

SOUL PROPRIETORS

Down in Sussex, where nobody goes, There live the Bruderhof, who wear funny clothes.

Report by Isabelle Anscombe.
Photographs: Howard Grey

A former tuberculosis sanatorium surrounded by idyllic Sussex countryside is home to a community of 200 souls who, at first sight, appear to have more in common with the pilgrim fathers than the girt-and-jag south-east. The men wear dark trousers with braces, plaid shirts and beards. The women wear short-sleeved white blouses, simple printed cotton skirts with matching tops, and identical black-and-white-spotted headscarves. These are the Darvell Bruderhof, a Christian community who have been here for sixteen years, trying to live the Sermon on the Mount.

To join the Bruderhof, you must give up both property and career. 'Are those things more important to you than being a brother?' asks John, one of the founder members of the Bruderhof. 'To give up yourself is something infinitely more difficult. There is no room here for pet opinions, personal ambition or anything other than obedience to the needs of the community - needs which determine anything from the work a brother or sister is asked to do, to where, within the five communities, he or she might be asked to live.'

There are few absolute commandments, just openness to God. 'The trend in women's life frightens me,' said Bronwen, a young woman who had grown up 'in the life', because that's not what is in God's mind for womanliness and Godliness. We have large families not because it's what we're told to do, but because it's a sensitivity to how God wants us to be. Hans, a Dutchman who joined the Bruderhof only four months ago, explains simply that: 'What I could do before as an evangelist going from door to door spreading the Word was too little; this is much bigger.' Pauline came with her husband in 1984. 'We had been living with three other families in Bristol, searching together, wanting to find the way to live as Christians. Her eyes shone. We came to stay here for a visit, and being a Christian suddenly became something real. We've found what we wanted - the supportive love of our brothers and sisters. The basic struggle is overcoming my own selfishness: when is what I want more important than serving others? I have to become small.'

Some of the long, low buildings of the original hospital have been turned into a kindergarten, with a under its wide verandah. There is a sandpit nearby, with a slide, swings and climbing frame. Under the heart of Sussex

Some of the long, low buildings of the original hospital have been turned into a kindergarten, with a under its wide verandah. There is a sandpit nearby, with a slide, swings and climbing frame. Under the heart of Sussex

Some of the long, low buildings of the original hospital have been turned into a kindergarten, with a under its wide verandah. There is a sandpit nearby, with a slide, swings and climbing frame. Under the heart of Sussex



TELEGRAPH SUNDAY MAGAZINE 37



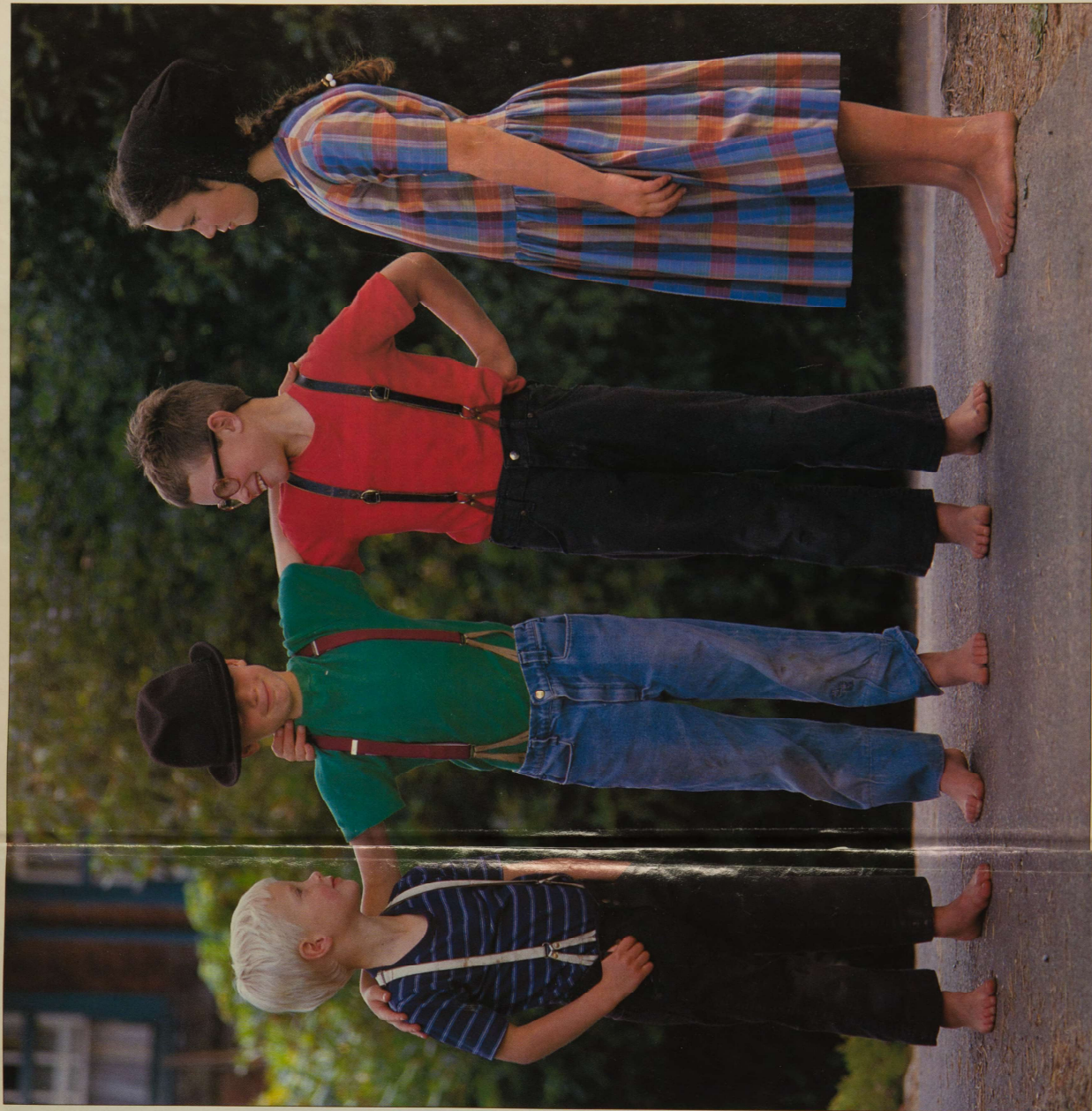
The elders of Darvell, right, have lived through many trials and tribulations to bring the community to its present state of peaceful prosperity. For the younger generation, *main picture*, growing up in the life means a childhood without cartoons, crisps or trendy clothes. They don't seem to mind

and Kirby Muggerside, who live nearby, are great friends, guests are welcome; open evenings are held once or twice a year; and there is an active programme of prison visiting. They have a single radio, and summaries of world news are pinned on the notice board along with letters and photographs from the American communities.

Stanley was an art student in London when he heard Eberhard speak and went to join the first Bruderhof in Germany, where he found people 'living the life that we were just talking about from our soapboxes'. Eric, an ancient pacifist, had read Edward Carpenter, H.G. Wells and Bernard Shaw, and had become interested in kibbutzim when he joined the Coswold Bruderhof. Johnny was an agnostic socialist: 'But socialism gave no explanation of what would cause men to give their best to a society,' he explained. 'What I didn't realise for quite some time was that my socialism was spiritual, and that the answer was compelling love between brothers.'

These three became pioneer members. In the early days, the Bruderhof went through almost biblical tribulations. The Coswold community farmed 500 acres right next to a military airfield. With the outbreak of war, local people became suspicious of so many Germans living there; there were unpleasant scenes. They were allowed to leave rather than be interned and, in 1941, 350 people left for Paraguay, the only country that would accept them, in five vessels, risking the U-boats to cross the Atlantic. They stayed for twenty years, eking out an existence as farmers on the poor soil before moving on to start the first of four American communities, Woodcrest, in New York State, in 1954. In 1971 the community decided to renew their European roots, and bought Darvell in Sussex.

On the surface, life at Darvell is idyllic. Telephone calls, sweets and wine are all allowed (though smoking is banned on health grounds); it's simply that no one has the money to pay for such things. The members of the Bruderhof were expelled by the community finances are handled by the steward, and



The elder Darvell, lived through many tribulations, the present peaceful generation picture, in the light of a child, don't see

Honest toil: 'The trend in women's lib frightens me,' says one of the Darvell women. Most of the workshop jobs are done by men, while the women look after the laundry, the kitchen and the care and education of the younger children



necessities such as shampoo are simply handed out from the central store. Personal possessions are limited to clothes, a toothbrush, a few plants and some postcard reproductions of classic paintings. Despite the fleet of VW vans, cars are kept out of the grounds where children play barefoot. There are no newspapers, no pin-ups, no bad language, no subservience to style or marketing hype. There is even a beguiling lack of religious insignia – no crucifixes or pictures of baby Jesus in the primary school, for the Bruderhof believes that symbols can too easily become idolatrous. Their religious rites are limited to a

short meeting in the Rhön – the blue and yellow hall named after the first Bruderhof in Germany – on Sunday morning, and the *Gemeindestunde*, or household meeting, when community matters are raised; for, says Katie: 'We only come to prayer with people with whom we feel united.'

Sometimes staying united is a struggle, for the Bruderhof believes in obligation to 'lay things on the Brotherhood's heart', or 'straight talking in love'. 'There have been times,' admitted Stanley, 'when the whole community has been shaken, and we've been through some serious crises.' Eberhard Arnold's first

community was split between those members who wanted a life of faith, and those who believed nothing could be achieved without establishing a firm commercial base, and subsequent generations have faced similar dilemmas.

'We have one golden rule,' explained Johnny. 'We never speak about a brother behind his back actively; if we think a thing, then we speak it out.'

'But,' added Stanley, 'we don't regard it as an excuse for a free-for-all. We don't want to have imaginary things against each other. It has to have a real basis, hands and feet.'

Delf continued: 'Anything that comes between us is a grief to us. But there is no pressure to confess. The answer to everything is the longing for reconciliation, to God and to fellow men. Love has to be a way. Admonition only works if we go to a brother in humility and love. You can't go to him with a sledgehammer.'

'It's a constant fight against oneself,' says Stanley. 'But there is always joy after the struggle – the joy of being reconciled to one's brother. We feel that the strife and conflict in the world are basically the last consequences of people's isolation, and of a competitive system.'

But did the competitive system not produce very thinkers and writers – Carpenter, Wells, Shostakovich who led them to join the Bruderhof? Delf eagerly takes up the challenge: 'There are great composers, artists or doctors, but where do you find a brother? And Stanley, who has lived longest within the Bruderhof, has the last, sombre, word: 'The world isn't dying for want of great composers, but for want of love of God.'

and Kitt friends; once or twice of a summary board at America

Those courage college, Delf Fra in your will need Mark w away fo side. I ce nities to sisters. I restful to

Bron stayed ready to pose. I s because compar the con in care: ills with was suc

The many in reaction which I Eberha grown. Hutteri style of ness ag: Thei membe

38 TEL

Look what's falling this autumn

The Edinburgh Woollen Mill Collared Pullover down to £12.95

EWM 842 Collared Pullover in 100% machine washable pure new lambswool with soft collar and neck button detail. Available in four subtle autumn shades, Chestnut Brown (647), Pine Green (667), Tempest Blue (687), Velvet Pink (697), plus Black (019) and White (010). Sizes 34" to 44".

EWM usual price £14.95. Special offer price only £12.95. Post, packing and insurance £1.50 per order.



24 hour telephone order service 0541-80092. Credit card holders may telephone their orders by simply ringing the above number quoting code Dept 839, your address and telephone number. We also state product code number, your size and credit card number.

The Edinburgh Woollen Mill

The Edinburgh Woollen Mill Ltd., Freepost, Dept 839, Langholm, Dumfriesshire, DG13 0BR. Reg. in Scotland, No. 24081. The Edinburgh Woollen Mill Ltd. is one of Scotland's largest fashion retailers with over 80 stores throughout the U.K.

COMPLETE THIS ORDER FORM TODAY

Fill in the coupon and send to The Edinburgh Woollen Mill Ltd., Freepost, Dept 839, Langholm, Dumfriesshire, DG13 0BR.

PRODUCT	COLOUR	SIZE	QUANTITY	COST
EWM 842				
EWM 842				

Postage, Packing and Insurance TOTAL 1 50

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to The Edinburgh Woollen Mill and crossed // and Co.

Access Visa Amex

Tick box and complete details below.

Card No.

Expiry Date Signature

Name

Address

Postcode

Normally, delivery is 14 days from receipt of order. If for any reason you are dissatisfied please return the garment/s within 21 days and we will refund the purchase price without delay. (These benefits are in addition to your statutory rights.)