

# WESTERN PA. HOME SCHOOLERS

A Network for Sharing Local  
Information about Homeschooling

Late Fall, 1985

Newsletter

Editors - Susan +  
Howard Richman

# 14

JOHN HOLT -- 1923-1985... THOUGHTS FROM SUSAN RICHMAN

As many of you have heard by now, John Holt, editor of GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING, and one of homeschooling's greatest friends, died on Saturday, September 14, 1985, after a recurrence of cancer. He died peacefully in his sleep, at his Boston home. In his last weeks, he was lovingly cared for by many close friends, both children and adults.

I count John Holt as a personal friend and mentor, someone who has changed the course of my life, and I ache at this loss. The several times my children and I were with him are special memories. John had hoped to visit with us here at our farm this summer, but his illness swiftly became much too severe. He has always been very encouraging of my writing and homeschooling work, always ready to appreciate everyone's contribution to his work. His voice will be sorely missed now.

We were grateful to be able to attend John's Memorial Service, held October 5th in Boston. The Quincy Unitarian Church was filled with people whose lives John had touched-- old friends and colleagues, homeschooling families with scores of children, the staff of GWS. Many who could not come sent on letters to be read at the service telling of their close friendships with John, and the special kindness and insight of this man that made him so loved by so many. Several of those who shared John's last days spoke. Lila Berg, an educator and children's author from England and long time friend, told how David Chickering, cellist with the Chicago Symphony, came and played cello for John right in the hospital, and then later at John's home, playing as often as John wanted, playing cello until John died. John had taught himself to play cello very well as an adult, and hearing the instrument he loved so much being played for him must have been a great comfort. And music, so important in John's life, filled the memorial service, too. Children played harp, recorder, piano, violin, cello, and several adults who John had directly inspired and encouraged to take up music also played. (I limped through a Bach Minuet in Gm. I never would have begun playing piano if it had not been for John Holt, and it seemed the least thank you I could give.) Shortly before his death John had asked that the 1st Movement of the Anton Bruckner 9th Symphony be played at the service. I think all of us could truly feel John's spirit with us then-- I have rarely been so moved by a piece of music, and I hope that the GWS office will soon offer this beautiful recording through their bookstore so that more of you can share in it. The closing of the service was especially fitting-- a chorus of homeschooled children led everyone in singing the Shaker folksong, "Simple Gifts".

The next issue of GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING will be a tribute to John Holt. I'm sure many of the very moving words spoken at the Memorial Service will be included. Also if any of you have personal memories to share of what John Holt's work and caring and vision has meant in your life, do send them on to GWS, 729 Boylston St., Boston MA 02116.

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