

RALPH BORSODI & SCHOOL OF LIVING

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We are glad in these first sessions just concluded to hear of the ideas of the Henry George Schools - of their history, expansion and achievements. We are now scheduled for something of the same on the School of Living. I discovered the School of Living in the late 1930's when I was a young college graduate seeking alternatives; something like young people today are doing. I had been for a few years a teacher in public schools and in religious education and a social worker in the Chicago slums. I was less than satisfied with the work and myself in doing it. The School of Living presented challenges which I wanted to investigate.

A School of Living! We are all familiar with a School of Engineering, a School of Agriculture, or of Architecture; a School of Law, an Art School, a Trade School, a Beauty School. But a School of Living! So far as I know, Ralph Borsodi is the first to conceive, to organize and operate a School of Living. He did it to offset the specializing, the fragmentation, the splitting into bits and pieces that had become common both in modern education and in modern living. He created

a School of Living in an attempt at wholeness, completion and fulfillment of human beings.

Ralph Borsodi was born in a middle class family and grew up in the Bronx, New York City. His mother died in his childhood. He was privately educated and very early grew adept at his own learning and self-education.

Bolton Hall, an admirer and co-worker of Henry George, was a friend of Borsodi senior. Young Borsodi was part of many family discussions with Bolton Hall. He learned early of the evils of land monopoly, and of the meaning and challenge if a community were to collect its land-value. Quite naturally he wanted to join the crusade. What would you do in the midst of New York City as an adolescent if you were moved by George's teaching? You'd probably do what Ralph Borsodi did when he was 17 - get a soap box, put it down on a corner near Washington Square, mount it and talk to all comers on how to eliminate land monopoly as a base for a free society. To Borsodi, George's ideas were familiar 60 years ago, and it's been central in his writing and acting ever since. Ethical, honest economics and business were his forte.

As an expert businessman, his first book in 1919 was THE NEW ACCOUNTING. There he stressed how important accurate records are to the integrity of a business. Soon he became marketing and advertising consultant to large firms including Duponts, Macys and others. He recognized the service of advertising but also its evils and errors and the tendency for business to "oversell" and stimulate over-consuming and dependence on the market. In his early book, ADVERTISING AND NATIONAL PROSPERITY (1920) he urged advertisers to put some of their large incomes to charity and education. But he never lost sight of the basic error behind all industry and centralization - the absentee ownership of and speculation in land.

Still young, he married a Kansas farm girl who had come to New York for a business career. When their two sons were small, the Borsodi family made their "flight from the city." On Seven Acres they de-

veloped their first productive home. Later they bought 16 acres and built a small dwelling of native rocks. They expanded it as time went on to a roomy, three-section home which they named Dogwoods. They gardened, processed and preserved food, raised chickens, rabbits, goats and bees. They added out-buildings of stone and a swimming pool. Eventually, as the boys grew up, they built a stone cottage for each of them - all still beautiful and serviceable today, fifty years later, now in the ownership of a good friend.

Borsodi commuted to his New York City office for some years. But always in Dogwood's third floor study, he pondered how people, to be fully human, should live. He spelled it out in THIS UGLY CIVILIZATION which Harpers published in 1928. In it he compared the quantity-money-minded life which most people were living and seeking, with the creative family experience of the modern homestead.

In those years I was a young teacher in Dayton, Ohio public schools and its released-time weekday school of religion. There we experienced the Great Depression of the 1930's. Dayton was hard hit; all its major factories closed down - headed by General Motors, Frigidaire and National Cash Register. Fifty percent of the heads of families were unemployed; children came to school hungry and without shoes; banks were closed, social agencies overwhelmed, and its teaching staff, including most of us in religious education, without salary. I, with co-workers, took what savings were left, and went to New York for more "light" and education on this difficult situation back home.

We enrolled in Teachers College and Union Seminary of Columbia University. We asked Dr. Harold Rugg and Dr. George Counts, famed sociologists, "What can be done about the economic collapse in Dayton, Ohio?" They didn't know but gave us a book, THIS UGLY CIVILIZATION by Ralph Borsodi. We read it, decided to see and talk with the author. Borsodi welcomed us, listened to our story of Dayton's need. From this and

other visits, he was invited by Dayton's Social Agencies to come to Dayton. He asked, "Why continue feeding people in the City? Why not help them get on the land to feed and shelter themselves? Develop some demonstration homestead communities composed not only of people on relief, but persons of all walks of life?"

So the Dayton Homestead Experiment was born and developed. I'd like to elaborate this a bit, because it was so important in my life and to the many people who then, and more recently, have been looking for alternatives. Dayton Social Agencies first bought an 80 acre farm on Liberty Road west of Dayton and divided it into some 30 small acreages. Not forgetting his first concern, Borsodi helped them put this land into the common holding of its users who became the Liberty Homestead Association. They were not buying their acreages, but paying an annual fee to their association for its use. Families applied and were selected; material purchased (with Social Agencies loans) and homes were designed and built, to be owned privately by the homesteader builders.

Borsodi wanted this to be an educational experiment. He sought and gained the cooperation of the Ohio State University President, who assigned faculty members in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, etc., to teach and train the Dayton homesteaders in needed skills. The plan increased to ring Dayton with fifty small homesteading associations of from thirty to forty families each. The Flagg method of rock-building which Borsodi had used at Dogwoods, was popular; most homes had an attractive copper-hooded fireplace.

Not long until funds were depleted and people suggested borrowing from the Federal government's New Deal coming into existence. Borsodi resisted - "Government funds mean government control," he said. But urged by necessity, Borsodi went to Washington and interested Secretary of Interior Ickes, and through him the President and Eleanor Roosevelt, in the "homestead answer" to both unemployment and the larger

cultural problems. Borsodi returned to Dayton with a \$50,000 loan with the unusual concession that supervision of the money's expenditure could be in the hands of the Dayton Social Agencies. Building continued. On the federal level a Division of Homesteading was set up in the U.S. Department of Interior and other homesteading communities were planned, out in the nation. When Dayton's \$50,000 was exhausted, Daytonians applied for a second loan. "Please wait," the government replied. "The Homesteading Division is being transferred to the Department of Agriculture, and we're not in a position to allocate funds now." Dayton homesteaders waited. When they pressed for an answer inspectors came out and asked for more time while they made detailed audits of the project. After some months they gave the homesteaders a choice: "If funds are loaned from the Department of Homesteading, that will mean the project must be supervised and directed by U.S. government officials. Are you prepared to put control in our hands?"

I had arrived on the scene from a stint of social work in Chicago's slums. I was part of the meeting when the homesteaders took the vote. Many saw that a government loan was their only chance. Winter was approaching and their homes unfinished. Without money to continue work, they would live in tents or shells of homes. The vote was in favor of "federalizing" as they called it - to take federal money and federal control.

At this Borsodi decided to leave the Dayton project. "I prefer not to work under government supervision. You can continue the project as you have elected," he told the homesteaders. "I see the need, if there is to be a valid, widespread effort at a 'rural revival,' for it to come from a sound educational movement." So he returned to Dogwoods homestead, near Suffern, New York, and by 1936 had organized and established the first School of Living. "Such an education is of two aspects," he told cooperating friends, who included Dr. Rugg and Dr. Counts, of Teachers College at Columbia. "Our School of Living will help people see

and know both principles and practices of good living. It will help them learn to garden and build, to process food and care for animals. But it will also help them understand the intellectual, emotional and social aspects and implications of all this. They shall know health in all its areas; they must understand principles of organization - when to cooperate, when to compete, when to turn to government; they must know principles and practices of production - what and how to produce at home, what and when to leave goods to factory production; people need to know the just and right principles of ownership - what things shall be privately owned, and what collectively owned, etc.

"The real task of education is to help people be selective, eclectic, pluralists - not monists," he repeated. "Too many people get hold of a single idea, good in its elf, but not adequate to the whole of living. A School of Living must help people face and adequately deal with all their real problems of living."

All this appealed to me, employed in Dayton, now teaching in its public schools. The government supervision of the Liberty Homesteads had ended in their liquidation. Delay and red-tape meant no action; homesteaders did live in their tents and shells that winter while audits and inspections were attempted. In the end they asked for refunds on the amounts they had invested of their own. With these they left their unfinished homes and most of them put the funds into homesteads at now, very low, deflated prices. One such homesteader was John Loomis whom I met and worked with the re. He bought a run-down farm, for a song. We planned to join our lives and develop it at Lane's End Homestead.

We agreed to postpone our marriage while I went to the Suffern School of Living to train for our homesteading, and to encompass as much as possible of what Ralph Borsodi meant by "living the good life." That was indeed a year of learning how to live. I could write a book about it, which I hope to do.

At Suffern School of Living, I was asked to fill the position of "assistant to Borsodi" - mostly to inter-

pret the philosophy to visitors, and to form and conduct forums in major problems of living. Along with it we gardened and preserved food; we did research which issued as the famous "How to Economize" bulletins on gardening, canning, dairying, etc. We read challenging books - on the Hunzas, nutrition, the famous studies of Dr. Weston Price on NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL DEGENERATION. We met interesting people - J.I. Rodale and his young son Robert came to inspect our compost heaps, read our books and enjoy natural, whole foods at our table. They've spread it to millions via ORGANIC GARDENING magazine.

The only thing better than being assistant at Suffern School of Living was to live out the pattern on our own homestead with John Loomis. And that's what we did from 1940 to 1968, when he died. Some articles have been written about the spate of modern homesteading. Ours along with the homesteading of others has been detailed in the publications we edited during the past thirty years. Always we were guided and blessed by the insight we had in major problems of living. We shared Borsodi's continued analysis and development of these problems. We corresponded about and discussed them, attended and helped organize all the seminars he conducted on them in these years - at Oberlin and Antioch Colleges, in his own Melbourne University in Florida, and many other places.

We kept in touch while he went to Mexico and to India searching for co-workers in his crusade for decentralist solutions to the modern dilemma. We assisted with problems of publishing his books. We held group studies, formed a local area School of Living in Ohio, kept our monthly journal coming out as THE INTERPRETER, BALANCED LIVING, A WAY OUT, THE GREEN REVOLUTION. Lane's End was, in fact, an outpost of the School of Living.

In 1965 our School's board of trustees helped purchase the thirty-seven acres in Maryland, here to set-up, if possible, a demonstration homestead community and to constitute a training center for leaders in the decentralist movement. You see here today some

of the results. You see what we have made of a sturdy 150 year old mill building that was in shambles when we bought it. The years we have had this property have been difficult ones - it coincides with my most difficult years - the illness and death of John Loomis, the need to dispose of Lane's End in order to share the inheritance - all very difficult and traumatic for me.

As a consequence, supervision at Heathcote was at low ebb. A group of autonomous young people functioned here - somewhat on their own terms, but acceptably continuing the publishing of THE GREEN REVOLUTION, and working out their own life problems. As we all know, the search for alternatives is rife among the young today. Our answer of "a good life on the land" beckons to many. Making the grade - the actual working out and implementing the homesteading life, is often more difficult in practice than the reading about it. We have here our share of seekers - many have learned well, and gone out to their own homesteads, or their part in the rural revival in various sections of the country, of Canada and in the world. A roster of our "graduates" and their present life-styles is indeed quite a testimony to the resourcefulness and strength they developed here. Some of them are in our sessions today, Evan Levefer and Ruth Tilton now doing so beautifully with Goodheart Farm at Beckley Springs, West Virginia; and nearby is Herb Goldstein at Downhill farm, in Hancock, Maryland. In my proposed book on the School of Living, I'll describe the work and accomplishments of a score of them.

If you look with understanding, you will notice evidence of accomplishment on the physical plane here at Heathcote School of Living - a restored building, comfortable office space, a well-handled cooperative dispensing staple natural foods, an extended toilet-bathing facilities to serve the twenty or more people who are in residence here; the Crib, carriage house, and other outbuildings refurbished and insulated to make living quarters by and for our student apprentices. You will see a very creditable Community Center up the hill, designed by Ted Judson, and constructed by

him and other "commune members" of salvaged lumber for \$400; you'll see Marga Waldek busy at her completely self-built, big, round homestead house; you'll see some thirty almost-cleared acres available, and some of them applied for by other homesteaders.

Some of our accomplishments are occurring in places distant from here. First, are the homesteads and communities being built, as I've mentioned, by our "graduates." Other homesteads by the hundreds have been developed by readers of our papers. Much help and learning has come to attendants at our weekend seminars on gardening, health, nutrition, child development, land trusts, money reform, and a host of other problems of living. We have written testimony and grateful expression of the help scores of people have had from Heathcote School of Living.

We believe too that our influence is being felt and extended much farther in basic social change on the two fronts which concern us most in this present company - the land reform and money reform. Borsodi's organization, "The International Institute of Independence," at Ashby, Massachusetts, under the direction of Robert Swann, exists to sponsor, teach and implement the group and trust holding of land for its users. "The International Foundation for Independence," at Exeter, New Hampshire under the direction of Keith Dewey, exists to teach and implement Constants, a commodity-backed money initiated by Borsodi which I will explain this afternoon.

Altogether, I hope you agree from this brief history of the School of Living, we can and should make a place and a future for our School - a School whose goal is to sponsor human practices and principles of living, organized around seventeen pegs or "areas of experience" and tested by agreed on "norms of living."

DISCUSSION FOLLOWING MRS. LOOMIS' ADDRESS:

Carl Shaw - When was the School of Living moved from Lane's End and when did you come out to Maryland? How is it operated now?

Loomis: The School bought this property in 1965 and various friends shared its supervision. The first was Dee and Ken Sprague; then Edith Gosnell, and after that, Roger Wilks. When Roger left in 1970, the Heathcote group began to call itself "Heathcote Commune" and functioned somewhat autonomously here in return for publishing THE GREEN REVOLUTION. In the Spring of 1971 I came to live at the Anackers and to observe and participate where needed. We invited and engaged several persons to function as directors, but three such attempts were unsuccessful and very brief. For the past year I have re-assumed increased, voluntary participation, which includes direct management and supervision of regional School of Living conferences and monthly seminars at Heathcote as well as some physical, renovation projects of our grounds and editing of THE GREEN REVOLUTION.

Now Richard Fairfield from Los Angeles has merged his monthly with THE GREEN REVOLUTION and will be editor-manager of our bi-monthly. His first sixty page GREEN REVOLUTION is here for inspection and I believe you will agree that he has a good grasp of Borsodi's and School of Living approach. Now too, Willis and Lucile Hunting have come to be executives of the School's program and to develop a Montessori school of children in conjunction with it. So now I feel much freer to turn to the writing and traveling that has been on my agenda for some years.

The School's income has been from our own earnings. GREEN REVOLUTION subscriptions paid its printing and postage. My conferences and seminars have paid their way - to the sum of \$4000 or \$5000 a year. No one has had salary, but now we have agreed on \$400 a month for Willis Hunting which he is disposed to help raise. We do appreciate any subscriptions, contribu-

tions or other financial help.

Bob Allen - What are the seventeen problems of living?

Loomis: To explain them would keep us here all day. We hope to have a weekend seminar on them soon; or maybe a series of weekends. I've long hoped that our board and other members of the School of Living would be thoroughly familiar with these problems. Let me just mention them here.

How would you go about organizing problems of living? How many distinct and different problems would you say there are? Why did Borsodi settle on seventeen? This is not a hidden esoteric job - sifting out real problems of living is possible for any one.

People came to Borsodi with all kinds of problems. He tells of a specific incident which got him started cataloging problems. This man said, "Borsodi, I have a financial problem. I wonder if you could help me. My wife has to go to the hospital and I have to borrow the funds." Borsodi heard his story and said to himself, "This man's real problem is not financial. He really is facing a health problem."

So he began listing problems as people came to him, putting similar problems in labeled boxes. He was familiar with how some philosophers, principally the Greeks, tried to catalog problems. Remember how they did it? The three great classifications they used? No? Yes you do - don't you know their great trio; The True, The Good and The Beautiful.

At first Borsodi tried to put actual, real problems into these categories, but found it too limiting, too tight. But he agreed that these Big Three did suggest the three aspects of a person that we all recognize as Thought, Feeling and Action. Think about it a moment. Borsodi saw that problems were mainly intellectual, emotional or behavioral - thought, feeling and action.

Problems and queries which could be dealt by the mind; other problems that had to do with feelings and values; and a third which could not be dealt with except by action. In the terms of the Greeks - Truth

for Thought, Beauty for Feelings, and Goodness for Action. Very neat and very profound as I see it.

All right. What are the great universal queries that all people face in the intellectual or Thought area? Borsodi lists four:

1) What is the nature of the world I live in? We all ask and ponder that, don't we? If you've given up on that one, your little child will ask it some time. They all do. Where did the world come from? What's it made of? Where is it going?

2) What is the essential nature of the human creature? Does he have free will? Is he determined by his environment? Some of both - where and how much? What is a human being's responsibility, etc.

3) What is the nature of Truth? How do we know what it is? What validates our ideas, concepts and practices? Do we know or come to any agreed on answers for these queries?

4) What is the nature of Cause? What causes events? And again, what is the area of responsibility for each of us?

Group II, another four big queries that have to do with feelings, values, preferences. These four force us to observe and deal with feelings and emotions.

5) Purpose; what is my purpose in living? Shall I follow the leader, do what everyone else does. Do I know why and for what I have chosen to live?

6) Beauty; what objects are beautiful and what ugly? What makes them beautiful? Ugly? Does anything go, just because I happen to "like" it?

7) What actions are good? Which ones bad? What makes them good or bad? Are there acceptable standards to judge them by?

8) How rich do I want to be? What material level of existence should I strive for? Can the problems of wealth and possessions be solved without a careful training in "economic values?"

Group III - we've covered eight important problems. Nine left. These are problems in action. All nine of them in School of Living program are important and all must be dealt with consistent with the standards we have set in answering the foregoing eight. These nine include, numbering consecutively from the previous eight:

9) Health; how shall we achieve maximum physical mental well-being throughout a long life span?

10) Occupation; how shall I occupy myself as between work, play and recuperation?

12) Possessions; how shall land, money and goods be owned and possessed so that each person has maximum freedom and security?

13) Production; how shall goods be produced; which in homes and local areas; which in factories and centralized manner?

14) Distribution; how shall goods be distributed among those who claim a share in it?

15) Organization; how shall enterprises be organized, as to cooperation, competition, etc.?

16) Political; when if ever shall legal coercion be used?

17) Education; how shall the wisdom of the world be distributed?

There they are! Are you wiser for having heard them enumerated? I hope they help you want to probe them in detail. I believe, from my experience, it could be said, that if you were to spend two or three hours in serious consideration and discussion of them with an interested group, you would never regret it. It would help make sense and order out of your search for knowledge and living.

Question - What is your goal and hopes for the School of Living?

Loomis: Another question that would keep us pondering for a long time. Brace yourself for a sweeping answer!

What are our hopes and goals? What is a fitting answer for anything which one believes strongly can benefit any human being? Is it presumptuous to say that I hope that adult education in major problems of living can grow and spread into every community in our country? If in every town and hamlet, the concerned thoughtful adults of that community gathered in a common center, which they could call their School of Living, to probe, discuss and act on their own major problems, wouldn't that be a sensible and challenging goal, one that every member of the Schools of Living could cooperate in helping bring into reality?

That, briefly, is my hope. It's what I've been working for since those early days in the 1930's when I first met Ralph Borsodi at his Dogwoods homestead and worked with him in the Dayton Liberty Homestead experiment. It helped us keep meaning and satisfaction during those thirty years at Lane's End and since at Heathcote School of Living. I've enjoyed the struggle, I've appreciated the wonderful people that have worked along with us, and I have every confidence that we are just entering the best period of School of Living history.

Now I am sure we must be ready for adjournment of this session, ready to gather downstairs for a lunch of organic vegetables, whole grain bread and natural cheese to refresh us for our further work together.