

This spring I was fortunate to be able to attend Camp Cheerio with John Stevens and Thomas Ingmire in spite of an overwhelming schedule. We are in the process of preparing our house to sell, moving, and I am preparing 2 sets of invitations, programs, guest book, thank you stationery, and place cards for our son's wedding in June. The wedding is to be in Wilmington, N.C., an 8 hour drive from our home in Maryland. We returned to Maryland from Tucson in early April after a 5 month stay and are now preparing to return to Tucson permanently. Cheerio was a welcome break from this schedule.

Cheerio begins with a visit from John Neal with class orders and other goodies Sunday evening. Also in the evening, we introduce ourselves, meet our teachers for the week, and generally socialize. Monday morning classes begin.

How do you teach intangibles? John Stevens asked this question as he explained that our learning is a continual process and that we all have untapped resources. "We can all grow in what our perception of calligraphy is today." We use conventional lettering forms as a reference, as a method to recognize relationships, as a point of reference and then we give them attitude. We make them expressive and abstract, and we look at the whole rather than at individual letters. Rules are invented to make it easy to teach something, but lettering isn't about perfect letters. Lettering has more to do with what you want to express than it has to do with memorizing 5 styles.

We used automatic pens, sizes 3A and 4, and we began with block capital letters. The underlying structures are modular, or in other words, have shapes related to each other. We did not use classical spacing, but pushed the letters together, compressed them, and condensed them. John showed us how to make light, medium, and dark letters and how to twist the pen for different effects. He suggested exercises for using and experimenting with these letters, and asked that we play, discover, and stretch ourselves beyond the comfort zone. He told us to "think of it as art therapy where the objective is not the finished piece, but the journey/process and the wonderful healing process that creativity invites."

We put our pieces on the wall where we see the whole of the design and not the individual letters. It is helpful to look at our work from this perspective, to look at it upside down and sideways. Standing away from our work it is easier to see the "lines, forms, rhythms and movement". We looked at each other's work and discussed and learned.

Half way through the week, Thomas Ingmire became our teacher, and the question, "How do you teach intangibles?" was again asked. Thomas's approach was to look back to history's earliest forms of visual communication: cave wall images and word drawings. These can have many interpretations as we well know from studying our local petroglyphs. Letterforms "translate" precisely into speech and therefore bring us more precision in communication. In addition, Thomas pointed out, as John had, that letter similarities are common to an alphabet.

In the past we needed to write to communicate, but today, calligraphy as opposed to typography, "has the freedom and the opportunity to explore the broadest possible range of visual freedoms, i.e., to make writing a form of drawing." In this workshop, it was our intent to "explore ways to think about regaining some of the freedom of the early 'scribe'".

Thomas carved pointed bamboo pens for us, and dipping them in ink, we began by simply writing our names. We changed the size and the rhythm of our letters and by so doing, created something quite special with our names.

With help along the way, we each created our own alphabet. Each letter had some relationship to its counterpart. Thomas suggested selecting a topic that has meaning for us and finding

shapes from that topic. I chose clay and used tool, design and pottery shapes. Designing the letters made me realize that the top to bottom, left to right sequence of strokes is natural and helpful for later writing. However if my alphabet were to be written bottom to top or right to left, I would rethink that rule. As Thomas pointed out, it is my alphabet and I can do whatever I want with it. We made grids for our alphabets so that we could recognize the letters we had designed, and then went on to write words and text. At first text was treated like a formal book page and then we moved on to drawing with our alphabets, to design of the page, to creating pieces of art.

The entire exercise was a lot of fun and in a sense liberating as well. A rather pleasant byproduct, was that spelling lost its importance though perhaps it shouldn't have. Perfect letterforms ceased to exist and were replaced by letterforms that were freely formed to work together and to create the mood I wanted. But I never lost a sense of the importance of the words.

The two classes meshed beautifully: both teaching intangibles, design, visual freedom, rhythms, variations, contrasts, and yet, the results were quite different. John said that, "when we look at writing from other cultures, we see the lines, forms, rhythms, movement much more easily as we are not trying to understand the words." By creating an alphabet in Thomas's class, we did exactly that.

Cheerio is a wonderful opportunity and if you have not been there, I recommend it. It is located in Roaring Gap, North Carolina, near the Blue Ridge Parkway and is owned by the YMCA. It is one of those wonderful places where there are no phones, televisions, or newspapers to cause distraction, although there is a phone available for outgoing calls with a phone card. It accommodates about 40 students in two classes which usually exchange teachers midway through the week as we did with John Stevens and Thomas Ingmire.

The view over the mountains from the classrooms and cafeteria and hotel are spectacular. Single and double rooms are available in the hotel and a dormitory, which is less expensive, is near by. There is a lot of green grass and hilly terrain, trees and little lakes, horses, deer and a variety of birds. Students come from all over the United States and the world and have varying levels of expertise. The first day there seems to be some trepidation from most about their abilities to meet the standards of the other students and the teachers, but this feeling quickly disappears as people realize that the classes are there for all levels.

Cheerio is a friendly place, largely thanks to the tone set by Joyce and Jim Teta. Jim does all the behind the scenes work to set up the classes and make sure that all runs smoothly. He also provides transportation from the Greensboro Airport. Joyce attends the classes and always goes the extra mile to be helpful and accommodating.

John Neal contacts each student in advance with a list of supplies, and he delivers orders to Cheerio along with a lot of other supplies and books for us to peruse Sunday night before classes begin. He returns one evening later in the week.

Cheerio, Fall, September 29 to October 4, 2002, will be taught by Denis Brown, Experimental Gilding with Copper and Brass, and Rob Leuschke, From Pen to Polish. For further information, contact Jim Teta at 5200 Bear Creek Rd., Winston-Salem, NC 27106 or at Tetascribe@aol.com.

More information about Cheerio can be found at www.calligraphycentre.com

Lynne Carnes Bio:

I was introduced to foundational in high school by my art teacher. ("Calligraphy" as a word has since been invented) I used it to pay the bills while a student at the U of California. After college, I married and led the life of an army wife, jill of all trades, mother of three, but did manage to study Chinese painting with Alison Stilwell Cameron. About 15 years after that I luckily fell into classes with Sheila Waters. She helped me prepare to teach Foundational at Anne Arundel Community College which I did for ten years. I belong to a collaborative group called Pen In Hand which puts on an annual show and sale of calligraphy and occasional shows elsewhere. I have shown in Pebble Beach, California, the American Embassy in Bonn, Germany, as well as a number of local venues. To learn more about the SAS: contact person is Kim Medina, hitthehills@yahoo.com