scheduling anything after seven hours of school.

My daughter took a college typing course this summer and loved it! I think we'll get into university language classes as soon as she's ready.

She'll also take dance, takes piano, swims extraordinarily, will play soccer, is taking a sewing class, messes with computers at the university. My son is into piano, Boy Scouts, soccer, swimming.

Easy Tables At Home

From Chris May (OH):

Last night I read “Those Easy Tables” in GWS #17, and the idea appealed to me so much I made two up—multiplication and addition—for my 5½-year old son. This morning I introduced them to him and he seemed to like the idea.

The first thing he completed was the diagonal row going from $1 + 1$ to $10 + 10$. When he had trouble with $6 + 6$, I had him start on the left side at $6 + 1$ and continue to the right until he got it ($6 + 6$). He worked the left column of the multiplication table and then lost interest. Well, they’re mounted on our kitchen wall for his convenience and interest.

(A month later:) Let me tell you what happened with the tables on the wall. David has not touched them since I wrote and I think there are several reasons for that. But, a 9-year old friend of his came over a couple of weeks ago. When she saw the grids she asked David if she could do them, and upon receiving his permission, filled in the addition grid and some of the multiplication one.

I made a new addition table for David and he filled some of it in—even has a wrong answer which I’m waiting to see if he catches. I think he has little interest in it because: (1) he has a lot of other things to do. One of his favorites is looking through science textbooks and playing board games. (2) Having the grids up on the wall is rather inconvenient. If I put it away and brought it out from time to time, there would be renewed interest. (3) His interest in math is sporadic—must be in a “latent” period at this time.

And from Nancy Wallace (NH):

Enclosed you’ll find two graphs, based on your GWS suggestion: addition graphs that I made for Vita (age 5). With No. 1, I drew the graph and added a couple of numbers of my own (16, 20). Then Vita got to work and I left her alone.

When I came back, she had gotten much of it right, but had put a 9 at the junction of $4 + 3$. Instinctively I told her she’d gotten it wrong, and her instinctive response was to get mad. She began going over her numbers as

darkly as possible “so you won’t change anything,” she told me. I realized that she was having a problem moving down the columns and across visually, but by that point I realized also that she didn’t want any help, so I didn’t suggest that she use her fingers.

I then made a smaller graph, which she liked. She started in and began tracing the columns with her pen. One of the first things she did was to put an 8 at the junction of 4 and 3. I (fortunately) didn’t say a word. She dropped the graph for a while and then came back with a red pen and instantly saw the patterns that the numbers were making. She patched up her mistake and then went on to complete the graph. Twice now, she has gone back to graph No. 1, and she obviously “gets” the pattern!

Ishmael (9) did a multiplication graph, although he stopped with the sevens. But he did enjoy figuring out how it could be used for division.

Good Math Materials

In GWS #14, I wrote about the Miquon math materials developed by my friend, Lore Rasmussen (available from the Key Curriculum Project, PO Box 2304, Berkeley CA 94702). One GWS reader writes:

Our kids have been out of school now for two months and we all are loving it. We ordered materials from Key Curriculum Projects, namely Lore Rasmussen's lab books and her son's books on fractions. We cannot recommend them highly enough. Being a family of independent people, we find these books perfect for our children (9, 7, and 4) as they can do them when they want, skip pages (or even books) and still know what's going on. What's interesting is they usually go back to those skipped.

Also, Nancy Allen (CA) wrote:

I wanted to comment on the Key Curriculum Ca. I ordered several of their materials and have been quite pleasantly surprised. Their "*Miquon Math Materials*" (for ages 6–8) are well-planned and organized in worksheet form. They do not contain deadly pages of boring drill but rather a few large-print problems per page, plus many pages of follow-the-dots, Cuisenaire rod activities, etc. I wrote to Key Curriculum to ask a few questions and to comment on how Craig enjoyed the fractions book I had ordered, and they sent me a complimentary set of workbooks plus a very friendly, personal letter. Altogether seems like a very nice company to deal with. They also have geometry and algebra sets as well as other math materials.

A Multiplication Pattern

When she was teaching at the Miquon School, Lore Rasmussen told me about another little pattern she discovered, that can help children (or adults) know the multiplication tables. It seems obvious enough, once you see it, but in all the years I was teaching elementary math I never noticed it. One of the reasons Lore (who had no training either in math or math teaching) was such a wonderful math teacher was that she did notice such things—she was fascinated with numbers and the patterns they made, and looked for and saw them everywhere.

Suppose we write down the multiples of 2—2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, etc. If we look only at the last digit, i.e., the units digit, of each of those products, we get 2, 4, 6, 8, 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 0, etc. If we arrange them in a circular pattern then by going around clockwise we get the last (units) digit of the numbers on the 2 tables.



What Lore then noticed was that if you go round that same circle counter clockwise, you get the last digit in the 8 tables—8, 16, 24, 32, 40, 48, 56, 64, 72, 80, and so on for as long as you want to continue.

If you think about it a while, you can see it would have to be that way, since adding 8 to a number is the same as adding 10 (which doesn't change the last digit) and then subtracting 2. But I never noticed that little pattern, and I don't think any of the other people to whom she pointed it out had noticed it either.

Then she wondered whether what was true for 2 and 8 would be true for other pairs of numbers that add up to 10—say, 4 and 6. The last digits in the 4 table are 4, 8, 2, 6, 0, etc. Go round the other way, and you do indeed get the last digit in the 6 tables—6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, etc. And, as you can quickly see for yourself, it works (as it must) for 3 and 7 and for 1 and 9.



If *GWS* readers show these patterns to children, I'll bet that a lot of those

children say, “Neat!” It is neat, and part of the joy and beauty of math—true math, not math as taught in most schools—is that it is full of neat patterns like these.

Stopwatch

On the whole, I think the best way for children to get to know numbers is to use numbers, the same way we adults use them, that is, to measure and compare things, and think about what our measurements tell us. My experience is that if children have tape measures, they are going to want to measure the lengths of things; if they have scales, they will weigh things, and so on. One of the most interesting things to measure and think about is time. In Chap. 15 of *What Do I Do Monday?* I wrote about a number of things that children might do with a stopwatch. Children who have stopwatches will probably think of others—and when they do, we'd like to hear about them.

The *SEE* catalog (Selective Educational Equipment, 3 Bridge St., Newton MA 02195) lists a simple wind-up stopwatch for \$13.50 (1979-80 cat.—price may be higher now). The trouble with wind-up watches is that young children may overwind and break them. Until recently electronic digital stopwatches were too expensive to consider. But the latest catalog from Markline (P.O. Box 171J, Belmont MA 02178) lists a digital stopwatch for \$14.95 (Model TI56210); for \$21.95, a combined calendar watch and stopwatch, with alarm, and for \$24.95 a calendar watch and stopwatch with even more features—times to 1/100th sec., split times for lap readings, etc. All of these seem to me very good buys.

Drama School Requirement

Judy McCahill wrote:

Just for fun recently, and because Colleen is interested in acting, I requested a brochure from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. Though we can't know what the future brings, it was reassuring, unschooling-wise, to see this brochure. There are no academic requirements to enter RADA. People of 17 and older are admitted on the strength of an audition. Period. And receive perhaps the finest training in acting in the English-speaking world. Colleen said she didn't need math to be an actress and she was right.

Dell Puzzle Magazines

Pat Richoux, who is the mother of our associate editor and has been enjoying GWS, wrote:

I liked the article you and JH wrote about the patterns in the multiplication tables (*GWS* #18, “Those Easy Tables”). It made me think suddenly of the tricks I use to solve *Word Arithmetic* problems—looking for 0, 1, 5, and 9 because of the distinctive properties they have. And that made me think—I don’t recall you saying anything in *GWS* about all the neat things kids can learn at home if their parents are Dell Puzzle fans. You certainly grew up on those magazines, and should remember how you helped me work them and eventually learned to do them yourself.

The letters people write to the Dell magazines often tell about things kids do with the puzzles and how they learn from them. I think someone said that their kid just practiced writing letters in the empty boxes of unused crosswords and enjoyed that. The first third of every issue is filled with easy puzzles that any school-aged kid could learn to solve, especially if it was a joint project.

Cryptograms (sentences in letter-substitution code) also teach things about spelling, like how many different two-letter words there are beginning with *a* or *i*, and the reasonableness of guessing what word would fit and make sense when you know some of the letters ... and looking for certain spelling patterns, repeated letters, like “little” or “people.” It’s like what they put into school workbooks, except that *Dell Puzzle* magazines are legitimate adult things, not lessons, therefore might seem more attractive to kids. It’s something grown-ups do for fun, not because it’s teaching them something (though it is)—and the satisfaction comes in getting it all right, or in beating the editorial score.

I remember that you used to help me do Anacrostics (sometimes called Double-crostics), by reading off the letters from the word lists as I filled them into the boxes. It really was a help (that up-and-down, back-and-forth bit can be tedious)—and then pretty soon you were trying to figure out the words, and looking things up in the encyclopedia or the almanac to solve the words.

More I think about it, the more I see that this fits right into the *GWS* philosophy. Can’t imagine how you could have overlooked plugging such a

rich, cheap, interesting source of learning and family-togetherness.

Well, I plead guilty. I did think quite a while ago of mentioning the Dell puzzle magazines in *GWS*, but never got around to writing up a piece. I'm glad my mother got me off the hook by saying so much of what I would have said anyway.

When I showed John an issue, he was amazed at how much it contained, and I counted it up—21 crosswords, 7 Anacrostics, 7 Diagramless crosswords, 6 Kriss-Kross, 17 Cryptograms, 6 *Word Arithmetic* problems, plus the Cross Sums, Bowl-A-Score, Logic problem, and 20 other puzzles. So there's a lot inside besides crosswords; I don't even like crosswords, yet I can still get my money's worth from the other puzzles.

There are three monthly publications, all very similar: *Dell Crosswords*, *Official Crosswords*, and *Pocket Crosswords*. You can find them on almost any magazine stand (I think the price is now 95¢), or subscribe from Dell Publishing Co., 245 E 47th, New York NY 10017. They also put out a magazine without crosswords for people like me, *Dell Pencil Puzzles* and *Word Games*, plus a number of special issues, annuals, etc.

I do feel I owe a lot of what I know about words, numbers, and problem-solving to Dell. And I have no doubt that one reason I happen to do well on standardized tests, with their multiple choice questions, analogies, etc., is because I've done so many of these puzzles.

Here's one of the easier *Word Arithmetic* problems taken from a *Dell magazine*. It's a long division problem in which letters have been substituted for the numbers, and your job is to figure out what numbers the letters stand for. Each number from 0 to 9 is used, and they are consistent throughout—if X stands for 7, every X in the problem is a 7, and no other letter is 7. See what luck you have with this.

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When a *GWS* reader said in a letter that her son likes puzzles, I did write

to her about the Dell magazines. She wrote back:

I do hope you will write about the *Dell Puzzle* magazines in your newsletter. We thoroughly enjoy all of their sections and have found them to be a great educational tool. I feel puzzles and games are particularly good for those parents who wish their children to learn to reason logically and think critically. The crossword puzzles are great vocabulary builders; the logic problems and cryptograms certainly promote logical analysis; and best of all—they are fun! The day my son began doing *Word Arithmetic* I knew he understood the logic as well as the mechanics of long division.

Good Painting Materials

Tom Wesley (Soames Bar, CA 95568), the father who told us in GWS #9 about the stunning artwork his daughter had been doing since she was a baby, writes:

When I first wrote GWS I was too insecure to use my name. Now I feel safe enough after four years of tolerant, helpful teachers and school board members to come out of the unschooling closet. I've enclosed a couple of photos of Mariko's work. (*Ed—they are still very beautiful.*)

Mariko goes to school when she feels like it, about once a week. I don't see how she could have the energy to paint if she were to come home from school, as you say, all droopy every day. She paints in the morning. Sometimes she whispers to me when she gets up that she's had a dream. She's going to do a painting today. We also have time to play piano duets and she can curl up with a book for as long as she likes. She reads faster than I do.

In GWS #16 you mention art materials. I'm a real crank about worthless children's art supplies, the way children's art is exhibited, and all the other adult assumptions and myths about children's art.

We have always bought the best art supplies for Mariko despite my subsistence income. The results into her ninth year have constantly amazed us. Her use of materials went approximately from crayons and felt pens at 6 months of age to easel and tempera at one year, to acrylics at 2. Acrylics have since been her favorite medium.

We never nagged her about making a mess or wasting paint. That would ruin the playful mood. Her "pitty paints" were so important to her that she was careful not to waste them. I quote Mariko on why she prefers acrylics: "They go on better and when you put them on thick they're shiny. Tempera paintings get dull and powdery. They won't last. There are lots more nice acrylic colors." But in all the books on children's art I have read in Japan and the US, and in all the shows of children's art in Tokyo and the Bay Area, I have never seen an acrylic painting by a child.

My reward for buying her an expensive camel hair brush is to see the sensual pleasure she gets from the delicate feel of a new brush and to see the interesting way a new brush influences her painting. For some time she has

been painting on masonite boards or other hardboard. I buy big sheets at a builder's supply, cut them into 2' x 4' or other sizes, lightly sand them, and prime them with good latex paint.

Speculations about the interplay of light, the reflection and absorption of colors are endless. You might be familiar with some of the theories of the impressionists. Every artist has his/her own philosophy. Since before she was one year old, Mariko has been getting excited about colors and their relationship.

This has to do with priming the boards, because base paint is not just preparation or the painting surface. The base controls the color. It is what gives color by reflecting light back through the color. When light goes through the colors, it is absorbed or reflected back. Of course, gloss reflects, flat absorbs. Gesso is white and flat.

You can prepare hardboard (masonite, bakelite, etc.) for acrylic paint with gesso or white latex interior house paint. Usually it should be flat. The problem is that there are many inferior house paints that will yellow or crack with age. You have to decide on gesso or house paint by considering how much you want to spend or how important you feel your work is. Gesso by the gallon is about twice as much but probably worth that much more. Use at least 2 coats of paint thinned with water. Let them dry well in between.

We usually buy Liquitex acrylic paint for Mariko only because we know some professionals who use it, and because it doesn't smell when it's mixed with other Liquitex colors. Different brands mixed together smell sometimes.

If you use acrylics thin like water colors you have the problem you mention in *GWS #16* with water colors when the rinse water is muddy. My wife, Miyoko or I act as the assistant-in-audience when Mariko paints. It's our job to get fresh water, etc. But if you use acrylics thick in the way oils are used, the muddy rinse water doesn't change the paint color. With white or other light colors, it might be necessary to squeeze out the excess rinse water from the brush with a cloth.

Herbert Read wrote in *"Learning Through Art"* (about 1936) that painting is the ideal mode for children to express themselves. This has been especially true since art was set free by modern artists and the invention of non-toxic acrylics. But painting done by children doesn't seem to have evolved much. In art history there have been no child prodigies to correspond with the great young musicians throughout musical history. Perhaps adult assumptions

about children's potential and children's derivative assumptions about what they can do with paint haven't caught up with our times. We can finally imagine that Mozart's sister might have been Mozart had she not been treated like a girl but we have not yet come to understand that the same kind of attitudes prevent all children from realizing their full potential.

I have encountered many examples of the kind of adult attitudes I am talking about. The comment of a particularly arrogant curator when she saw Mariko's paintings was, "As if we didn't have enough trouble with our modern artists being called childish, without having a real child's art to contend with." In another case, a friend of mine in San Francisco entered a painting by his daughter in the annual San Francisco Open Show without stating her age (about 10) since there was no place on the form to do so. When the newspapers learned her age, the judges withdrew her painting and told her father to enter her in the children's show incidentally, her paintings were not for sale and neither are Mariko's. They are her treasures to be put away and occasionally to enjoy.

If children have not been given good art materials and helped to acquire the techniques so that they can use them bravely while they are young, possibly before they are four but even better earlier, their original imagination is probably lost forever. It will be obscured by the socializing process.

Young Author

An AP story, 10/4/80:

Juiz De Flora, Brazil—Luciano Fleury Da Cruz has become a celebrity in Brazil by writing a book about bandits who try to take over a city by polluting its water supply with a pipe-corroding chemical, and then kidnap all the plumbers to prevent repairs.

Luciano is 6 years old.

“He’s been writing stories since he was 4”, says his mother. “This was his first book, and on a lark we submitted it to a publisher. Somehow the newspapers found out and since then everything’s been just crazy.”

Reporters line up for interviews. Television shows scramble to invite the boy to appear. Strangers knock on the door and ask for copies of his 60-page book. The book, a children’s story, is called *A Epidemia Hidraulica*, Portuguese for *The Plumbing Epidemic*.

In it Luciano writes: “Castor was sleeping when the tap began to drip heavily and he woke up and went to fix it. But it kept dripping and he kept getting angrier. Luckily his friend Mosca, the detective, managed to plug the leaking hole, but they needed a plumber. They went to the workshop of Metalico, Mosca’s plumber. But when they got there it was closed. Castor’s house remained flooded, and so did all the other houses in the city because all the plumbers had disappeared.”

“I don’t know where Luciano gets the ideas for his stories”, his mother says. “He won’t accept suggestions from us, and if we try to help he throws a tantrum and runs into his room.”

Luciano insists his stories are original, but admits to being influenced by Walt Disney and Brazil’s best-selling author, Jorge Amado.

“One reporter didn’t believe Luciano wrote the book by himself,” his father said. “So Luciano took the man’s pen, sat down in front of him and wrote a chapter.”

Luciano says it takes him between two and four months to finish a book, writing when and where inspiration strikes. He wrote the last chapter of his book in his pediatrician's waiting room. Illustrations are drawn by a cousin, supervised by the author.

"The Plumbing Epidemic" had a first printing of just 100 copies. "We had intended to distribute them only among family and friends," Luciano's father explains. "We didn't want to make it seem we were exploiting the boy."

The boy sees it differently, "My father wouldn't let me sell it," he says. "That sure was dumb."

His father is now negotiating a second printing of 200 copies with a small local publishing house. These also will be distributed free, he said. "Luciano will turn professional only with his second book."

The second book—and the third—are already written. Luciano's father is typing the manuscripts from the author's handwritten notebooks. *The Treasure of Comba-Tomba* and *The End of the Hunt* should be published in January with printings of at least 2,000 copies each. All profits will go to Luciano, his father said.

Luciano seems less than thrilled with the literary life. He enjoyed the publicity for a while, but "giving so many interviews is tiring." Anyway, when he grows up he plans to be "a scientist, an inventor and a chemist," and will write only in his spare time.

Exploring Music

From Nancy Wallace (NH):

I really enjoyed Dean Schneider's "Advice on Reading" (GWS #15). As I mentioned earlier, Ishmael and I are both learning how to read (and play) music. I have been doing a lot of thinking about how you do teach someone to read music, and basically, all you would have to do is follow Dean Schneider's seeps. First, play kids a lot of music. Then, Suzuki style, let them play themselves, until they want to read music. Then, I'd just give kids the notes to the pieces they already know and let them get to work themselves (with whatever help they want). When they are relaxed around sheet music, I would begin to do some work (like the work with phonetics) on intervals, timing, etc. But I wouldn't rush it.

Ishmael and Vita learned how to read by reading *real* books, and likewise, I'd only give the kids *real* music to read. Bach wrote volumes of pieces for his children, and so did Schumann and many others. Mozart and Beethoven wrote some pretty easy stuff when they were children and so on. The musical literature is immense. Ishmael likes to play folk songs, especially when the words are written down so the rest of us can sing along and I'd count folk songs as musical literature as well.

Ishmael has been doing a whole lot of music reading on his own, from my Suzuki books, where he has heard the pieces many a time, and also from Bob's recorder books, because he knows that if he learns something then he can play it with Bob. He has also been improvising like crazy. He takes a melody, unconsciously, from one of our advanced Suzuki records, plays it with his right hand and then he works out his own left hand accompaniment. In a few days he has embellished the right hand and comes out with a totally new piece. He never sits down to improvise, but he plays the piano all the time in snatches and he barely pays attention to what he's doing. It's marvelous to see what emerges.

(From a later letter:) For the past week or so, Vita has been busily writing music—tuneful music at that. The amazing thing, to us and to her teacher, Bob Fraley, is that she supposedly doesn't know how to read music yet, and yet she can write it and play what she's written. I think Ishmael showed her where middle C is on music paper and she wrote the rest by

interval.

Ishmael writes music too, in fact he was Vita's inspiration, and recently he's been writing little operettas—the latest one is called "*Boston Charley*", and Vita has to do a lot of singing.

Vita just came running up—she just discovered that a cube has six sides!

P.S. At night Vita and Ishmael have been dancing to Beethoven's 3rd and 5th symphonies.

My First Tune

As it happens, over the holidays, for the first time in my life, I wrote down a tune—a melody to go with William Blake’s poem “*The Divine Image*”, which we printed in *GWS* #12. What’s more, except for the first line, I wrote it all on a bus, going up to Maine to see some friends over Christmas.

I’ve had tunes going round and round in my head for years, but this is the first time I’ve ever tried to write one out. I had read the poem to an old friend a few days before, and had wished I could write a melody to go with it. But to write any music that I would like as much as the poem itself seemed impossible. However, the night before I went to Maine, while I was improvising on the cello, I worked out quite a nice tune for the first line. Next day, on the bus, I was reading some books (for our list), but the tune I had written kept going round and round in my mind, saying, “Write some more! Write some more!” Finally I gave in, put the book away, got out a steno pad, and using my own chromatic notation, began to work on the tune. The man next to me must have thought I was crazy, humming little bits of tune and then writing mysterious dots (they didn’t look like music) on the paper. By the time I finished my journey, the tune was finished. I liked it very much, and still do—I think it goes quite well with the poem.

Now I want to write tunes for some other poems, among them Robert Frost’s “*Fire and Ice*.” I plan to try to work from the beginning with standard musical notation. I suspect that with practice I will find it easier to get the tunes from my mind to the paper. Of course, with a piano or other keyboard instrument it is much simpler—you can tell by looking what the notes are, while if you are composing out of your head you have to figure out all the intervals.

Several readers, notably Ann Kauble (“Writing First”, *GWS* #12), have told us about their children learning to write before they learned to read. For some, this is more natural. I have long wanted to be able to look at written notes and sing them, but not having even enough time for the cello, I didn’t want to spend time on this kind of sight-reading. More than once I thought that perhaps writing music, which I also wanted to do, might for me be the best way to learn to sight-read it, and it looks as if this will be the way I will go.

At any rate, I feel strongly that children (or adults) learning music should be encouraged from the start to spend some of their time making up tunes and writing them down. If some of you adult beginners or your children write some tunes, send them along. Plenty of magazines publish children's poems; maybe *GWS* will be the first to publish their music.

More on Tape Recorders

Hard as it may be to believe, some things actually do get cheaper. The price of really good quality stereo cassette recorders, which at first cost several hundred dollars, has been dropping, to the point where you can get one for not much over \$100, sometimes even less. With a pair of stereo headphones (good ones often available for less than \$50), this is the least expensive way I know to get high quality reproduction of recorded music.

A disadvantage of cassette recorders is that many more recordings are available on records than on cassette tapes—the selection on records is much greater. But one advantage of cassette recorders is that, with efficient headphones, you can play back the music directly, without having to have an amplifier. A further advantage, especially in families with young children, is that cassettes are much less likely to be damaged in playing and handling. I think it might be hard to teach children much younger than six (?) to handle records carefully enough to keep from damaging them, but children of three or younger can and do play cassette recorders without hurting them or the tapes.

A still further advantage is that with a recorder and a microphone (quite good ones are available for less than \$50, and Radio Shack has advertised a stereo mike for that price), you can make recordings yourself, of you and/or your children talking, or singing, or playing musical instruments.

I have found it very helpful, in my own work with the cello, to make from time to time a recording of myself playing. When I am playing, I think so hard about how I want the music to sound that I tend to hear it sounding that way. If I actually make a recording, and later play it back, I get the unvarnished truth. I usually hear that when playing legato I do not join notes nearly as smoothly as I think I do. I may also hear that on some notes my intonation (pitch) is not quite right. I often learn a lot by recording myself playing just a simple scale. But now and then I am pleasantly surprised to find myself getting a much better sound from my cello than I had thought. Sometimes it even sounds almost like a “real” cellist playing.

Whether it tells you you’re playing or singing is better or worse than you thought, a tape recorder gives you the kind of feedback that otherwise you might only be able to get from a teacher or expert player. You can also record

and note your own or your children's progress over time.

It could also be useful in studying foreign languages—you can compare your own pronunciation of words with that of native speakers. Of course, you don't need an expensive recorder to record voices; the cheapest portable will work well enough.

It is fun, too, to make recordings of your children talking when they are little. You may think at the time that you will remember forever what they sound like—but you won't. Years later, the sound of their voices may remind you even more strongly than photographs what they were like when they were little. Perhaps even a tear or two will fall.

One company from whom I have bought equipment, with good results, is Stereo Discounters, 6730 Santa Barbara Court, Baltimore MD 21277. Their prices on the brands they sell are usually much less than you would pay in a store, and many times during a year they will have special sales in which their prices are even lower. As I write they have on sale (until Feb. 28, 1981), one very good cassette deck for \$136 and another for \$148, plus turntables and receivers at very low prices. Their catalog is well worth sending for.

On Handwriting

When I was little I was taught cursive handwriting, found it easy and pleasant to do, and soon developed a small and fairly neat handwriting that, at least when I am being careful, has not changed much to this day.

Teaching fifth grade, and seeing many students with slow, tortured, scrawly, irregular “cursive” writing, I began to wonder why the schools insisted on teaching cursive. Still believing then that schools had good reasons for everything they did, I decided it must be because cursive was so much faster than manuscript printing. Since my own handwriting, particularly when I was using it a lot, was very small and quick, I could easily believe this. Secretly I thought that probably very few people could write as fast as I could.

One day in fifth grade I told my students about “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog”, the famous typing sentence (one of many, I later learned) that contains all the letters of the alphabet. I asked them to see how many times they could write it in a half-minute, which I timed with a stopwatch. After each trial, they counted up the number of words they had written, to see how much they improved with practice. We did a number of things like this in the class, in which students competed not against others but against themselves, trying to break their own records. The children enjoyed these contests, in which, since everybody improved, everybody won. They fell to work with a will on *The Quick Brown Fox*—as did I, sitting at my desk, racing along with my tiny handwriting.

When I began walking around the room looking at the papers which the children eagerly stuck in my face to show their improvement, I received a shock. Three of them could apparently write faster than I could, even though they used manuscript printing, one sloppily but two quite nearly. I thought, “This can’t be right, there must be a mistake somewhere, I must have counted wrong, these ten-year olds can’t possibly write fat manuscript letters faster than my itty-bitty super-speedy cursive.” I proposed we write some more quick brown foxes. They gladly agreed. Back at my desk, I made my pen fly. This time we would see! Alas, the results were the same—I was still the fourth fastest writer in the class. (Did I confess? I don’t remember.)

So why do we teach and demand cursive in schools? I have no idea. Pure

habit, I guess. In the words of the old song, “Do, do, do what you done, done, done before.” Later I learned that school cursive, first called Palmer handwriting, had begun as an elaborate decorative script invented for engraving in copper, a very slow and painstaking form of writing that had nothing to do with speed. Someone, somewhere, decided that it would be nice if children learned to write like copperplate engraving, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The trouble is, of course, that a great many children never do learn to write quickly, easily, beautifully, or even legibly, and the higher their social status, the worse they write. I saw an amusing demonstration of this once. A friend and I were collecting signatures for a political candidate. We had been assigned a street in Cambridge, which begins in a very rich neighborhood and slowly works its way north into one of the poorer neighborhoods in the city. Most of the first signatures on our petition sheets, collected in the rich neighborhood, were barely legible scrawls, no two of them alike. Then, as the neighborhoods got slowly less rich and the houses smaller, the signatures began to be more legible. The last thirty or so signatures on the sheet, all collected in a low-income working class neighborhood, were all perfect and identical examples of the model handwriting you see over school blackboards. They were so alike that I thought the Board of Elections would think we had forged them all ourselves.

Later on, thinking about this, I decided that these working class people had almost certainly all gone to parochial schools, where the teachers had said, perhaps silently, perhaps out loud, “We’re going to teach you good handwriting if we don’t teach you anything else.” There is a kind of social realism at work here. Those teachers were fairly sure that none of their working class students would one day be dictating letters to secretaries, or writing out prescriptions, or preparing legal briefs, or designing machines or buildings. No, what they would be doing would be filling out sales slips and laundry receipts, and if people couldn’t read their writing, they were going to lose their jobs. The moral seems to be that if you work hard enough at preparing children to fill out laundry receipts, you will probably be able to teach quite a few of them to do this. Unfortunately, that is about all they are going to be able to do.

Meanwhile, at the “good” schools where the children of affluent people went to get ready to become doctors, lawyers, professors, etc. the bad

handwriting grew to be such a problem that some of the schools decided they had to try to do something about it. What they tried to do, and what they learned about handwriting in the process, I will write more about in the next issue.

Useful TV

Letters from several readers:

I have just discovered that Instructional Television can be valuable, and I cannot recall any mention of it in *GWS*. I learned that the teacher's guides are available for a small fee to anyone who wishes to order them from the educational TV station. First, I ordered the 1980 Instructional Television Resource Catalogue for the state, which lists the daily program schedule, a description of each program, and the title and price of the teacher's guide for each program. I ordered the guides I wanted and received them four days later. I wonder if each state has an ITV Resource Catalog that can be ordered from the state educational TV station free of charge. The teacher's guides could be used by a child independently. Two programs we especially like are *Finding Our Way* (map reading skills) and *Thinkabout* (problem solving methods).

Ed. note: We found out from the local public TV station that in Massachusetts, the guides are available from Mass. Educational Television, 54 Rindge Av. Ext., Cambridge 02140.

One of the greatest benefits of homeschooling has been something I'm hesitant to discuss. The purists may be aghast, but there is now time to take advantage of good television. Daytime programming on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) is nearly all educational. After the initial glut, the children have settled into only watching favorite programs: *Math Patrol*, *Electric Company*, *3-2-1 Contact*, *Cover To Cover*, *Let's Draw*.

When they went to school, they felt compelled to watch TV every night from 8 to 9 p.m. just because 9 was the required bedtime. Now we share many good adult programs since they can sleep later (or at least as long the youngest's noise will permit!). Our seven year old has learned who the Nazis were and what inhumanity can exist—we watched *Playing for Time* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Her sister knows who Disraeli was because of *Masterpiece Theatre*. We have been freed from the consumption of garbage because now we can say, "No, thank you, I'll wait an hour for the banquet to begin."

I've noticed that there is a large difference between kids who watch TV and those who don't. We've narrowed it down to really good nature films on PBS and some regular network stuff. My kids forget how to amuse themselves when they watch a lot because they are so used to being spoon-fed entertainment on the tube. They seem more people-centered and creative in their relationships after not watching for a while. But then, it does have its inspiring moments. My eldest boy (6) just watched the "Albatross", essentially a flying bicycle, fly across the English Channel, and he was really thrilled.

Possible Exchange

An Alaskan reader writes:

I worked at an adult vocational school for a time and discovered how easy it was to get enough basic skills into a person so he/she could take and pass the GED test for a high school diploma. In some cases their skills had been completely lacking (they could not read or write at all). Anyway, my staff and I got those people nearly 500 GED diplomas.

I have decided to get out of established education and do something different. One thing I will do is to take my children out of the system and educate them myself, probably using Calvert materials for their basic skills.

I have also considered taking on some children in need of a home and education. Another possibility would be to team up with other people to exchange services aimed at the education of our young. Our oldest boy (12) has already toured Hawaii and California, and spent the 5th grade in Fresno, Cal., with the family of a business man. (Also has his own stock market account.) If these experiences were shared by a group of people, it could possibly turn out a good education and for a reasonable cost. But these exchanges would have to be handled carefully.

Museum Volunteer

A couple of years ago, a high school student in New York City wrote:

I worked as a volunteer at the American Museum of Natural History this past summer. Were you ever there? It's a great place. I loved working there for all the reasons you write about—we were given real, useful things to do. I always thought of it as a fun thing to do during my summer, but I soon realized that we were really helpful to them.

Also, I made friends with many adults, on my own, not through my parents. I recently went back to visit a friend that I made, a 60-year-old guard. He is very different from people that my parents know (those are either in the political or theatrical world—that is quite varied in itself, I know). He does tell me that “these are the best years of your life”; he is cynical and thinks I have stars in my eyes. Perhaps I do, but I know what to do about that—you and Paul Goodman (*Growing Up Absurd*) have told me.

But all the same he treats me like an equal, and it is an honest, equal friendship, really all that is needed for any good one.

New Books Available Here

Grimm's Fairy Tales (\$5.35 + post). I've been looking for a good collection of these tales, and this is by far the best I have seen—20 of them, very nicely printed, and told in the straightforward and unaffected way in which the original storytellers must have told them. The book is light in weight so a child would feel comfortable holding it; the stories are well-translated and fun to read; and, as in our Andersen collection (GWS #17), there are lovely illustrations in color and black-and-white by the prince of fairy tale illustrators, Arthur Rackham. Don't see how it could be better.

In the introduction to a different edition of Grimm's tales, published by Pantheon, the Irish writer, Padriac Colum says some very interesting and lovely things about the old tales:

In the place where the storyteller was, the coming of night was marked as it was not in towns or in modern houses. It was so marked that it created in the mind a different rhythm. There had been a rhythm of the day and now there was a rhythm of the night. A rhythm that was compulsive, fitted to daily tasks, waned, and a rhythm that was acquiescent, fitted to wishes, took its place.

The prolongation of light meant the cessation of traditional stories in European cottages and when the cottages took in American kerosene or paraffin there was prolongation. Then came lamps with full and steady light, lamps that gave real illumination. Told under this illumination the traditional stories ceased to be appropriate because the rhythm that gave them meaning was weakened.

Other things happened to put traditional stories out of date. Young people went to schools and learned to read. The newspaper reader took the place of the traditional storyteller, the man of memories.

A real culture, as we know, is all of a piece and all its parts fit together. Household stories imply work done in a household and work done in a household implies household stories. In western Ireland today a loom or a spinning wheel is a sign that one can find a traditional storyteller in the cottage or in the neighborhood.

The Children Of Green Knowe, by L. M. Boston (\$1.75 +post). This book is about a small English boy, his mother dead and his father far away in Burma, who goes to live with his great-grandmother in a big country house that their family has lived in for hundreds of years. There he meets the ghosts or spirits of three children who lived—and died, all together, of the plague—in the house, three hundred years before. In time these child-ghosts, who have lovingly haunted the house since their death, and played with many later generations of children who lived there, reveal themselves to the new little boy, play with him, and in the end save his life from another, evil, and very different kind of ghost. The story is told very simply and believably, and we soon envy this little boy's sense of being part of a very long tradition, of being in many ways connected to the past.

By *The Shores Of Silver Lake*, by Laura Ingalls Wilder (\$2.65 + post). In this fifth book in the much loved Little House series, the Ingalls family move from Minnesota to a homestead in what will become the town of De Smet in the great plains of the Dakotas. As the story begins, the family has all had scarlet fever, and Mary has gone blind from it. But she keeps up her courage, and Laura leans to “see out loud” for her, telling her about everything she sees. After much hard work and many adventures, the family is finally settled on their homestead, where Ma and Mary hope they will settle down for good, though the adventurous Laura, truly her father's daughter, would rather always be moving into someplace wild and new.

The Phoenix And The Carpet and *The Story Of The Amulet*, by E. Nesbit (\$1.75 each + post). The four children (and occasionally their baby brother) from *Five Children And It* have further adventures with magical creatures and objects, in which they learn again that magical powers can often get them into difficult situations. In *The Phoenix And The Carpet*, they find a magic carpet that will take them anywhere, but it often takes the incredibly vain but kindly phoenix to get them out of their scrapes. In *The Story Of The Amulet*, a magic charm enables them to travel into the past (and the future as well), where they meet Julius Caesar and other interesting and sometimes sinister people. In all of these stories E. Nesbit keeps her sure touch about how children see and respond to the adult world, and conveys very well the children's unsentimental, sometimes exasperated, but always strong affection for each other.

Nesbit was what we would now call an ecologist, and dreamed of a world

in which people would be much kinder to each other, and above all to children. At one point in *The Story of the Amulet*, the children visit the future, and there meet a nice lady whom they invite to look at their world. The lady agrees, but after looking only a few minutes at Victorian London and the wretched faces of the poor people there, she begs to be allowed to go home. So the children push the lady into her own time and place, where London is clean and beautiful, and the Thames runs clear and bright, and no one is afraid, or anxious, or in a hurry.

The Tombs Of Atuan, by Ursula Le Guin (\$2.00 + post). This is the second book in the Earthsea trilogy (see GWS #18 for a review of *The Wizard Of Earthsea*.) It begins with the story of a girl who when only five is taken from her home to be prepared and trained to serve as the high priestess of a very old religion of darkness and death. She grows up in a tiny desert settlement surrounding the great tombs which are the seat of this religion. At the age of fifteen she completes her training and takes command of the labyrinth of underground caves and tunnels, dozens of miles of them, that is her world and which only she is allowed to enter. She believes in the nameless powers which she serves, and is content and indeed proud to serve them.

Into this holy and forbidden place suddenly comes the magician Ged, now a mature man in his thirties, hoping to find and take away an ancient ring which will bring peace to his world. The young priestess, outraged at this invasion and desecration, resolves to kill him. But, furious as she is, she can't help admiring his courage, and even more, can't help wondering why and how he came. That is all I will say about the plot of this strange and compelling story which, every time I read it, sticks in my mind long afterward.

Mathematician's Delight, by W. W. Sawyer (\$3.15 + post). This book, by a British mathematics professor, is not a textbook, though it has a lot of textbook type material—examples, exercises, etc. As the author says in his first sentence, "The main object of this book is to dispel the fear of mathematics." I don't know any other book aimed at the same audience—adults, and children over 12 (maybe younger)—that does this as well.

Some more quotes from this friendly and sensible book:

Mathematical thinking is a tool. There is no point in acquiring it

unless you mean to use it.

Why should such fear of mathematics be felt? Quite certainly the cause does not lie in the nature of the subject itself. The most convincing proof of this is the fact that people in their everyday occupations—when they are making something—do, as a matter of fact, reason along lines which are essentially the same as those used in mathematics.

To master anything—from football to relativity—requires effort. But it does not require unpleasant effort, drudgery.

Mathematics is like a chest of tools: before studying the tools in detail, a good worker should know the object of each, when it is used, how it is used, what it is used for.

What is true of philosophy is equally true of mathematics: its roots lie in the common experiences of daily life.

Reason is in fact neither more nor less than an experiment carried out in the imagination. It is by no means necessary that reasoning should proceed by clearly stated steps.

The two main conditions for success in any sort of work are interest and confidence.

This last quote is from Chapter 4 of the book, “The Strategy and Tactics of Study.” This chapter alone is well worth the price of the book. It is so solidly packed with good advice that it would be tempting to quote it all. The gist of it is this:

If you can find out what your difficulty is, you are half-way to overcoming it. (Ed.—I would say nine-tenths of the way.) People often go about with a fog of small difficulties in their heads: they are not quite sure what the words mean, they are not quite sure what has gone before, and they are not quite sure what the object of the work is. All these difficulties can be dealt with easily, if they are taken one at a time.

This interesting and pleasant book will be very helpful to any people who

had trouble with math, or who are working with children who have trouble with it. But it is not for them only—anyone can, and most will, enjoy it. Feel free to browse and skip around in it. Leave alone any parts that make you feel anxious. Come back to them later—or don't, whichever you want. Sawyer means what he says; it is more important that you should like the mathematics you know than that you should know a great deal. If you like what you know, you can easily learn more.

Aha! Insight, by Martin Gardner (6.75 + post). This book, for adults or older children (10+?—maybe even younger if they love puzzles) is a collection of riddles, puzzles, and brain teasers, with very good discussions of the ways we use our minds when we solve riddles and puzzles. Martin Gardner doesn't just tell you the answers; he goes through the steps a person would use in trying to solve the problems. So it is a book about thinking, above all the kinds of thinking that we use in doing mathematics.

As any will know who read his monthly "*Mathematical Recreations*" in *Scientific American*, Gardner is a very lively, clear, and interesting writer. Along with his text are many amusing illustrations.

I should add that for some of the riddles, at least, I thought up solutions that were not the same as Gardner's, but that seem to me just as good. So don't assume that the answers he gives are always the only answers.

The Book Of Small, by Emily Carr (\$3.60 + post). Emily Carr was one of Canada's greatest painters, and the first to use the forests and the totems of the Indians of the west coast as materials for her painting. When she was in her seventies, her health failing, she began to write about her life. This charming collection of essays is about her growing up as a little girl in Victoria, British Columbia, in the late 1800s. She, the "Small" of this book, was the youngest in a large family. It is astonishing how vividly Emily Carr remembered these scenes of her early childhood, and even more, what it felt like to be little. A quote or two may give some of the special flavor of these memoirs:

(Saturday night) the clotheshorse came galloping into the kitchen and straddled around the stove inviting our clean clothes to mount and be aired . Dede got the brown Windsor soap, heated the towels, and put on a thick white apron with a bib. Mother unbuttoned us and by that time the pots and kettles were steaming. Dede scrubbed hard. If you

wriggled, the flat of the long-handled dipper came down spankety on your skin.

Alice was two years older than I. She stopped brushing her long red hair, jumped into bed, leaned over the chair that the candle sat on. Pouf! Out went Sunday and the candle.

The Cow stood meek and still. Small climbed to the cop rail of the fence, and jumped on the broad expanse of red back, far too wide for her short legs to grip. For one still moment, while the slow mind of the cow surmounted her astonishment, Small sat in the wide valley between horns and hip-bones. Then it seemed as though the Cow fell apart, and as if every part of her shot in a different direction. Small hurled through space and bumped hard.

A perceptive and delightful look at the world of little children, and also, of little towns just getting started.

Our Town, by Thornton Wilder (\$1.75 +post). This play, when it first appeared, was remarkable in many ways: it used no scenery, and almost no props; it had no plot or dramatic incidents to speak of; it was a play about the everyday life of ordinary people in a not-very-interesting small American town. Seeing it for the first time, many people must have asked themselves, at the end of the second act, “Isn’t anything going to happen in this play?” Yet the overall effect of the play was so powerful and moving that it was one of the great successes of the American theater; opening on Broadway in 1938, it ran continuously for many years. It is as up-to-date and as moving now as it was then—a wonderful play to read aloud, or just to read. And in its quiet, understated way, it says something about life that can’t be said too often, and maybe especially to the young.

The Ides of March, by Thornton Wilder (\$2.45 + post). This book, which the author describes as “a fantasia on certain events and persons of the last days of the Roman republic”, is perhaps my favorite of all historical novels. It is written entirely in the form of letters, from one to another of a small group of people prominent in Rome, including Caesar, Cleopatra, Cicero, the poet Catullus, his mistress Clodia, and a few others. These Letters are all imaginary, but it is hard to read even a few pages of the book without thinking of them as real, and indeed wishing they were. For the book is a

portrait of Caesar, perhaps as Wilder thought him to be, more likely as Wilder wished him to be, and the man he portrays is so intelligent, imaginative, wise, and interesting, and so human in his weaknesses, that we are eager to believe that such a man really existed.

Like Mary Renault in *The King Must Die* (GWS #16), Wilder is writing about leadership. But while Theseus in *The King Must Die* was primarily a warrior captain, gathering together partly by guile but mostly by force a group of tribes into what would be the Athenian city-state, Caesar is the ruler of a powerful and mature state, for many years a democratically governed republic, but about to become a permanent monarchy and dictatorship. In writing about Caesar, Wilder is writing about the science and art of government, and the meaning of political freedom.

All of this may sound dry, but the book is the furthest thing in the world from dry. The Rome of which Wilder writes is a small town grown large, but full of the gossip and intrigue of a small town, where everyone knows or passionately wants to know what everyone else is doing. We feel very strongly the excitement and anxiety of a community which knows it has come to the end of one way of life but does not know what may be coming next, which feels itself on the brink of great events and great changes. Not very much happens until Caesar's murder, which ends the book, but the story is none the less exciting for all that.

Two things I want to quote. To an old friend who was captured and hideously disfigured in one of Caesar's campaigns, and who has since lived alone, Caesar writes:

First when my daughter died, next when you were wounded, I knew that I was mortal; and now I regard those years as wasted, as unproductive, in which I was not aware that my death was certain, nay, momentarily possible. I can now appraise at a glance those who have not yet foreseen their death. I know them for the children they are. They think that by evading its contemplation they are enhancing the savor of life. The reverse is true; only those who have grasped their nonbeing are capable of praising the sunlight. I will have no part in the doctrine of the stoics that the contemplation of death teaches us the vanity of human endeavor and the insubstantiality of life's joys. Each year I say farewell to the spring with a more intense passion.

Caesar writes to Cleopatra about the actress, Cytheria:

Ten years ago a few moments of sober conversation exhausted (Marc Antony) and he would be fretting to balance three tables on his chin. He had no malice, but he had no judgement. All this Cytheria has remade; she has taken nothing away, but has rearranged the elements in a different order. I am surrounded by and hate those reformers who can only establish an order by laws which repress the subject and drain him of his joy and aggression. Cato and Brutus envision a state of industrious mice. Happy would I be if it could be said of me that like Cytheria I could train the unbroken horse without robbing him of the fire in his eye and the delight in his speed.

How beautifully this says what we keep trying to say in *GWS* about the ways in which wise and loving adults can and do civilize children. These quotes are only a tiny few of the treasures in this book.

Toward a History of Needs, by Ivan Illich (\$2.65 + post). This very compact, interesting, and important book is a summing-up of Illich's work during the '70s. In that decade he, and a number of other people who worked with him (including myself), came to understand that the modern institutionalized, industrial world we live in is a world in which almost all people have become convinced, not only that they are not competent to meet many of their most important needs, but that they are not even competent to decide what these needs are. Experts and specialists tell us what they think we need, and how and at what price they are going to meet those needs for us—more and more, if they can only lobby through the right laws, whether we want them to or not.

In short, the modern institutionalized world is more and more a world of compulsory expert help. Years ago, worrying about a possible future tyranny, I wrote, "It's not the guys in the shiny black boots who worry me, but the guys in the long white coats." The danger seems greater now than it did then.

Another way of looking at this is to say that modern society has turned some very important verbs into nouns. It has taken on increasing number of fundamental human activities, things that for a long time people have done to meet certain obvious needs in their daily lives, and turned these activities into commodities, manufactured products, things that people cannot do but can only get. People must buy these commodities in the market place if they have

money, or beg people or governments to buy for them if they don't have money.

Thus, to pick some examples that will be familiar to readers who know Illich's work, the activity of inquiring into the world around you and learning how to do more things in it has become the commodity "education"; the activity of building or repairing or changing your own dwelling has become the commodity "housing"; the discipline of living in as moderate, sensible, and healthy way as possible, has become the commodity "medical care." Of this last, Illich writes:

Today, few people eschew doctors' orders for any length of time ... just twenty years ago, it was a sign of normal health—which was assumed to be good—to get along without a doctor. The same status of non-patient is now indicative of poverty or dissidence.

The second section of the book, "Outwitting The Developed Nations", is the text of a speech that Illich gave in Canada in 1968, saying what has become common knowledge now but that then seemed so radical as to be ludicrous—that the effect of foreign aid (Point Four, etc.) on poor countries was going to be to make most people in them poorer than ever.

One reason, among many others, why this book is worth reading and owning, is that in its final chapter, "Energy and Equity," it contains all that is now in print of Illich's extremely important book of the same name. In it he says, among other astonishing things:

The model American male spends four of his sixteen waking hours on the road or gathering his resources for it. (He) puts in 1600 hours to get 7500 miles: less than five miles per hour.

By now, people work a substantial part of every day to earn the money without which they could not even get to work. The time a society spends on transportation grows in proportion to the speed of its fastest public conveyance.

A very important book for all who want to know, culturally speaking, where we are, how we got here, where we are going and where we might choose to go instead.

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About John Holt

John Holt (1983–1985) is the author of *How Children Learn* and *How Children Fail*, which together have sold over a million and a half copies, and eight other books about children and learning. His work has been translated into more than 14 languages. For years a leading figure in school reform, John Holt became increasingly interested in how children learn outside of school. The magazine he founded, *Growing Without Schooling*, reflects his philosophy.