

# Christcircle people

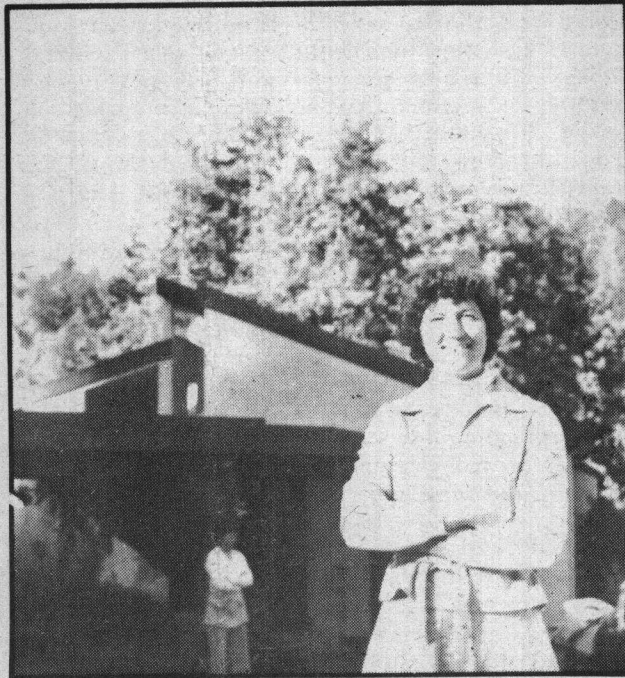
## High Spirits in the Valley

by Inge Sandvoss

**A**LMOST three years ago, as we prepared to move from San Jose to the greener side of the mountains, I chanced to go to a garage sale not far from our home in the Cambrian area of San Jose. It turned out to be a highly unusual sale, for where most affairs of that kind offer only varying kinds of junk, this sale proved to be a treasure mine of useful and beautiful items.

My curiosity aroused, I asked one of the women why they were parting with all these lovely things. "We are starting a commune in Boulder Creek called the Christcircle," she said, "and we're selling all our material possessions to make it possible." Some 40 people, including children, were involved in the undertaking, she said, then gave me their address: Christcircle, Kings Creek Road, Boulder Creek.

Soon, we moved to Scotts Valley. More than two years passed in a combination of work and discovering the delights of Santa Cruz and surroundings; yet sometimes at a quiet moment I would wonder how the Christcircle people were doing. Then, a few weeks ago, while I dried clothes at a Scotts Valley laundromat, a woman and several



*Glynda from the Christcircle.*

children came into the facilities with what seemed to be enough laundry for a hundred people. To my inquiries of why anyone would have that much laundry, a lovely young girl named Julie told me that they were from the Christcircle. I remembered the garage sale and asked the woman in charge of all that laundry how the Christcircle had fared since their move to Boulder Creek.

"We've changed a great deal since we started," said Glynda, whose name I learned as we introduced ourselves. "Originally," she explained, "the Christcircle was just meant to be a place to raise our consciousness. But we knew that our realization isn't worth very much until we put it into action, and the best way to express that knowledge, we thought, was to open a group home and school." That's how I belatedly discovered Camelot.

Kings Creek Road leaves Highway 9 north of Boulder Creek and runs for about four miles through mountainous forest lands before it ends at the large clearing on rolling, high terrain where the Christcircle family makes its home in a surprising complex of buildings. This is no ramshackle collection of camp buildings. For 2½ years the family, under the direction of its patriarch, Arthur J. Hempel, has quietly built carefully-designed, modern facilities for communal dining, housing for children and adults, classrooms and food storage space. The original, older homestead of the large property is used for printing and crafts projects, and plans are under way to remodel it. There is also a huge barn which once housed steers, but is now humming with children who are engaged in activities like building rabbit hutches and repairing bicycles.

Glynda leads me through the different buildings, explaining their purposes and how they were built. There's the Sanctuary Building, where classes are held as well as meetings and Sunday services. We see the dining room, where 50 people sit down together, and peek into an immaculate kitchen from which emerges a rich aroma. Glynda shows me Baghaven Hall, a building designed with loving care and especially for children. Besides the dormitories, Baghaven Hall boasts a family room with a huge, fieldstone fireplace, a reading loft and a wonderful thing called the Mud Bath. "The children are often extremely muddy," explains Glynda, "and they enter the house through the mud bath. Here they shed dirty clothes, take showers, put on clean clothes, and when they come into the family room they are sparkling." I meet the children, too. They are all ages, and seem happy, wholesome and open. Later, Glynda tells me the backgrounds of some of the children, those whom no one else wanted—"impossible" cases, often referred by probation officers. Once they were autistic, or battered, or

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neglected or criminal; the Christcircle family members treat them all with the same combination of affection and firmness, and they begin to bloom.

A 12-year-old boy, with whom I had had a conversation when I first arrived at the premises, had come to them with the mental and emotional age of a child of 18 months, says Glynda. After nine months with the Christcircle family he has now reached the equivalent of an eight-year-old boy.

Another battered child is little Tommy. He is five years old, but was so neglected that he looks like he's two or three. "When he first came," says Glynda, "he was so starved for affection, that he needed constant attention." At age five, he still has not been toilet trained. He looks happy now, holding my hand for part of the visit through Baghaven Hall. Even totally autistic children have responded to the family's approach. "We use no one school of thought in treating the children," says Glynda, "only what our hearts tell us to do.

"We never try to give the children anything but our own growth," she continues. "When we see the children stopping, then we know we have stopped. We practice doing each thing totally," Glynda goes on. "Scrubbing the toilet is to be done with as much care as cooking or writing. We are always teaching each other how to be full of care, and that requires a total stop of everything else."

The person who inspired the Christcircle family is Arthur J. Hempel. "Many times the chance has been offered to Arthur to set himself up as a guru," says Glynda, "and every time he turned it down. He is in the highest and truest sense a saint. He never asks anything of anyone that he hasn't first asked of himself. His vitality enfolds you, there is a constant push to keep growing," she affirms, "and out of that vitality he has nurtured us and is drawing out of us that same saintliness."

We've come to sit down in the dining room after our tour through the buildings, and by now it's noontime. I'm invited to dinner, and accept gladly; the brisk mountain air gives anyone an appetite. The big room fills rapidly with adults and children, who sit down to an old-fashioned dinner of meat, potatoes and vegetables. Before eating, everyone around the tables holds hands and there is a time of silent meditation. I'm sitting across from Hempel and next to the 12-year-old boy, who not long ago came to the family with an infant's mentality. He tells me he is an Aquarius and interested in airplanes. Hempel has a short, reddish beard, astonishingly blue eyes and is really as unassuming as Glynda said; but one senses a tremendous strength and authority. We talk about the special attraction this mountainous area has for spiritual people. "If you are clairvoyant," says Arthur, "and when conditions are right, one can see the aura of the mountains. It appears as a white light, sometimes, and at other times it looks purple." I have the feeling that the Christcircle is right at the center of that aura. •