

An Idea For Film & For Family Sharing

Bill Sutkus

Two rather different ideas are being brought together in what might prove to be a happy marriage.

The first idea comes from Doug Harper, who has been giving some thought to making a film about homesteading. The thought is not to romanticize or to propagandize, but rather to present an opportunity and medium for us homesteaders to analyze and express ourselves in an effort to say what we are about. In anthropology this approach is termed ethnoscience, which posits that a group of people should not be described or categorized in terms or taxonomies of the social scientist but that a society should present and explain itself in its own terms, using its own questions and its own ideas of what is important. In one of the original films using this ethnoscientific approach, the particular group of people being filmed is shown toward the end of the film, editing the film, making the choices and decisions about depicting and presenting the whats, hows and whys of their lives.

The second idea has been put forward of late by a number of homesteading folks, both on the homesteading questionnaire and in conversations. Many of us have expressed a need for and interest in sharing between families. "What we value most about these meetings (to be distinguished from parties, at which intimate talk is almost impossible) are the persons. We enjoy and benefit from sharing with each other the important things in our lives at the moment, as a spiritual renewal, a morale revival." The concern is not so much about communicating techniques of homesteading but about sharing personal questions and philosophical difficulties: What happens to our philosophies and our families in facing and resolving the need for financial income?... What image do we have of ourselves as homesteaders; what image do we present to others; what image do others actually have of us? Or, do I, as a back-to-the-lander, have to feel guilty if I stop at McCarthy's for a cup of coffee and a hot fudge sundae?... How do the sex roles and age roles of the larger society translate to the homestead? Is someone still always right; who gives in first?... What are the pluses and minuses of homestead life for our children? As one person put it, this kind of sharing has traditionally been thought of more in connection with organized religion.

Doug's initial, tentative step in pursuing his film idea was to get together with a few of us for a meal and some discussion of the idea. What resulted was an experience in the kind of interfamily sharing that a number of us were suggesting and searching for. Thus were wedded the process of pursuing the film possibility and the proposal for increased sharing between families.

As now envisioned, families interested in the film and in the sharing with other families would get together in small groups (maybe 2 to 5 families) to share some food, perhaps, and some talk for sure. Doug would tape (audio only) these get-togethers. These tapes would be a major part of the input in making the decision to do or not to do a film. If we decide to do it and if the necessary funding is secured, then these tapes might well form much of the audio portion of the film.

If you are interested in participating or if you have questions or suggestions, contact the Harper's (322-5594) or the Sutkus's (287-3759) or Liz and John Scarlett (324-5635).