

# 'Youth Incorporated' Goes International

J. LACEY REYNOLDS

Boys and girls from twenty-one European nations visit America on a magic carpet provided by Youth Incorporated of Nashville, Tennessee.

J. Lacey Reynolds, Washington correspondent, "The Nashville Tennessean," tells the story of this exciting and moving adventure.

LATE ONE BUSY FEBRUARY afternoon, Silliman Evans, publisher of *The Nashville Tennessean*, who was stopping in Washington, telephoned me to come to his Mayflower Hotel suite "to handle a story about bringing some boys and girls over from Europe."

This didn't seem as important as the powerful political stories that were piled on my desk. After all, Washington was always full of visitors from Europe who had rank and distinction and were grown up besides.

I may have grumbled about being "a travel-page editor for kiddies" before clearing up a couple of urgent matters and getting over to the Mayflower.

Two Nashville acquaintances were there. One was Allen Dobson whom I remembered as a precise banker and businessman who could figure compound interest to the fourth decimal. The second was J. H. Stetson, secretary-treasurer of Youth Incorporated, which Dobson had organized five years ago.

## Gesture of International Good Will

Dobson had a dream about extending the local program of camping and sports that Youth Incorporated, a non-profit civic organization, had been sponsoring so successfully. He wanted to bring to Nashville a boy or girl from

each of the 21 European countries outside the Iron Curtain as a "Hands-Across-The-Sea" gesture of international good will. The Europeans would live part time in the homes of Tennessee families, and part time in the 750-acre camp of Youth Incorporated on the outskirts of Nashville.

It was the most idealistic, visionary and impractical dream ever to come from the mouth of a hard-bitten businessman. But it gave me the "tingles" all over.

Since February, this dream has become a reality and vanished like the dream it was in the first place. Youth Incorporated did bring to this country 22 young Europeans for a look at America and Americans as they live. The whole fantastic venture has forged international ties of friendship that the acids of adversity could not possibly dissolve.

## State Department Cooperates

Dobson, Stetson and I went to the State Department next day to enlist its support in selecting the young visitors. This was a non-government undertaking and we wanted nothing from the Federal treasury. All expense would be handled by Youth Incorporated and public spirited Tennesseans, but there

were many important details that our government would have to handle. The Foreign Visitors Division cooperated immediately, for they understood well that the material things that bind people together must be supplemented by the intangibles that people carry in their heads.

In each country, the American Cultural Attache and the Ministry of Education set up a committee to recommend three candidates. Candidates were recommended on the basis of scholarship, talents and personality, but above all, qualities of future leadership. This was not a charity venture; what was wanted were young leaders who could interpret to their countrymen what they had seen and lived in America.

Youth Incorporated set up a civic committee in Nashville to make a choice among the three candidates recommended from each country.

The 22 winners came from 21 countries. Norway sent two representatives. Bjorn Tysdahl, the brainy, burr-headed son of a telegraph operator in Oslo, won first place, with Agnes Nygaard, photogenic 16-year-old, as runner up. Agnes was the daughter of a Norwegian Supreme Court Justice and wanted to become a lawyer. So the Nashville Bar Association put up \$1,000 to bring her to America with the group.

Besides Norway, the group hailed from Eire, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Holland and Belgium. Such a hodge-podge of nationalities probably never has travelled to the United States in one party.

## Reporters Visit European Homes

A month before the tour was scheduled to begin in July, *The Nashville Tennessean* sent two reporters to Europe to interview the winning candidates in their homes. The lot fell to Miss Louise Davis, Sunday magazine writer, and myself—probably because I had gotten the “tingles” when Dobson first broached his dream.

In carrying out our European assignments, we interviewed 10 of the selected visitors. We found them and their parents shy; uncertain of their English. At first, they were skeptical of the whole venture. They thought the trip was too good to be true—and so did we.

These were children of the war. Although now 15 to 17 years of age, in their childhood they had heard the explosion of bombs. They had dreaded a knock at the door because it might be the Gestapo. They had known the privations and anxieties of a continent at war. In some respects, they had been deprived of their childhood. And they were a more mature lot than their contemporaries in Nashville.

At first, this worried the sponsors back in Tennessee because we did not want such discrepancies to exist. But they existed nonetheless as discrepancies between humans so often exist. As it turned out, discrepancies were not as important as we had anticipated, for reasons that will be explained later.

## Cross-Section of European Youth

We found these teen-agers a cross-section of European youth from diverse backgrounds. John Smith was son of a London schoolmaster; Helle Martensen-Larsen, the daughter of the chief of

police at Odense, Denmark; Fatma Aktan, the daughter of a Turkish engineer; Genevieve Maze-Sencier, the daughter of a chemical magnate of distinguished French family; Robbert Leopold, the son of the sales manager of a Dutch oil company; Gitta Haeubel, the daughter of an Austrian postal official.

We didn't know how this crowd would jibe. After a while, they were diverse personalities from diverse countries and backgrounds, going to a country that was almost as diverse as Europe itself. But they did jibe immediately.

On July 3, they flew into London for the assembly from all the compass points of Western Europe. Those who weren't homesick were air-sick, and most of them arrived in London sick both ways. They recuperated within an hour, and began chattering away in English, the only common language and the official tongue of the tour.

They were much more fluent in their English together than when they had been interviewed separately in their homes.

I asked Helle of Denmark about this, after hearing her glibly conversing with Renee Antoine, of Belgium.

"Why didn't you speak English so well when I was in Copenhagen?"

"I was shy," she replied.

The fact is that they had gained confidence in their textbook English once they got together and found it worked better than they had expected.

On the evening of July 3, the American Teen-Age Club of London gave a dinner for the Europeans, and Frank Sinatra appeared to croon a few American numbers. Every one of them knew Sinatra from his records. The next day, U. S. Ambassador Lewis Douglas invited the group to the Fourth of July reception at his residence. All 2,000 guests took notice of John Robson's



*Courtesy The Nashville Tennessean*  
European youths pick oranges from a tree in Florida

kilts, and the native costumes of Gitta from Austria and Arietta Rautenbacker of Finland.

Between July 4, when they left London for the States, and August 19, when they returned for dispersal to their respective homes, this group enjoyed a Cook's tour that even Cook's could not have arranged. They were received by President Truman in Washington; they stayed at the swank Waldorf Astoria in New York; saw the circus in Chicago; inspected Oak Ridge and the TVA; and sun-tanned in Florida. Few VIP's have ever received such a plush reception as these teen-aged Europeans.

The barriers of nationalism were lowered on the long trans-Atlantic flight to New York when Carmine Punzi, the personable Italian whose English was hardly understandable, resorted to the most international language of all—rhythm. He improvised a couple of castanets by putting coins in paper cartons that were not being used by his air-sick companions. In the front end of our American Overseas airliner, he congregated a chorus to do a "rah-dee-dah-dee-dah; rah-dee-dah-dee-dah."

Four of the Europeans started an international bridge game. While the engines of the airplane droned away, they argued the rules in the only language they could all speak.

### **Welcome in America**

When the plane landed in New York on July 5, we were greeted by the largest concentration of flash bulbs ever assembled at Idlewild International Airport, aside from high official receptions. The Europeans did the Stork Club, the Roxyettes and sightseeing. But only 36 hours was consumed in

New York, because Allen Dobson was determined to give these youngsters more than the "skyscraper treatment of America" which is so often accorded to Europeans and accorded exclusively.

After being in New York only one day, reporters asked the visitors their impressions of America.

"How can we say?" Gitta from Austria observed shrewdly. "We have not had a chance to see how Americans live—only New Yorkers. Not all Americans live in the Waldorf."

When the Europeans arrived in Nashville on July 7, they received impressive demonstrations of good will and hospitality. Three hundred people waited at the airport, although no effort was made to organize a turnout for the occasion. On two successive evenings the youngsters stood in reception line for two hours hearing profuse words of welcome and affection from 700 or 800 well-wishers.

Throughout their stay in Tennessee, there were repeated shows of hospitality and generosity. Invitations for their appearance at civic functions and to "have a bite of supper with us" swamped the offices of Youth Incorporated. Merchants and businessmen showered the group with gifts of clothing and other necessities. Their money (those who could get American dollars) was literally no good. Each of the 22 had received from Mr. Evans in New York \$20 as advance on an article to be written for the paper before their departure from the country. That was about the only money some of them had to spend and it was adequate.

### **'Gifts for a Time of Joy'**

When the European boys went into

camp with 60 Nashville boys for their 10-day camping period, eight chocolate cakes were contributed anonymously by people living near the camp, with a note saying: "In times of great joy, as at weddings, and of great sorrow, as at funerals, it is an old southern custom for neighbors to bring gifts of food. Your arrival is a time of great joy for us, so please enjoy these cakes. Your Neighbors."

Our original misgivings about the relationship between the Europeans and our comparatively sheltered Tennessee youth proved groundless. It was true that the Europeans had been schooled in a grimmer life, and their ways were more mature and their intellectual interests broader. But it was also true that the Nashville boys and girls seemed to be more socially adjusted. They were also brawnier and excelled in most sports. Thus the deficiencies of each group were cancelled out and each respected the other for his superior attainments.

The Nashville boys and girls tried to help the visitors with their English (at the end of their stay, the Europeans had a slight southern drawl as compared with the proper British school-boy accent they had brought to America). They schooled the Europeans in the language of American romance. They taught the visitors how to play softball and ping-pong, ride horseback, pitch horseshoes. In turn, the Nashvillians were taught how to play soccer, but could never play as well as the European boys who beat the Americans handily 3 to 1 on one livid July afternoon. The Nashvillians learned the national anthems of other countries. Even if they didn't teach the Europeans all

the words of "The Star Spangled Banner," they did teach them, "Goodnight Irene." This, incidentally, became the Europeans' theme song because it was the first American popular tune they learned together in the United States.

### Lightning Sparked at Times

I do not wish to leave the impression that all was sweetness and light. Sometimes the lightning sparked between opposing poles of opinion.

Genevieve Maze-Sencier, 16, who had the highest IQ of any of the visitors, carried around a suitcase full of intellectual snobbery. She frankly said that she considered Americans "barbarians" and sincerely believed this until she met some Nashvillians whose IQ, education and wisdom excelled her own. One day, she confided:

"All Americans are not barbarians. I met several of them yesterday who are interested in music and literature and intellectual discussion, too."

Upon leaving the country in August, she said that while she loved her own country, she wanted to remain in the United States. She found it so intellectually inspiring!

Renee Antoine thought Americans were a bit sluggish, politically speaking. As a high school student in Antwerp she had participated in the student marches protesting return of King Leopold during the spring referendums. During August, when Leopold had returned and riots were tearing Belgium apart, she said:

"I wish I were back to stick up posters and march with the crowds in Antwerp."

And then, she witnessed a Tennessee Democratic primary and found that

her contemporaries in Nashville were just as partisan as she was in Belgium. She felt more at home.

The sleepy Spaniard, Antonio Peon, thought Americans rushed around too much. He himself was continually relapsing into a siesta.

He told the Nashville Kiwanis Club: "The Spanish people live good in siesta. That is the big difference between your life and ours. So I would say: don't be so lazy as us; don't hurry so much as you."

Antonio was continually complaining that his "spirit" never caught up with him in the wild rush of his American itinerary. While touring East Tennessee late in his visit, he said: "My spirit is still in Nashville. It was the same when we came to New York. My body was in New York but my spirit was in Madrid. It took about a week for my spirit to catch up and for a week I was without it. Now, it will be three days before my spirit catches up with my body from Nashville."

Bjorn Tysdahl, of Norway, felt that America could do more to provide adequate housing. Under the Dobson policy of "showing them everything—the show places and the slums, the best and the worst," Bjorn had seen the slums of Nashville. He sensed the contrast with housing in his own country, where public housing has been vigorously undertaken.

### **Race Issue Puzzles European Youth**

The most difficult problem for the Europeans to understand was the race issue. Their countries had no Negroes or minority races of color and they found it easy, at first, to offer solutions. On the other hand, the ultra-conserva-

tive group of Nashvillians who sponsored and financed the trip believed that they knew the "solution" if they were just left alone from "outside interference."

The first effort of the Nashville sponsors was to convince the young visitors that there was really no problem at all—or that the problem was just being agitated by New Dealers in Washington. They kept emphasizing that "the American Negro must help himself."

At the end of a briefing session on the subject, headed by Dr. Harvie Branscomb, Chancellor of Vanderbilt University, John Robson, the square-headed Scot, asked this question: "Must the American Negro help himself all alone? Is it possible to educate the white man to extend him a helping hand?"

The question infuriated a minority of the people of Nashville; they thought it highly impertinent coming from a "kid of 17." But it stimulated thought in other quarters.

Many of the Europeans were incensed over signs: "This end of bus for white people only," and by drinking fountains side by side designated "White" and "Colored."

They were somewhat persuaded that something was being done for and by the Negro—when they saw federal housing projects for Negroes in Nashville and visited Pearle High School and Fisk University.

The whole project cost an estimated \$50,000. Literally scores of Americans contributed services that could not be calculated in terms of money.

### **What Did the Visit Accomplish?**

What did it accomplish? Was it

**Educational Leadership**

worth the money and effort? In answer, I would say these things were accomplished:

1. The Europeans were educated to the fact that Americans are not as tumultuous and uncivilized as pictured in American movies and crime news. The young visitors were surprised that it was unnecessary to have a bodyguard in Chicago. The rather uncomplimentary impression of Americans that has been conveyed by some GI's and American tourists was also corrected in their eyes.

They found Americans human and hospitable—no less human and hospitable than their own people. To them, this was a revelation because they had been led to think of us in terms of sheer bigness—big buildings, big expanses and big braggarts about it all, devoid of the ways of culture.

2. Tennesseans who followed the day-to-day activities of the group through the pages of *The Nashville Tennessean* themselves received a liberal education. In forum after forum and wherever it was possible, they put to the young visitors questions about their own countries. They asked about socialized medicine in England; communism in Italy; dictatorship in Portugal; pacifism in Sweden, etc.

The Europeans left their imprint upon the community—even if only upon its conscience. They chided Tennesseans for putting up with the poll tax while preaching democracy. Nashvillians shifted uncomfortably when the young visitors pointed out bad housing conditions or suggested that our courts were too informal and undignified. And some may have considered it impertinent when John Robson

suggested that more should be done to aid the Negro race and when Agnes Nygaard or Renee Antoine or Genevieve Maze-Sencier scoffed at "white" and "colored" signs of discrimination. But many pondered the picture of themselves as reflected in the mirror that they held up to the community.

3. The project had tremendous propaganda value abroad. The State Department sent back to Europe thousands of words, hundreds of photographs, and scores of recordings. The story of their magic-carpet tour of America was funneled back, not only to their own countries but to those countries lying behind the Iron Curtain. The visitors themselves wrote articles for their country's press. They were interviewed and photographed upon their return home. They made speeches and radio addresses refuting some of the monstrous lies that Russia has been seeking to tell about us in Europe.

The story of their American tour was played in Europe in sharp juxtaposition to the drab news of war in Korea, which broke out just before they left for the States. In the news, it loomed as a green island of hope for eventual peace in a hopeless sea of distrust and dissent and death and disaster and war. When the story of Eva Gfrorer's activities in the United States appeared in the newspapers back in Berlin, where the shadow of one war had been replaced by the shadow of another, Eva's mother was incredulous. She wrote Little Eva asking how much of the story was really true!

This sort of project should be undertaken by other communities throughout the United States. It could well be done by other youth organizations, by

Chambers of Commerce, by newspapers, by educational groups or civic clubs. One strong practical idealist like Allen Dobson could put it over in any American city, no matter what the sponsoring organization. Any group wishing to undertake a similar venture would profit by the experience of Youth Incorporated, which would be only too happy to pass on helpful pointers.

Coming over the Atlantic from London to New York, Captain J. M. Kirkpatrick, of our American Overseas Airliner, radioed ahead to his New York

office suggesting that the plane, which carried more diverse nationalities than he had ever flown in 300 Atlantic crossings, be christened "Flagship UN."

"People think of the airplane as an instrument of destruction," he mused as we neared Gander, Newfoundland. "But it can also be used as an instrument of peace.

"If other cities would sponsor goodwill trips like this, we wouldn't have to use the airplane to destroy things. We could use it to build for a better day in the world."

## *World Understanding in the Elementary Grades*

DELIA GOETZ

**How will your pupils, when grown, feel toward people of other lands? Delia Goetz, Specialist on the Preparation and Exchange of Materials, U. S. Office of Education, poses this as a crucial question of our time.**

THE MOUND OF MAIL on the desk in the Division of International Educational Relations grows higher each day. The height of the mound is mute evidence that you and hundreds like you realize your responsibility for doing something about developing world understanding. The tone of these letters shows that you feel this is a big order for your fifth graders, with your already full schedule. There are many questions in the letters. "Where do I begin?", many of you ask. It's a good question. Why not begin by deciding what you *are* and are *not* trying to do?

First of all you are *not* coaching applicants for the quiz kids programs.

Neither are you developing star performers who will bob up and tell everything about any country in the world next time the principal steps into the room. You *are* trying to develop world understanding. What does that mean? With children in the elementary grades it means gaining some knowledge of and appreciation for people of other cultures in their own community and in other lands.

### **Children Are Eager to Understand**

In order for children to understand people, they must be able to put themselves in the place of these people, know their problems and how they feel

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