

'We, as parents, we want to thank you and through you the entire staff of the school. I must admit that she made not only significant progress in the knowledge of the English language, but also became a totally different child. - in the best sense of the word. She gained new skills in communication and adaptation and became much more responsible. Thank you!'

Last year, I wrote about the mention of 'significant change in his life'. Now 'a different child'. I always say 'Come to VacStuds and change your life.' For several this is true – including one of the teachers. More on this later.

The Board Meetings give me a remarkable insight into the way children think – and not only about what can be gained from a VacStuds Course. In the Meetings they speak with remarkable candour about their feelings, aspirations and fears. What strikes me most is that for some it's one of the few times that they really connect with children their age; really get to know them. They have to accept that life on a VacStuds Course is accelerated. A day is a week; a week is a month; the month feels like an entire term. If they don't accept this, it's week 4 before they get going and they leave full of regrets for people they haven't come to know. On the Course, everyone has several major factors in common – using a foreign language; being away from home; living in the same place. All of these are great equalisers. They can cover up any number of what a child might consider as personality defects. It is as though everyone is a blank sheet of paper on which they can draw whatever personality they wish. From this point onwards, they can reveal their differences and they are all to do with personality and personality is the same in every language.

A parent wrote to me this summer, 'Again you delivered wonderful experience to my daughter. She came back home very, very excited about what happened at VacStuds. When at business meetings people are talking about 'company mission' and 'customer promises', I always give VacStuds as example of it. Your promise: 'Days I'll remember all my life' is true. Congratulations.

What else have people said about the Summer of 2013? 'I just wanted to share with you the amount of feelings that Mary Hare has taken to our life: happiness, proudness, satisfaction, etc. Again, I have to say it, after 30 years! S. has come back enthusiastic - I had no doubt about that - and his English has improved a lot. The first days he was speaking Italian as a foreigner making literally translations from English. The only problem is that he is really upset now and he is suffering Maryharesickness. You need to have a document on the VacStuds site: you were giving us advices about facing homesickness, now we need more advice to face this melancony' (an Italian former student from the 1970s and parent); 'Since my departure I can't stop thinking about this great month full of great experiences and a lot of self-development. And I'm convinced I'll remember these days all my life (a German student); 'Summer paradise 2013! Thanks everyone for this fabulous year! Thanks VacStuds for amazing emotions! Thanks Spanish Quality for everything ! This year was awesome.' (a Russian student); 'This year was very different in lots of ways, but for me, everything I love about the school remains. Once again I find myself incredibly grateful for another year within your organisation; the experience was irreplaceable and my gratitude for my cumulative three months there grows stronger each time, not just in terms of the immediate enjoyment, but in how it has helped to develop me. For this I have to thank you once again for providing me with this opportunity. Every year it feels like I might have learnt most of what Vac Studs has to offer, but each year it continues to deliver again and again' (a Sports Organiser, former UK Rep, former Apprentice); 'I had the time of my life working for Vacational Studies. This is, however, only the beginning :-)' (a teacher); 'On my way home I was thinking about how amazing it was this year and I realized that I was being during this month and I am now the exact person I was wishing to be when I first came to Mary Hare - not only I have improved my English and don't find it difficult to have a chat with native speakers anymore, but also I made so many good friends and I didn't have any problems getting to know them. Being an extroverted, out-going and self-confident person was just natural to me and after reading what people have written in my memory book and realizing that not only I can see the difference and I'm not the only one that can see how much I have

developed, I was crying not only because leaving Mary Hare is very hard and painful, they were also tears of happiness for which I would really like to thank you lot' (a Prefect); 'The best: everything. The worst: saying good bye' (a Dutch student); 'It was the greatest experience of my life and I already miss it so much. Thank you for making us feel at home and for the kindness of everyone there' (a Lebanese student).

There is more, much more, on the various Facebook pages. I am honoured to receive such compliments.

The Summer of 2013 was hot and became hotter. Read on...

Summer 2013 remembered

'I can cope with -30°. It's the +30° that's the problem,' a Norwegian told me. I couldn't agree more. It was so hot this summer - +34° and more - that even those from the hottest countries noticed that this wasn't the England of popular imagination. It was a tropical island.

Once again and, this year, sadly in a swansong performance, Matt Jamieson was Senior Sports/Social Organiser, back for his sixth year in one capacity or another. He promised to involve the girls more in the social programme and he was true to his word. He and I (and all the girls I asked) realised that events need to have boys in them, though. It's so much easier to make boys do ridiculous things. Sports Organisers Matt Debney (in year four), Lewis Weaver (in year five), Yannick Mol (in year five) and Sports Assistants Tanya Fernández Fernández (back for her eighth summer), Arnov Sengupta and James Guest (all in year two) were splendid. After a year as an Apprentice following his year as UK Rep came Tom Dell, now doing a gap year in Australia which finished (much to his and our chagrin) on the day the 2014 Course finishes. Back as Apprentice as preparation for possible staff applications in 2014 were Gustaf Håkansson, Marcus Bell and Ellie White. Rachel Lewis was back for her fourth year, this time as Matron and Office Manager, aided by Rebecca Cadman (former UK Rep and Apprentice).

As Academic Director, Joe Wallis, was back for his eighth summer, ably assisted by Chloe Huelamo, Senior Teacher and ACM, back for her seventh. She also helped with office administration. With Vaccles to exchange for treats or chocolate, pocket money to distribute, staff duty rotas to organise, children to allocate coach seats to and any number of students to dispense TLC to was Tom Goodwin, Course Manager for the sixth time, and much loved by our students.

In the very strong team of teachers were Bernardo Savill (fourth year), Thomas Olszewski (third year and also i/c computers), Katy Hubble (in her third year); Alastair Cockburn (in his third year, but first as a teacher); Philip Davies and April Hamshire (in their second year) and newcomers Jimmy Stirling, Neal Caplin, Vanessa Jelbert, James Hearsey, Summer Wood and Nick Shatti.

Catering was by Mary Hare staff once again. I filmed their work so parents can see the quality. There was something for everyone and one could have eaten very healthily indeed. I had every meal with the students, getting to know them, and was struck how many of them chose the most unlikely combination of foods and made just the wrong choices. I can only say that excellent meals were available at every serving. The kitchen staff once again went to great lengths to make the special dinners, like Valentines and Christmas, very special indeed.

As the nightly 'Club' discos have such sophisticated gadgetry and talented DJs, there was no need to import anyone from outside.

The board meetings culminated in the Trinity Examination in spoken English taken by 45%. All

candidates were graded. No one 'failed'. Everyone enjoyed it. Joe Wallis organised special preparation classes for those who wanted them. We shall continue to offer the examination in 2013.

The board meetings also ended in a Public Speaking Competition won by Julius Hagen.

The prize for the 'VacStuds Through My Eyes' competition was won by Joan Ribas. Both now have Canon Ixus 310HS cameras in brown identical to my gold 310HS used to take all the photos and videos on our web site.

Our link with The Mary Hare was Ian Frey whose knowledge of the School gave me enormous help from the initial dorm placements to the final storage of our masses of equipment. 'We see you as a major business partner' is Mary Hare's view of Vacational Studies. 2013 was our 31st summer at Mary Hare. Our relationship is rock solid.

And there was me – praising, admonishing, checking, filming and photographing, dispensing justice – once again a deus ex Mercedes and ex-Citroen, loving every moment, of course, and no longer having to drive across Newbury several times a day.

Also around were my sons Lars, Piers and Ian. Lars became a student and went native. He, too, suffered the pangs of separation mentioned above. Several of films were shot by Piers. Ian explored the woods for wild life and created his 'Nature 2013' Facebook page.

Remembering 22 July 2011

Particularly poignant for us was the one-year remembrance of the events in Oslo and on Utøya on 22 July. We held a one minute silence at 11.00 BST to coincide with the silence being observed in Oslo at 12.00. A moving tribute was given by Astrid Helsingen. We remembered the 77 killed that day, most of them a similar age to our own young people. Every nationality came to show solidarity with our Norwegian friends and their abhorrence of the grotesque racism that lay behind the perpetrator's actions. It was an honour and privilege for me to be asked to conduct the remembrance. We continue to admire the Norwegian authorities' way of dealing with the aftermath of the events by making their society even more open.

Vacational Studies photos and film clips

The idea of communicating with parents via photos and film clips of their children having a great time that I introduced in 2009 was continued with the enhancement of trying to show this great time while it was being had, so day and night my computer uploaded onto Shutterfly the daily photos from my EOS 5D Mk III and video clips that were on my Ixus 310. The Canon was also used for filming this year for the possible end of Course 'VacStuds 2013 All Over Again' DVD. The response from parents to this daily update has been very positive and reduced the number of calls from those concerned. Uploading to Shutterfly takes ages and is not particularly certain, so I have used our Vimeo account for class videos and films.

Password protected section of the website

I put even more information in this section this year. Maybe in 2014, I shall include a list of email addresses.

Teaching programme

This year, more than half the teaching programme was devoted to the film project and the remainder of the time to more conventional teaching often incorporating the interactive whiteboards that are a part of every Mary Hare classroom. The class films have been uploaded to Vimeo rather than Shutterfly. The quality of the films is now excellent. Communication via writing has changed its focus and exchanges via e-mail, text and Facebook are now an integral part of how we lead our lives. I asked that 'relevant writing' be included in classroom activities. This took the form of contributions to the VacStuds Facebook page.

UK Reps

The UK Reps (chosen after a rigorous interview at Norwich School by the Trustees of the Vacational Studies Foundation and Matt Jamieson) were first-class. They were Alice Guest, Lawrence Randle, Katharine Ronaldson and James Steel. They were used as teaching aids by the teachers, sports aids by the crew and Band Aids by any staff who could see that a child needed special help – but generally the UK Reps had already spotted this.

As in 2013, 2014 UK Reps' first week will be considered as time 'on approval' and the probationary period will extend for the remaining three weeks, just in case they think their places are secure and they can take it easy.

There will no longer necessarily be four UK Reps. Some of their roles will be taken on by 'Apprentices' and 'Prefects'. 'Apprentice' posts will be available, not only to UK Reps, but also to ex-students with superb English. They, too, may be considered for sports staff posts.

Prefects

My idea to have Prefects was a success. This was largely because of the strong and positive personalities of those allocated this position. I found them helpful as 'sounding boards' and valued my meetings with them. They chose the members of the Student Council. Students over 18 whom we know can apply to be 'Prefects'. A Prefect will be allocated to different classes by the Academic Manager and will learn English by using it in the classroom and in the film-making process as a 'classroom assistant'. Prefects will also have access to the Crew room. Their bed time will be one hour later than the norm. Students whom we do not know may become Prefects after a few days at our invitation. Returning Prefects will be Senior Prefects. Students may find being a Prefect a useful addition to their CV.

Read Tanya's opinion on being our first-ever Prefect in 'Some Thoughts'.

House Captains

Students over 16 can apply to be a House Captain. There will be a male and a female House Captain for each House. They will liaise with the Senior Sports/Social Organiser and take a lead in organising House events. House Captains will be able to use a room in 'the Snug' near the Crew Room with its own TV. Students may find House Captaincy a useful addition to their CV.

Staff Helpers

These posts have been discontinued in favour of Apprentices, Prefects and House Captains.

Sports 2013

The competitive 'League' matches in a variety of sports with each side dressed in their House colour ensured that the new House system worked well, as did Sports Day. In 2014, I shall request that the House Captains of each House choreograph a dance as well as a performance of the House song.

Sports 2014

Will be fantastic...

Parents, Children and Unrealisable Expectations

It is important that all parents read this section. The relationship between ourselves and the parents of children in our care is a partnership. We want all our young people to get the most out of the experience. For this reason, I have written a 'Parental Control Condition' into the contract we have with parents.

In brief, I say 'We do our best to fulfill our 'duty of care' under English law based on good will and the trust established by your and your child's agreement to the 'rules' as evidenced by the signed 'Agreement and Travel Details' form. If we think a problem is likely to arise, we shall try to contact you before it does so it can be prevented. Nevertheless, if your child's attitude or behaviour is such that we find we cannot exercise the control required to fulfill our 'duty of care', we shall pass responsibility for control to the parent either by requesting the parent's presence or by telephone contact with the child. If this fails and we decide the child is beyond control, we shall expel.'

Generally we have excellent support from parents. Occasionally, we do not. There is no child who does not accept that they sometimes do wrong, make mistakes or act aberrationally. What children accept so readily is unacceptable to a tiny minority of parents. For their child to do wrong must mean that the child is a victim of circumstance and that someone else must be to blame. Some also find it hard to transfer responsibility for their child to a third party – us – and believe they must provide a constant input. All we ask is that parents leave everything to us, in the knowledge that (i) they will hear if there is a problem, (ii) no news is good news, (iii) we have experience in dealing with children, (iv) their child may make mistakes, (v) we shall try to work with them if the child does make a mistake, but (vi) if what their child does is serious enough for us to require that child's removal from the Course, they must comply at once.

We do what we can to encourage students to learn and use the Course to advantage. We do our best to look after them. We make no other claims. We cannot force a child to integrate. While we provide encouragement, they must help themselves. They will find others who speak their language and they may be tempted to take the easy way. They may come with friends from home. We cannot keep friends apart. They must decide to broaden their international horizons, mix and use English. Parents may make requests, but we reserve the right to place students in what we consider to be appropriate classes and dormitories. The final report we write will be our frank assessment.

As the teaching/learning situations are different, it may not be similar to the school report you are accustomed to. The Course is a communal experience. Individual freedom is restricted. Our school buildings are houses in a boarding school – not an hotel. Accommodation, washrooms, etc. are shared. Bathrooms may be away from dormitories. Clothes storage space may be limited. All sorts of compromises have to be made, but for most young people this is part of the fun. We also ask parents to accept that telephone contact with their children, especially in the first few days, is not a good idea. We ask that mobile phones are not brought. We are not being difficult, just putting into practice what we know from experience works. In effect, what we are requesting is a partnership between us based on our expertise and parents' trust in us. What we provide and the parameters of what we permit are in our literature. We act on the assumption that parents and students read it all. If your child is interested in drinking, smoking, going out at night and leading an independent life, please choose another organisation less restrictive than ours. We assume that parents will be realistic about their children. We exercise due control, but they have the freedom to do things that are wrong. If they do, there are repercussions outlined in the 'Notes'. We do what we can to prevent rule-breaking, but if it happens, parents must accept that it is occasioned by their child's free will, not lack of control on our

part.

Let me put it into context. Ours is a new, exciting and active environment. Parental control appears absent. Our students are a long way from home, without the constraints and re-sponsibilities that tend to check behavioural excess. No doubt there is also the desire to impress one's peers. They may call it 'being carried away'. Whatever the causes, occasionally a few of our students may indulge in behaviour that is simply anti-social. If they get caught, they may feel they have little to lose. Protected by this feeling that no one of importance will ever know, I am aware that some students have broken our rules and even the law. All students come to us after a 'letter of recommendation' has been written about them by their school. To remove this feeling of anonymity and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own actions, we write frank reports to parents. We reserve the right to send the writer of the original 'letter of recommendation' a photocopy of any correspondence we have with parents about children in our care.

We have also noticed that some parents encourage children to break our rules. Henceforward this will constitute a breach of contract. I write more about this under 'Mobile Phones'.

Contacting Students

The students who adjust best are those whose parents phone them only on the two 'Telephone Sundays'. If these parents wish to know how their child is adjusting, they phone the Course Manager and ask. There are some parents who feel they must speak to their children frequently. We ask parents who must speak to their children outside 'Telephone Sundays' to phone the payphone after 21.00, not our School Office number. We cannot search for children in a large building and campus. The payphone may ring unanswered. A student may answer it. If so, that student can be asked to search for a student. That student may or may not comply with the request.

Mobile Phones & Gadgets

Mobile phones are not useful in the context of the Course. The time young people spend with us develops their sense of independence. They need to be able to cope with small challenges on their own. An immediate call home at the first sign of a problem delays the growing up process that is a part of the Course. The only time a phone is useful is when a child is away from the school. We allow mobile phones to be used only on trip days. In line with UK Government Education Department advice on the possible health hazard for young people of microwaves near the developing brain in an enclosed environment, we do not permit students to use mobile phones freely inside the school. We prefer that a mobile phone is not brought. Any mobile phone brought must be kept in the office. We accept no responsibility for loss of or damage to mobile phones that are brought. Any mobile phone kept other than in the office will be removed for the duration of the Course. We shall treat in the same way as a mobile phone, a laptop computer and any device that uses a wi-fi connection. Those wishing to listen to music or take photos will have to bring another device. Our restrictions on mobile phones are clear and in our rules to which parents have given their signed agreement. Just as parents have trusted us for 40 years to provide exactly what we describe, we trust parents to abide by the agreement they have signed. We have found that some parents have told their children not to hand in mobile phones or have given them a second phone to keep hidden. We cannot discipline children for the actions of parents who undermine us. By the same token we cannot accept responsibility for children who selectively break our rules at the request of parents. We consider this makes it impossible for us to exercise our duty of care. We shall consider this a breach of contract and request that the child be removed.

English Law

I state on the Application Form that this applies. There is nothing sinister about the inclusion of these words. We are de facto in loco parentis in the summer. We accept responsibility for looking after a

large number of other people's children. We take this responsibility seriously. Parents trust us to make wise decisions. Sometimes, however, we receive requests which we consider unwise. For example, we are asked to let children be unaccompanied by staff when we consider they are not responsible enough to be unaccompanied. Children feel that, if they ask their parents to request something from us, we must comply with a parental request. We are the ones closest to what is happening. We know what a prudent parent would do and would not do in certain circumstances. Legally, we are expected to fulfil the role of a prudent parent – no more, no less. Sometimes we do not agree with what a parent is asking us to do. We shall use our discretion in all matters. Under English Law a parent may not sign away a child's rights. This includes the child's right to be protected by adults. We shall do what we think is right for the child. This is why I state that English Law applies.

Property

We ask that valuable items (including expensive clothes) are not brought. All items with a used resale value over £40 must nevertheless be listed on the 'Valuable Possessions' form. At the end of the Courses we send back every named item of property left behind. Un-named items are also returned if we have a good idea to whom they belong. We can keep items in our office on request. While they are safer in our office than elsewhere, we accept responsibility only for items stored in our safe. Items given to us for safe-keeping are kept in our safe for the duration of the Course and are not removed at any time. Property not in our safe and lost other than when in the student's possession on a trip is not covered by the Insurance policy we include as part of the Course Fee. We accept no responsibility for mobile phones.

Health & EHIC

All students are entitled to free emergency treatment under the Medical Insurance policy included in the Course Fee for illnesses or accidents that happen in Britain. EU and EEA residents are entitled to free treatment under the National Health Service for illnesses or accidents that happen in Britain. Pre-existing conditions are not covered by our insurance. No one (not even an EU or EEA resident) is entitled to free treatment under the NHS for a pre-existing condition unless they have an EHIC (European Health Insurance Card). EHICs were introduced on 1 June 2004 and are available from Social Security or Health Department offices overseas. If an overseas Social Security or Health Department office states that an EHIC is not needed because free treatment for a pre-existing condition is available for anyone in the EU or EEA on a short stay, that advice is wrong and the office should contact the Department of Health on +44 20 7210 5318 for confirmation. If they have a pre-existing condition and do not have an EHIC, students should have their own medical insurance.

Lost Luggage

New arrangements for hand baggage mean that more cases are lost by airlines than before. We shall continue to help students who arrive with no luggage to buy necessary items, but as the contract the airlines have is with the passenger (not ourselves) they will not refund the cost to us. We shall inform parents what has happened and take the cost from pocket money. The airline will then reimburse the parent who will, we hope, have topped up the pocket money.

Excess Baggage

The economy class limit is 20 kilos. Airlines insist that luggage over 24 kilos is put in a second suitcase (which must be bought) and then there will be an additional charge of £100. Students must, therefore, bring less than 20 kilos of luggage.

Before and During the Course

Parents are welcome to contact me on any matter. In July and August I can be anywhere. For practical reasons, therefore, it is best to make contact with me during the Courses on my mobile

phone +44 7717 007 007 or, if it is to find out how a child is, the Course Manager is best placed to give this information on +44 1635 244 221.

After the Course

Please feel you can contact me about anything connected with Britain. For example, parents ask for my advice on continuing their children's education in Britain. I am happy to help. No charge! I see this as a natural extension of my work with young people. Students ask for information, sometimes thirty years later or more.

Vacational Studies Trade Mark

Our logo and the words Vacation Studies and the names of some of the schools we have used have been registered as trade marks. We have no connection with any other organisation – whether with a similar or dissimilar name and programme.

The Jörg Weise Association (JWA)

This exists to encourage international understanding. Every year, we have students who make an exceptional contribution to the international aims of the Course or who are internationally-minded. These may like to consider joining the Association. [Click here for more details.](#)

Giotto

This enables our students to keep in touch with friends from when they were students with us and to make new contacts for social or professional purposes. [Click here for more details.](#)

Vacational Studies Foundation

The Vacation Studies Foundation was registered as a Charity under English Law in January 2000 to assist talented young people. [Click here for more details.](#)

H.T.W. Mucklejohn

My father, who was Company Secretary from the founding of Vacation Studies until his death in 2003, was a great support to me. In his memory, the Jörg Weise Association has donated in perpetuity a full Scholarship which I am able to award when I come across a young person who would benefit from our Courses, but cannot apply for financial reasons. If you know one, tell me.

VacStuds on Facebook

is for those connected with Vacation Studies to continue to relate to us and to each other. [Click here for more details](#)

VacStuds on Twitter

exists because it can exist, but I have yet to be convinced of its worth. [Click here for more details](#)

Vacstuds.com in a virtual world

Vacstuds.com is our 'shopwindow' and main medium of communication. All our 'literature' is there. There is no point now in our printing anything on paper, especially as information can be updated in seconds. We expect all parents to have internet access and to check the 'Latest News' section at vacstuds.com for the latest news and links to the information we produce. We occasionally send e-mails to everyone and ask that vacstuds.com is included as an allowed address so that messages from us are not seen as spam.

My thanks

...to all those who trusted with the care of their children this summer. It is a privilege for me to meet some of the most personable, intelligent and charming young people in the world. and to know that, since 1973, those who have been through the Vacation Studies experience can say that these are 'days I'll remember all my life.'

and finally...

For those who are interested, my second book about my adventures ('And Then There Were Three – Expanded Edition' (ISBN 1903933730)) was published in June 2006 and is available inter alia via www.amazon.com. I have put the entire text on www.andthentherewerethree.co.uk A third book will appear when I have finished writing it.

IGM – Autumn 2013