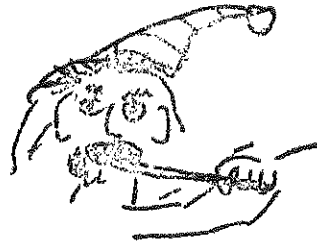
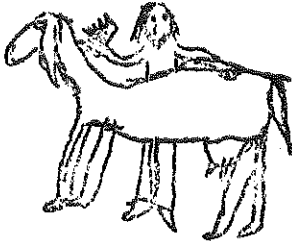


The Learning Farm  
2690 Valewood  
Carlsbad CA 92008

# FARM MEETING NEWSLETTER

Number 2  
Oct. 24, 1976



## RAISING THE ROOF ON A NEW GOOSE

The Farm is having a barn dance fund raiser on Halloween. We're inviting the public and requesting donations. There will be a Pot Luck at 5:30 and the dance is at 7:30. Vintage Music Co. and others will play. The donations will help pay for repairing or replacing the Blue Goose, our school vehicle, as well as insuring it. Wear a costume.

PIANO ROLL - Mike F.

Last weekend a bunch of us, teachers and friends of the Farm, hauled off in Robert's truck to get a piano from June Pierce. It's wonderful. It's also out of tune after 3 days of play. We helped June get another piano for her home and Shawn sat in the back of the truck playing like a madman down the freeway.

CLEANUP DAY - Mike F.

Our planned work day for parents and teachers was a lemon and a half-not a single parent showed up. In fact, most of the teachers weren't here. The only thing cleaning up were the pessimistic bets.

"Why don't we have a special day and go clean up your house?" How about if we have a special day and have school at your house? This place has a lot of debris laying about from the olden days-boards with nails, etc The teachers all work like it was going out of style and can't get it all done.

We decided that since the parents won't help on the weekend, then ~~we~~ we'll do the cleanup on a school day cancelled. We could always try to get tetanus boosters wholesale.

#### STAFF CHANGES - Mike F.

Some or several of the new staff (Mike, Mary, and Robert) feel self-conscious about their lack of teaching experience.

There are several other new faces on the staff at the school. Phyllis has been teaching part-time, as has Cathy Benshoof, and Shennan. Phyllis and Cathy have earned credentials in teaching and have several years of experience. Shennan is doing work in teaching and computers at Palomar.

Phyllis is interested in a teaching position, and might fill some important gaps in our abilities.

The general feeling among the full-time teachers is, "If someone better comes along, I'll go." How can this be decided? It inevitably raises sensitive questions---economic tenure, the value of credentials and experience, teaching style and ideology.

#### STAFF REVIEWS - Mike F.

The new teachers are being evaluated by the tenured staff (Wind & Eileen) after two weeks and after one month.

The evaluation criteria have been 1) Compatibility at the household level, 2) Teaching skills and abilities, and 3) ideological balance.

There are some complaints that Mike has not done enough with the lab., and Mary has not done enough with the little kids, and Robert is always saying something goofy.

#### HOW ABOUT DEMOCRACY?- Mike F.

How about if there are elections to select the teaching staff of the Learning Farm? They could be yearly, allowing that much tenure to those elected. The important criteria of compatibility at the Farm household could be appreciated in this process, by means of endorsements by the residents. The endorsements of outgoing staff could also be appreciated. The Farm children can and should participate in staff selection. At least once a year, the parents meeting would be a school meeting.

New faces would best become familiar through volunteer work, and this is good. It would provide a period of familiarization with the way the school works, its history and philosophies. It would be a testing-ground, with room to learn before facing the job daily.

What are the alternatives to democracy? Seniority? Superior listing of credentials? Decisions by the experts (the teachers)? Can we speak well of these in our larger world?

## Is Your School Too - Ernie Bassener

Wed. 7:15 AM.

Wind: "Why don't you play hokey, stay here and play with us all day?!!!"

Ernie: "I'd like to, but . . ."

Following Monday 9:00 AM.

Ernie: "I don't hafta go to work today, so I came to play with y'all"

Here was an opportunity to become involved in the educational experience at the Farm. At the morning meeting it was decided that most of the kids would go to the beach and that Eileen would stay behind with those that didn't want to.

Having packed some slides in my pocket and 15 people in my van we were off to Solana Beach to study tidepools and sunlight. The ocean, however, had no desire to cooperate with us in our exploration. The tide was high and the tidepools were under water.

The group held up well in the face of this intense disappointment and immediately went swimming to work it off in the surf. Underwear and shorts substituted for non-existent bathing suits and a good time was had by all.

All this calorie-consuming activity led inevitably to lunch after when about half of the kids (myself and Wind included) set to work on an urban renewal project: a new city constructed entirely of sand was arising in the North County! Amazing!

A civilization was rising here before my eyes. World Peace was at hand! I ecstatically joined with the builders of a better society only to realize that history's patterns were repeating themselves. For on the outskirts of our beautiful city, a missile base was being built! Society was once again the pawn of the military/industrial complex. Sic transit gloria mundi.

Then it was on to the park where the kids played or studied as they wished. Most seemed to want to ride on the merry-go-round and I got my exercise pushing it. Finally, the witching hour of 2 PM having arrived, we returned to the Farm. The return took the form of a race down Chestnut between the van and Robert's pick-up (if you can imagine a race between a snail and a turtle).

And so it was a day well spent reliving childhood experience and discovering that the child I was doesn't live too far below the surface. It's nice to let him out once in a while.

### Decision-Making Processes - Mike Fellows

The best way to consider decision making is as a special part of communications.

Here are a list of ways we can get information from each other:

- 1) conversation
- 2) discussion meetings
- 3) newsletter
- 4) voting
- 5) bulletin boards
- 6) bulletin board discussions
- 7) family-staff conferences
- 8) notebooks of questions circulate for answers
- 9) letters
- 10) impromptu questionnaires
- 11) gossip
- 12) telepathic vibes

Some of these methods are more effective than others, and some are more appropriate than others. The key is to use the method that is most appropriate for the situation. For example, a newsletter is a good way to keep everyone informed of what is going on, but it is not a good way to get feedback on a specific issue. A discussion meeting is a good way to get feedback on a specific issue, but it is not a good way to get feedback on a general issue. A notebook of questions is a good way to get feedback on a specific issue, but it is not a good way to get feedback on a general issue. Letters are a good way to get feedback on a specific issue, but they are not a good way to get feedback on a general issue. Impromptu questionnaires are a good way to get feedback on a specific issue, but they are not a good way to get feedback on a general issue. Gossip is a good way to get feedback on a specific issue, but it is not a good way to get feedback on a general issue. Telepathic vibes are a good way to get feedback on a specific issue, but they are not a good way to get feedback on a general issue.

Some of these are better than others, depending on circumstance. Most of them we are using, or at least exploring.

One we haven't tried yet is (8), notebooks of questions and answers.

The idea that all decisions should be made by consensus can be appreciated as a striving for better communications and for communications (information) to have priority over action.

This isn't always possible, and the illusion of consensus (or complete information) may be undesirable.

If I waited before doing anything to be absolutely sure it was what I wanted to do, I might not get much done. Groups face a similar problem.

### TRACKING THE WILD PUPIL

"How Can We Keep Track of How Much The Kids Have Learned?"

1. Evaluation notebooks---logbooks---journals.
2. Ask the kids.
3. Kids ask us questions.
4. Teachers and whoever's interested among the kids can keep school journals and periodically trade them and continue writing in a different one.
5. Children and all write a lot of books and journals. Children could be introduced to personal journals early: Joe's story--- I like to ride bikes (learning to write and read by writing) "Today I learned to subtract. This is what my house looks like."

### LEARNING TO LEARN - Mike Fellows

Learning to learn, being self-motivated, self-actualized, independent study---learning how to stand in line, namely with a day-pack and something to think about---this skill has been recognized as something valuable.

There are three main lines of thought on it around the Farm so far.

- 1) You're born with it---Mary.
- 2) You need to be deprogrammed---[REDACTED]
- 3) It's learned by example---Mike.

Robert and I spent a few years in a public sort of freeschool program. The teachers kept at us with loving harangues---"o what you want! But, do something! Look at the world! You guys had better do something! do nothing, if that's what you want! You can do nothing!"

Hermanson would stay up all night and come in with great bags under his eyes and bundles of books in his arms. "Read this for me, would you?" he'd ask, "What do you think about the black people in this country? Would you do something about it for me? Could you look at this for fifteen minutes?" Lots of us cried because he was so hard. He lectured us about staying up all night, "If you need to, take a col shower."

I used to think our fruitful, chaotic creative years owe a lot to his harangues. We took freedom seriously when we took cares to heart. Maybe it was his example.

## LEARNING TO LEARN Continued

"Oh, yeah," said Eileen when I told this story, "---how to get grey hair and wrinkles!"

"Well, he's changed," I laughed, "I went to see him at the Ed. Center about some idea in 1974. He's changed. 'Are you happy?' he said, 'I'm happy---are you happy? ... I live in suburbia and I'm middle-class and I'm happy! Are you happy?' He hadn't read much lately either."

## MUTTERINGS AND MUSINGS - Mike F.

Why are science and education any different?

The best things there are to learn are the things we teach each other.

And they will want to learn what they need to learn---to get us to drive them to the beach? Because we can convince them that math is not the ogre it used to be?

How would you like to be deprogrammed?

I'm beginning to think there's a good reason why the framers of the Constitution did not make it, "Decisions regarding government will be arrived at by concensus and announced by someone whose vibe is tuned in."

Ernie asked, "If you think something, does that mean it will happen?"

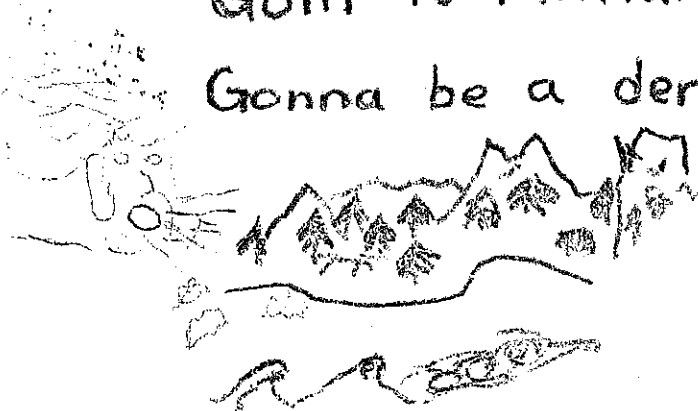
How would you answer that?

## MIKE AND MARY GOING TO CARMEL END OF NOVEMBER

We like the kids. We like teaching. We like the Farm. We like each other, but we've been surprisingly unhappy. And we're going to leave due to this nonstandard unhappiness. We're going to Carmel on an independent study project.

Goin' to Montana soon

Gonna be a dental floss tycoon!



(short)

### A QUESTION WENT UP

- 1). What are your ideas about learning (math and reading etc.), and whether we should have classes, and how we should decide about group activities?

### LOU'S TREE!

- 2). " Any institution is like a tree with two roots, and a good institution has these characteristics. 1). The least control thats necessary, 2) the most freedom as is possible. For the maximum well-being of the group, when they get out of balance there is a third tiny root thats important-it is revelation.

### WAYS TO DO SCHEDULING:

- 1). Plan a week in advance.
- 2). Decide day- functions in advance and decide time at morning meeting.

### WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE KIDS WHO FIGHT:

- 1). Special teacher (s) assigned to work with group (s).
- 2). Keep group together and decide democratically about the day.
- 3). Work with problem kids on individual basis-have a problem teacher.
- 4). Have bigger kids watch them? (a little each day).

Mike

### REQUESTED BY THE KIDS:

We asked each age group what they wanted and they requested these classes.

Math-4 days/week, writing and reading-everyday, creative writing-<sup>Thurs. &</sup> Fri., French-Wen., Speech-1 day/week, Social Studies-occasionally, Science-occasionally.

Some calsseswere only requested by a few.

### MIKE'S PLAINT:

I'm beginning to feel somewhat bullîed by the scheduling. I don't think those request that were made in the conferences (do you want to have classes on a regular basis?" "Sure" "How often?" "Oh, 3 days a week". "What days?" " Oh Monday, wensday, Friday".) Should be some iron law to prove that we are reliable teaching machines. Tomorrow I want to have a conference with whoever, in order to reorganize cleanup and I want to hike or something. I've barely even had a look at the school. I envy the kids. How come the teachers were never asked if they'd like to have scheduled classes on a regular basis? Is it because the kids are learning but we're teaching, is that it? I need 2 months to settle down.

Mike

### WIND'S REPLY:

I feel that if scheduling becomes an iron binding that it should be discussed, changed, eliminated....I dont feel that scheduling that was agreed on should be

permanently disposed of without a discussion of all those concerned....when this happens, then we end up with the kind of situation that we often have here: 2-3 teachers thinking one thing is happening and being frustrated because 2-3 other teachers are doing something entirely different without letting each other know... An example is the "log-books" (previously called "evaluation notebooks") many (More than 6) families have voiced a concern about whether we keep any kind of a continuous record of academic (and other) progress....their reasons were varied (I want to know what my kids are doing and I can't be here because I work, His father won't let him come here unless I have some proof to show him that he's doing academics, what if he has to go somewhere else-they'll make him start over etc.). When this concern was voiced I showed them the folders and later when we all agreed on notebooks, the "logbooks"....so the parents smile and say "that's great" and then I go back and open the logbooks and the first two I pick up are empty....so I think to myself "him...maybe we didn't agree that we would record what the kids are doing." Then I remember that Mary helped make them and Mike at one time said "Yea that's a great idea" and perhaps it was before Robert was teaching here....so what's going on? I won't agree to try something and don't do it, that's worse than refusing to try something in the first place....

Okay so we did talk to the kids about academics and they did give us a schedule and it is flexible (I like to teach morning classes so when it's my day to teach I schedule in the morning) but I offer the classes that the kids requested, because that's what we said we'd do and I don't feel put-on because that's one of the main reasons I'm here-to be with the kids...I don't know what was meant by "reliable teaching machines" but I do believe that I am here to inter-act with kids not to study math or yoga or bread baking by myself...my "free time" is for that...my school time is with the kids...we all have off days or unusual circumstances emerging but it seems to me that if we are hired as teachers we can spend our time here 30 hrs. a week, doing things with the kids and if they suggest a schedule we can honestly put energy into trying it instead of belittling it.... I don't think that we should agree to trying things and then spend our time making fun of things...When we were discussing how to let kids know about classes (remember John R. mentioned that kids need to be encouraged) I mentioned that kids just can't relate to written schedules all the time (some of them can't even read or tell time) and when the time comes for a class or should go around to the kids that have voiced an opinion and ask them if they want to have the class (this was to free us so we didn't have to teach the same math class 20 different times a day) Somehow this got translated into "Now we teach a class".. Why would anyone choose to make fun of an honest attempt to solve an obvious problem... perhaps too much talking and writing is going on here and not enough learning on our parts...I question our values....yes I question our values when a newsletter becomes more important than being with the kids...when a part-time teacher tell me that she had to spend 20 minutes with a child to find out where he was in math before she could start teaching him a class...for those of you who have never taught math to little kids did you know that there are dozens of concepts just dealing with the counting numbers that can help a kid to understand our number system before he even gets to subtraction? And that people have spent years of their lives setting up phonics programs that actually teach kids how to read? And that most kids when they get played out really do want to learn phonics and math if it's presented to them on their level, in their way? Little John doesn't know if he wanted phonics class, he doesn't even know what phonics is but he may soon be at the point where he's ready to learn sequential "sounds" for making words...what if nobody ever tells him about it? Instead just mention in a casual voice at a meeting that he left because he was bored of hearing the teachers talk at each other "Uh, does anybody want a math or phonics class today? No? Good! Nobody even mentioned it till I asked

at the end of the meeting. I spent my 2 days this week teaching the 4, 1 hour scheduled classes that the kids requested, and I didn't feel at all put upon--there are over 100 waking hours in a week. Why should I have to ask you when the classes are going to be when it's your turn to teach them? It's like having to remind people to put away dishes during school and pick up food at night when they made the rules themselves, in the first place...I am very much confused and concerned...why did you decide to apply for a teaching position? That's an honest question and not a snide remark...I'd really like to know... I wanted to teach kids in a self-governing school and spend time researching and studying new approaches to education (philosophy, methods, tools, schools living situation)....And now maybe I can sleep.

Perhaps It's Time To Re-Read Summerhill? Do you know what they did about classes records, etc. Have you read about (visited, talk to teachers from other Free Schools) ?

#### FREE AND OTHERWISE-BY MARY

I think a school is best when it's a school for....Teacher as well as.... students. I don't understand how else this kind of schooling could be a good kind. We're all students and teachers, aren't we? Otherwise there's a wrong gross separation between adult and child. The reality of a free school-free world--whatever appears a pre-adulthood affair. Perhaps I'm exaggerating, but what are the teachers interested in learning? Are you learning Math? No? Then how come you teach it?

#### Settling Down!-Mike

I think the idea that a good teacher is someone who has a particular attachment to children stinks----children are people. I'm skeptical of building a life around wanting to teach children. Teaching is a natural function if learning is.

#### No Title-Robert

Robert says what he most expects to learn here is about children, teaching techniques, etc.

#### The Job-Mike

Robert thinks the idea that children will want to learn all the things they will eventually be glad they know is totally spurious. This is not a free school. We are paid to teach. Wind said, our job sometimes to entertain. I think the excitement of the teachers about learning is a valuable part of this school and (Eileen's, Wind's, Mike's, Mary's, and Robert's) answers to the question of "What do you want to do today? What do you want to learn? "Ought to have some reality it's functioning, even if we must bow our enthusiasms to the interests of the kids, and the curricular concerns of the parents, out of economic considerations.

#### More Ways

A) Kids to notify about help-Teaching they want at morning meeting. B) Each to be counseled quickly thereafter- give problems -how far do you want to go in workbook today? C) Afternoon Round-Up-Group maybe, Roundups at specified times later. Divide up into patrios. "Man-on-man vs. area defense. Semi-scheduling When someone wants to do math-request it, then go ask if anyone else wants to also.



If someone else requests another thing while you're doing math, then schedule the new request, for later.

#### Another Plan -Shenan

Objectives-Determine thru conferences with parents and students, and teachers-meetings what minimum tools/skills children need to survive in society/culture.

Strategy-Younger ones-Determine structured play/games to inculcate Tools/skills in children as deciden above.

Prerequisites-Motivation to learn skills thru knowledge mapping of students goals/objectives and currnet level of education.

Implementation-Older ones-schedule temporal framework within which courses are offered around which other activities may revolve, being aware that times may always be changed to accomodate new ideas.

This is purposely vague. After you read between the lines we could have a teacher meeting to discuss possible implemntation.

Lets give the students the option of an easy method of learning these skills i.e. a structure they could plug into if they so desire.

#### Comments-Mike

How about mapping the age/skill paths that lead to various sets of possibilities as an adult, and the requisites of those paths and sets and how they can learn them most quickly? The basic impulse is simpler "hey man, this is good-this book, this place, this person...everyone of those is a bit of mapping information. There are differences in the style of administering classes, that are important. Possibilities.

- 1) Teacher; "When do you want the math class scheduled?" Student "I don't know. I don't feel like doing math today." Teacher "OK".
- 2) Teacher; "When do you want the math class scheduled?" Student " I don't know. I don't feel like doing math today". Teacher; "Well, you asked for a class each day. It's a good way to learn math. Do you still want to? You don't have to every day-or any day. That's your right, that's the way this school is..."
- 3) Teacher; "When do you want to learn math today, and have that class?" Student " I don't know, I don't know if I want to do math today." Teacher; "Well, I'm going to do math from 1:00 until cleanup. See how you feel then."

#### Wind did a parody:

"Anybody wanna do math today? No? Well, good." It's unfair, and such a thing was never said, but there's truth to it. There's a million ways to say the same identical words: "When do you want to do math today?" If your're not enthusiastic about it, can you "get yourself" to be? Or to act like it? Is it worth trying to feign? Can the kids see through it all to how you really feel about it anyway? What do you do when your'e scheduled for a job you don't want? (Go crazy? Fake it? Do you duty because you agreed to it?)

#### Apology-Mike

As I review the note I wrote earlier, I find the tone to be needlessly ascerbic

and it may misrepresent what I think about the scheduling. I apologize for exasperation. When kids want us to schedule classes and then don't want them, I am exasperated. We can try out a number of different approaches to coordinating the day and each experiment will need feedback. We need a way of routinely handling the feedback, and for that we need to avoid thinking too strongly "this is the answer" about anything we set up I think. I think it would be best to consider my complaint about feeling cramped as part of this process. Until we decide to try something else, I intend to keep up with the scheduling. If no one who requested a class wants it on a particular day. I may or may not schedule it for myself. (and whoever might change their mind. Is this OK? Unless we specifically decide to allow several approaches, I think we should all stick to the same experiment so we can each get an evaluation of the different approaches.

#### Classes Experiment

- 1) Set time-same everyday
- 2) plain announcements-no hinting
- 3) If no one shows up-teacher free at that spot
- 4) Can decided at morning meeting
- 5) We'll evaluate it monthly for two months.

#### Morning Meeting-Beach Rule Vote

- 1) No going to beach until after 11A.M.
- 2) OK for kids to go to the beach early, who prefer and reading and math on their own, with a little help there etc..

#### BA MANNERS

This article is dedicated to recent staff friction. Inundated in inexperience, and faced with many new organizational problems and problems of fitting the space to a doubled enrollment, and with some legacy of bitterness from last year, perhaps we can be forgiven for being a less than happy crew.

It's bad manners to walk out on a discussion.

It's bad manners to assume someone is ignorant if they disagree with you, and continue to repeat your arguments.

It's bad manners to expect new democracies to make the same decisions as old ones.

It's bad manners not to make membership expectations and commitments explicit.

It's bad manners to leave evaluation criteria indefinite.

It's bad manners to delay an evaluation for several weeks for no clear reason.

It's bad manners to forsake levity in ideology (e.g. to forget a sense of humor).

It's bad manners to forfeit discussion because of suspicions over phraseology (i.e. flipping out over someone's choice of words).

It's bad manners at a meeting to talk longer than it takes to make your point.

It's bad manners to treat meetings like a classroom and conduct a quiz.

It's bad manners to treat a meeting like a classroom and maneuver a discussion.

It's bad manners to interrupt.

## BAD MANNERS (Continue )

It's bad manners to assume that everyone works well with reading and writing.

It's bad manners to expect others to be your secretary.

It's bad manners to play God.

It's bad manners to forfeit discussion because of suspicions about motives.

It's bad manners to reject ideas because of their authorship.

It's bad manners to hold back criticism to a boiling point.

It's bad manners to make judgements without offering specific criticism and constructive ideas.

It's bad manners at a meeting to move on without settling the business at hand.

It's bad manners to make a painful criticism of a good person, without making it clear (tone of voice, choice of words, facial expression) that nothing is intended but to be helpful, to be loving.

It's bad manners not to be gentle, even (especially) when you must be strong.

It's bad manners to make a painful criticism of any person, without making it clear (tone of voice, choice of words, facial expression) that nothing is intended but to be helpful, to be loving.

It's bad manners to over-analyse, and treat practical problems in personal ideological terms and abstractions (i.e. questions at a meeting should be in as plain a language as possible, and free from predigestion and slanted presentation).

It's bad manners to usurp due process with personal decisions (unless it's an emergency).

It's bad manners to say "you know what I meant to say" because maybe you said something you didn't mean to say when you had your pants down.

It's bad manners to use ideological (special) terms without a certain amount of skepticism, a sense of humor, and an entymological dictionary (e.g. deprogramming, spaceship earth-earth is not a spaceship).

It's bad manners to make aggressive and hostile gestures and faces without seeking some physical contact to release and redirect this energy lovingly (i.e. don't clench your fists, give a free rolfing; don't squint, sit closer).

It's bad manners to leap to conclusions, without all the appropriate data.

It's bad manners to chase ducks.