

Henry Barnes and Waldorf Education A Personal Tribute

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Henry Barnes

It was my good fortune to meet Henry Barnes just at the time when I had joined the Anthroposophical Society. I discovered Rudolf Steiner relatively late in my life; I joined the Society in 1978, the same year I met Henry. The occasion for this first meeting was initiated by Eckehard Piening, another of the many accomplished teachers with Henry at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City. 1978 marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Steiner School, the first Waldorf school in North America. At the time I was an associate professor of history at Teachers College, the graduate school of education of Columbia University. Knowing that I had joined the Society and of my interest in Waldorf education, Eckehard asked me if Teachers College might host a major conference on Waldorf education as part of the celebration of the 50 years of Waldorf education in this country. It was a great idea, and, to something of my surprise, we secured the agreement of the President of Teachers College to go ahead with the conference. Henry had retired the year before from the faculty of the Steiner School, where, for nearly forty years, he had served as teacher, and, for much of that time, as Chair of the Faculty. It was clear

that Henry was the ideal person to give the keynote lecture at the conference, which he agreed to do.

The conference was held the following spring of 1979. Thorn Zay at the Steiner School had put together a traveling exhibit of art by Waldorf students, which Eckehard and Henry had arranged to be installed at Teachers College for the conference. The exhibit was subsequently shown in many cities across the country, but it made its debut at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the first experience of people attending the conference was to enter the halls of Teachers College lined with the remarkable artistic work of Waldorf students.

The President of Teachers College, Lawrence A. Cremin, gave a welcoming address and Henry followed him with the keynote lecture, entitled simply, "An Introduction to Waldorf Education." His was followed over the course of the weekend by three other lectures: by John Davy of Emerson College in England; by Alan Howard, a leading figure in Canadian anthroposophy and Waldorf education; and by Professor Hope Lechter, an anthropologist at Teachers College, herself a parent of two sons in the New York Steiner School, and a good friend of Henry Barnes.

I should mention: This was not Henry Barnes' first appearance at Teachers College. On the contrary. As a child and as a young person Henry attended the Lincoln School, a renowned experimental school based on the educational philosophy of John Dewey and located at Teachers College. Then, in 1946, upon discharge from the army, in which he served for three years during the war, he applied his service benefit to earn a masters degree in the teaching of history from Teachers College. Now, here he was, some three decades later, describing for the attendees at the conference, including the President of the College, what a genuinely creative and living education looks like.

After the conference, we published the four lectures as a special section in *Teachers College*

Record, one of the main professional journals of education in this country. We then reprinted the special section as a little booklet with Henry's lecture as the leading article, with the whole thing under the title of Henry's lecture, "An Introduction to Waldorf Education." I still consider Henry's article to be one of the best, brief introductions to the nature and substance of Waldorf education available in English. For many years thereafter, his article was sought after by parents and Waldorf schools for just that purpose, as a solid, brief introduction to Waldorf education. And, consequently, the little booklet containing his lecture had to be reprinted more than once.

I would like to touch, out of gratitude and respect, on a couple of ways in which Henry's life was especially important for me personally, and I think also for many others. For one thing, the presence itself of Henry Barnes as an intelligent, committed, and leading representative of anthroposophy and Waldorf education was extremely important to persons like me coming into anthroposophy for the first time. For example, my friend Robert McDermott and I discovered Rudolf Steiner almost simultaneously and, at the same time, both met Henry Barnes. Over the years, to know Henry simply as a model of what anthroposophy could be and mean was itself an assurance that we were on a worthy path. And then to have the opportunity to have talks and meetings with Henry from time to time deepened that assurance.

For me, two things especially stand out. In the 1990s I was deeply involved with AWSNA, the Association of Waldorf Schools in North America, as was Henry Barnes. Again and again it was Henry's leadership and wisdom that helped deepen my own understanding and grasp of Waldorf education and of its potentially crucial importance in our time. The other thing I want to mention is that it was my privilege to read a couple of early drafts of Henry's history of anthroposophy in North America, *Into the Heart's Land: A Century of Rudolf Steiner's Work in North America*. He had already written his biography of Rudolf Steiner, *A Life for the Spirit: Rudolf Steiner in the Crosscurrents of Our Time*, an insightful and accessible portrayal of the life and work of Rudolf Steiner. Then, in his nineties, Henry undertook a major work of historical research and writing: the enormous task of bringing together in one volume the history of anthroposophy in North America in all its myriad

expressions. It is a path-breaking work, which in its comprehensiveness is not only an essential resource for the general reader interested in the development of anthroposophy in North America, but also a necessary starting point for anyone in the future who undertakes to write a specialized history of any particular aspect of anthroposophy in North America.

What I have written should make clear Henry's dedication to research in anthroposophy and in Waldorf education. When I was editor of this *Research Bulletin*, Henry's donation often arrived before we had mailed any solicitations. His support and interest were ready and sincere.

The last paragraph of Henry Barnes's keynote lecture, "An Introduction to Waldorf Education," presents his clear grasp of the heart of both anthroposophy and Waldorf education; namely, an understanding of the wholeness of life and the critical importance in our time of developing a living thinking capable of dealing with the wholeness of life:

Life itself is a whole, a web of inter-related, wonderfully interpenetrating facts and processes. The analytical intellect dismembers the living chain and sets up a linear equation in which *A* is linked with *B* by mechanical cause and effect. It is "linear thinking" that is unraveling the delicate balances in nature and is leading us into environmental disaster. It is the same mentality that reduces the sensitive complexities of social life to abstract formulae, which inevitably break down and plunge us into still greater chaos. Life is calling to be understood but the call cannot be answered with the thinking that became dominant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What is needed is a thinking that can flow with the movement of life itself, that is inwardly mobile and alive, that can perceive the whole as well as isolate and enumerate the parts. Such a thinking is in tune with life, is itself alive. It cannot be satisfied with definitions and will not rest until it has come to grips with the full reality. It is this quality of intelligence toward which Waldorf education strives.

And Henry, by his own life-example, demonstrated that it is this quality of living intelligence toward which the whole of anthroposophy strives.