

## Leamington Peace Festival: 14<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> June, 2008.

By Judith Ratcliffe

2008 is the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Leamington Peace Festival. Originally set up in 1976 in order to **'bring together different people, with different philosophies and ways of living, into one peaceful, respectful environment, and to give them the opportunity to become more involved in bringing that to the world as a whole'** and conjuring memories from some of 'dancing in the rain and mud' or as a 'great place to bring the kids' or 'to have fun with lots of mates'. I answered an advertisement in the local paper for volunteers and as a result ended up in the thick of the action...

The Information Caravan, whose exterior, Quoc and I had decorated on the previous day with memories and thoughts about previous festival years, from members of the public, a few of which I have quoted above, proved to be a marvellous vantage point for watching events unfold with Vishakha and the other festival volunteers (in between chalking the lists of bands and activities onto huge boards to stand outside the relevant tent/bandstand and giving directions to festival-goers).

'Dancing in the rain and mud' was, fortunately, not an experience enjoyed by this year's revellers, who sunbathed and picnicked on the grass in front of the marquee and the bandstand, where bands such as Locomundo and Hot Magenta, and artists like Shanade Morrow, took the crowd by storm.

Taking a short break from my volunteering duties in order to relax in a very comfortable, technicoloured Mexican hammock, I had the opportunity to read the festival handbook and to decide which stall to seek out next.

There were over a hundred to choose from, scattered across the grassy park outside Leamington Museum and Library: From Amazing Crêpes to the Spa Theatre Company and from rainbow coloured hats to hand made jewellery and tattoos. As I walked around the Festival I saw children twirling hula-hoops outside the Kids Tent and watching clowns, adults eating ice-cream and trying their hand at the potter's wheel outside the ceramic tent.

One stall/tent which particularly caught my eye was that belonging to Activ8, a Nuneaton-based charity, set up in 2005, which 'aims to raise a positive profile of learning disabled adults within the community and to promote self confidence and self expression through art and creativity'. I spoke to Ruth, one of its members, and she showed me a picture which she had painted: It impressed me that she had captured the essence and expression of a person as well as any photograph could.

Other charities with stalls at the festival included Mid Warwickshire Cats Protection and Amnesty International, Coventry Stop the War and the United Nations Association. Some of these charities gave talks through out Saturday and Sunday at the bandstand and the marquee, in between the live music acts.

Even the Mexican Hammocks, which I had been swinging in, earlier in the day, had an important role to play in world affairs- The Mexican Hammock Company was set up in 1983 to 'develop reliable alternative sources of income in areas of high unemployment and relative poverty... in Mexico'.

I took away from the Festival a deep sense of Community Spirit and togetherness, knowledge of things that I had never stopped to consider, and an even bigger smile than usual. It goes to prove that a serious message is perhaps best given in the context of having fun and I very much hope to be involved in the Festival again, next year. Perhaps I shall see you there?

Should you wish to get involved with volunteering or to find out more about the Leamington Peace Festival, their e-mail address is [info@peacefestival.org.uk](mailto:info@peacefestival.org.uk)