

WESTERN PA. HOMESCHOOLERS

A Network for Sharing Local Information about Homeschooling - Newsletter #2, Summer '82

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

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

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