



The Legacy of John Holt: A Man Who Genuinely Understood, Respected, and Trusted Children

Patrick L Farenga

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The Legacy of John Holt contains sixteen portraits of a radical teacher and writer whose ten books and work influenced schoolteachers and homeschoilers to help children learn in their own ways. Written by friends, colleagues, and homeschoilers who knew Holt personally, this book sheds new light on a pivotal figure in American education whose work continues to inspire the homeschooling movement (which Holt called “unschooling”). People who knew Holt from his college days until his death share stories and details about him that bring his quiet but forceful personality to life for readers and present his ideas about children and learning as part of their own lives, not just theory. “So many of the voices that we now need desperately to hear seem to have faded in the media-celebrity din: Paul Goodman, Ivan Illich, John Holt, to name three who told the raw truth about modern education. Perhaps their relative obscurity today is because they were not empire-builders, gathering disciples, but old-fashioned prophets, letting the chips fall where they may. This new collection of testimony from those who knew John Holt well suggests still another explanation. Here we see how influence grows not by the establishment of reputations, but by inspiration—to pursue one's own truth, bestow one's own gifts. This is a heartening realization in our dark times.” —Taylor Stoehr, author of *Changing Lives: Working with Literature in an Alternative Sentencing Program* and *The Paul Goodman Reader* “John Holt departed altogether too soon. Thank God he left behind Pat Farenga to help lead the effort to make Holt's deep wisdom about children available to a new generation of parents and teachers. The contributors to Pat and Carlo's book bear witness to the currency of Holt's work and provide us with poignant and intimate glimpses of the person behind the ideas. I feel like I know John so much better now.” —Chris Mercogliano, author of *Making It Up As We Go Along*, the Story of the Albany Free School; *Teaching the Restless*; *How to Grow a School*; and *In Defense of Childhood*. “Where the hell would we be without John Holt? When I first encountered him a couple of decades ago, like so many others I was immediately thrilled, and quickly read everything he'd ever written. I figured I had a pretty good handle on his thinking and understood why he mattered so much. But over and over again through the years he keeps coming back to me. I keep remembering things he has said and keep realizing that I still don't fully grasp the radical depth and scope of his ideas. So often I feel like I have broken a new intellectual trail for myself or like maybe I have a good new idea, and then I realize, naw, John Holt said that better than you, just thirty-years ago. And how great is that? This book is one more reminder of that, and a sweet one at that” —Matt Hern, author of *A Radical Handbook for Youth*; *Field Day*; and *Deschooling Our Lives*. John Holt gained fame in the 1960s as an insightful school critic with his books *How Children Fail* and *How Children Learn*, both of which are still in print and combined have sold nearly 2 million copies. Frustrated by the slow pace of change in schools, Holt became one of the founders of the homeschooling movement in 1977, when he published the first magazine about learning outside school, *Growing Without Schooling*.



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