

## The Neubronner Story

The Neubronner's case was first mentioned in the previous issue of HEJ and generated more than a little interest. The Neubronner's run a small press publishing business in Germany and are translating *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* into German for the first time.

The Neubronner's story begins in a way that is personally familiar to many home educators. Their elder son, Moritz, began school along with his age mates. For two years his parents, Tilman and Dagmar, watched their son struggle mentally, emotionally, and physically with his new life style. His enthusiasm for life and learning drained gradually away and finally his health began to suffer. Try as they might to find a solution for his unhappiness within the system, Tilman and Dagmar felt as defeated as Moritz clearly was. When their younger son, Thomas, began school, it looked as if he were about to repeat his brother's negative experiences. Within days he was telling his parents that he would prefer to stay at home, complaining that he had headaches and that school "smelled funny."

At the end of 2005 the family decided that they could struggle on no longer. Moritz and Thomas could not be asked to continue enduring a life style so detrimental to their well being and their parents removed them from school. In giving up one battle, the Neubronners took on another. There can be few new comers to home education who do not feel some degree of trepidation at the task before them, but in Germany an extra deep breath is required. There, home education is a criminal activity which the authorities are determined to stamp out no matter what might be the cost of such zeal.

In the initial legal action taken against them the Neubronners argued that school was making their children ill. The court found that this was not a sufficient reason to keep them at home and when Thomas and Moritz subsequently failed to turn up at school a fine of 1,500 Euros was levied. This, the Neubronners declined to pay. Whilst the legal machine ground into action, Moritz and Thomas were savouring life at home. About once a month two teachers from the school at which they were still registered came to their house to monitor their progress. The boys undertook written tests and received encouraging reports but their parents noticed much more significantly learning than this. Dagmar likens the whole process of natural learning to that of a growing plant; an organic process in which her sons' minds thrive and flourish. The Neubronners' enthusiasm for and joy in home education is palpable.

Their fines have been raised within the last few weeks to 4,500 Euros and bailiffs have visited their home in a fruitless search to impound property that might realise this sum. The Neubronners have been determined not to pay (and in any case couldn't have the money) and they were also determined not to follow the route of several other German home educators who, with their backs against the wall, decided to move to more liberal countries. It's been obvious from their communications that this is an extremely courageous family, willing to risk prison sentences to defend their right to home educate.

Compulsory school attendance is the law since Hitler made it so, and the grounds on which it is still so stringently upheld are statist and prejudicial. The authorities particularly fear religious extremism or the creation of the bogey "parallel" societies, but in fact are unwilling to tolerate any deviation from state control. Arguments about the children's educational progress can hold no sway; by the school's own measures they are doing well. The bulldozer reactions of the authorities look much more like a crass show of strength – do it our way or else – than a considered approach to child welfare.

The Neubronners have done a remarkable job of generating interest and publicity around their cause with newspaper reports and TV appearances. Disseminating news about their case both at home and abroad will help turn the spot light onto the authority's intransigence, but for now the hope that the German authorities might enter into sensible dialogues about educational alternatives being allowed in Germany is once again on hold. Threatened with losing parental control, the Neubronner's have had to leave behind their home and are currently touring to decide where they will settle.