

Summer 2018 Revisited

Our long, hot summer began in mid-June. Too early, I thought. Usually this would be followed by a couple of months of our traditional sunshine and showers. Not so in 2018. The countryside baked and we sweltered in unaccustomed sun and heat broken only by a day of rain in the middle. The grass became straw and the Mary Hare grounds as hard as concrete.

Tom Goodwin was back as Course Manager for his 11th summer having had his life changed by his marriage to Veronica Martins who had been a student and then a staff member. 'Come to VacStuds and change your life' was one of the themes of the 'Audience with Tom Goodwin' during the Course. With him in the office and taking over as Assistant Course Manager in his nth year with us was Matt Debney who has become the VacStuds ethos on legs.

On the teaching side in 2018 were Academic Manager Joe Wallis in his 13th summer with us; Course Tutor James Harsey in his 5th year; Bernardo Savill as Senior Teacher in his 9th summer; Sebastian Shead as Senior Teacher in his 1st summer; Neal Caplin in his 5th summer; Dale Ogilvy, Leonie Crowley and Rhodri Stratton in their 3rd year. New to us were teachers Tom Cox, Josh Cawood, Hayden Bryon and Julian Lume.

Pedro Mol in his 7th and swansong summer was our very capable and talented Senior Sports/Social Organiser – a natural leader who fed back information to each member of the crew to ensure that everyone performed to the best of their ability. He was ably assisted by Sports/Social Organisers Benedict Smith for Hawtreys in his 4th year; Lawrence Randle for Douai-Elstree in his 4th; Pablo Mol for Mary Hare in his 5th; Anders Strømme for Cheam in his 3rd. Anders was also 'Leadership Mentor' and introduced the concept of leadership into the programme so that everyone could see if they recognised this in themselves and, if they wished, develop it through the various positions of responsibility we offer.

Sports/Social Assistants were Helen Veit for Mary Hare in her 4th year; Annabelle Eccleshall for Douai-Elstree in her 3rd; Carlotta Gottardi for Hawtreys in her 4th summer; Martijn Mullié for Cheam in his 3rd. Camilla Gottardi in her 4th summer was Sports/Social Assistant for Cheam and also Matron's Assistant.

Our first-ever male Matron was David Corral Fontecha. Although new to us, he was recommended by last year's Matron, Tanya Fernández Fernández, so he knew what to expect – sudden emergencies and late nights – and rose to the occasion magnificently.

Apprentices were Sophia Haehnelt for Douai-Elstree in her second summer; my son Lars for Mary Hare in what must be his tenth; Ángel Sanchez Cantalejo for Hawtreys in his seventh. For the first two weeks we had Paddy Douglass for Cheam in his second summer and for the second two weeks we had Alejandro Aparicio for Douai-Elstree in his third; Hanne Creighton for Cheam in her second; Jean de Gourcuff for Mary Hare in his third and John Bryer for Hawtreys back for his second summer.

Qualified Lifeguards were Benedict and Lars.

Prefects were Alfonso Vandekeybus (Portugal); Amalie Lindstad (Norway); Ana Sofia B. Silva (Portugal); Benedetta Magni (Monaco); Christian Nicolas (Lebanon); Emma Colantuoni Sanvenero (Monaco); Gordon Mak (China); Josep Aulet Salazar (Spain); Leonor Silva (Portugal); Louise Gogstad (Norway); Magnus Þórðarson (Iceland). All justified their positions and worked for the Course in different ways, some centre-stage, some working in

the background as happens in real life. The Testimonials I am able to write if asked will assist them.

House Captains were Sofia Martínez-Villaseñor Piñero and Gustavo Vandekeybus for Cheam; Jonathan Lindefjeld and Antonio Belli for Douai-Elstree; Eduarda Fiuza Ferreira and Elie Nicolas for Hawtreys; Adriana Tur Marí and Elinor Tandberg for Mary Hare.

Sub-Prefects for Cheam were Mak Hoi Lam and Michelle Pretka; for Douai-Elstree Sofia Otten and Sebastiaan de Vries; for Hawtreys Elmar Lutzenberger; for Mary Hare Ivan Kuznetsov.

The School Council was led by the capable and efficient Louise Gogstad and included Jonathan Lindefjeld; Elinborg Thomassen; Philip Groenmeijer; Joe Osborne; Elinor Tandberg; Stella Haagensen; Nicolo Colantuoni Sanvernero, Leonhard Munsch and Sebastian de Vries.

This year's Head Mentor was Benedetta Magni. Mentors were: Antonio Belli, Maya Nedivi, Hugo Mullié, Thea Moarbes, Carmen Gómez Pacheco, Sophie Günther, Elinor Tandberg, Alex Beschi, Stella Haagensen, Laura Le Maux-Gramaglia, Arthur James, Micaela Micaela da Silva Lourenço, Sophia Ramahi, Rutger van der Peijl and Elinborg Thomassen. Several young people were considered suitable for and received Mentor support.

There was just one Ambassador this year – Arthur Pineault James who told everyone about Quebec. Although huge, few knew much about it..

We have two prizes. The prize for Academic Excellence was awarded by the teachers to Elinborg Thomassen and for English Speaking to Laura Le Maux-Gramaglia.

This year's Board Meetings touched on various subjects. During the first week, I explored how much people knew about their fellow class-members. The answer was not only 'not much', but also showed that the majority were not particularly curious to find out. It was only when they became aware of just how different everyone's culture is that they started taking an interest. By the third week, I started on 'register' – the different vocabulary and sentence-structure one uses to, for example, friends, parents and a formal setting like the Board Room. During these sessions some remarkable contrasts came out regarding appropriate register for classrooms, ranging from the very formal in the UK to the far more laid-back in Scandinavia. By the time, the Public Speaking came along in the fourth week, almost everyone was communicating on a more-or-less profound level with many others. The topic, as usual, that entrants were invited to speak on for two minutes was 'What VacStuds has done for me'. To those who had put their names down for it were added several who came from the floor spontaneously, stimulated by the frankness of the first few speakers who had externalised with poignancy and depth of feeling the dramatic effect that the closeness of the relationships they had developed had on them. What came across was that every speaker spoke of how 'safe' they felt on the Course and how this made them want to trust their friends with feelings that has remained previously unspoken. More than this, people who had been strangers 26 days before, were standing in front of 140 people using a foreign language with confidence. Of all the events I have witnessed in 45 summers of VacStuds, this was the most moving. No one had a dry eye.

This year's Masterclass sessions looked mainly, but not exclusively, at 'Macbeth' as this was on the programme at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre later in July. It took place during Digest (formerly 'Homework').

Jonny Hayes took a 'Theatre and Mine' option during the first week of the Course and ended with a performance to the whole school on the grass in front of the conservatory. Several showed remarkable acting skills and I even wrote fan e-mails to parents.

Catering was in the hands of Mary Hare's new Catering Manager, Hugh Robertson. His hotel background showed. Home-made soups were served every day. There were innovations, such as a Chinese meal with chopsticks from a box and a cheeseboard, including Cornish Yarg wrapped in nettles. Whether it be 'Christmas Dinner', 'English High Tea', 'Valentines' or the 'International Meal' we could rely on the catering staff to lay on a spread. In charge of Housekeeping was the superb Pam Swift for the first week, the end of which coincided with her retirement. Sam took over. Kevin Gardiner was our helpful link with Mary Hare.

Like every summer, VacStuds 2018 has been exceptional. The events have all been photographed and videos and are on Shutterfly and Vimeo. With almost everyone now second-generation or family members, the quality of the young people who come to us is outstanding. I know from having gone back through our archives to recreate the student lists from 1973 and then tracking people down for the Facebook and Linked In groups that we have had with us those who are now leaders in business, the arts and politics. The current generation will be no exception. I am sure that the progression system we have enabling people to go from one stage to another will give them an early taste of what it feels like to take responsibility and be a leader.

What started out as an English Language Course in which young people grew up and developed has become a Course for youngsters to grow up in and develop using English as a working language. The positions of responsibility that began with Tanya's Prefectship seven years ago have developed into a progressive structure that is inseparable from the Course itself, resulting in every member of the Sports/Social crew being a former VacStuds student. The whole sports/social side of the Course hits the ground running from Day Minus-One.

It is a real privilege to nurture young talent and see it develop from year to year. Ángel Sanchez Cantalejo told us in his 'An Audience with...' how he came to us at 12 with no English or social skills, but with lots of enthusiasm and a sweet smile. Each summer he came back taking more and more responsibilities. Now, at 19, he will be on the 2019 Sports/Social Crew.

Our 'House' system with sub-Houses each having their own people in charge has engendered a healthy inter-House competitive spirit and enables our youngsters to identify with a small group.

For me, the New Year is here. 2019 has started with some positions of responsibility already being taken up.

My thanks to everyone who has entrusted me with their children this summer.

Ian Mucklejohn – 5 August 2018