

What Sustains Us?

We
believe
that
freedom
entails
responsibility

What Sustains Us?

Or: How I Learned to
Stop Worrying and Love
Rotating Grazing Pastures,
Recycling Everything from
Barn Waste to Bottles and
Turning out Lights

A CNN-Time survey in 2002 revealed that 59 percent of Americans believe the apocalyptic events outlined in the Bible's book of Revelation will occur as written. An Associated Press-AOL News poll says 25 percent believe it will happen in 2007. Others suspect we're facing yet another possible end. In an AP news story last June, renowned astrophysicist Steven Hawking said, "It is important for the human race to spread out into space for the survival of the species. Life on Earth is at the ever-increasing risk of being wiped out by a disaster, such as sudden global

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warming, nuclear war, a genetically engineered virus or other dangers we have not yet thought of.”

Those not awaiting an immanent rapture or building spaceships are talking up sustainability. It’s a word used with everything from recycling to philanthropy, but the core meaning is closely related to environmental conservation. The 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development created a report establishing guiding principles for sustainable development, defining sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Environmental scientists cite this year’s balmy New England winter and record snowfalls in the Rockies as harbingers of doom—the result of increased greenhouse gasses leading to an eventual endgame of a severely disrupted biosphere where humans can no longer survive. *Their faith lies in believing that we haven’t reached the point of no return and that we can back away from the tipping point—if we modify our behavior.*



Sustainability and The Putney School

Carmelita Hinton had a vision of sustainability when she started The Putney School, although that word may not have crossed her mind. You see it in the rhetoric of the founding principles and in the structure of the curriculum that, to this day, includes farming, land stewardship, a global outlook and plain old Yankee pragmatism. We still eat The Putney Special in honor of that ability to make do when supplies are scarce.

In a 1954 letter to alumni in the *Putney Post*, Mrs. Hinton addressed the earth-saving aspect of sustainability, saying,

“We live close to the land and cultivate an appreciation of nature. By studying the environment of which we are a part, we gain understanding of our role as stewards of the land.”

She said more things that address our own sustenance, however, including:

“The years at Putney are a time of intense outdoor activity. Students work on the land and take part in a vigorous athletic program; they develop self-reliance and lifelong pleasure in accomplishment.”

“We believe that music, the arts and crafts are basic expressions of the human spirit and the quest for beauty. To that end, each student participates in the arts and in music to develop skills that will bring lifelong enjoyment.”

“Life at Putney helps students develop intellectual integrity and social conscience. Living in a small community, we urge consideration and respect for others.”

And, perhaps most importantly,

“We believe that freedom entails responsibility.”

Three generations of students have attended The Putney School since its founding (and one of Mrs. Hinton’s great-grandsons is here now), so whatever we’ve done to sustain ourselves has worked thus far. But what sustains us today?

We’re rotating grazing pastures, recycling everything from barn waste to bottles, building and upgrading structures to be energy efficient, educating our community to turn out lights and close windows, exploring alternative energy sources and doing other environmentally sound things we’ll illustrate in the rest of this special section.

But we also need to be economically sustainable. That’s why there are ads and stories in this issue touting planned giving, the Annual Fund and other ways of giving so that Putney can continue to teach responsible, mindful living. The reality is that Putney’s programs are sustained not only by tuition, but also by investments and contributions.

We gather to Sing on Thursday mornings because life isn’t all about survival of the species. Our spirits need to soar. Many of our faculty members’ avocations—from yoga, to fiber arts, to playing in the orchestra—reflect Putney’s founding beliefs. Teaching by example is the next best thing to learning by doing. Our people live our mission. You’ll see more about that on page 21.

Can anyone be trusted to accurately predict the future? Most of the time we can’t even agree on what happened in the past. The present is where we live and it’s where we make our decisions. Will you recycle this magazine (or pass it on to a friend) and turn out the light when you’re done reading? We can’t know for sure. Will your decision change the fate of humankind? Can’t help you there, either.

By shifting the emphasis away from the Earth we’re trying to save and onto the people we’re trying to save it for, sustainability takes on new meaning. There’s so much more to it than statistics and doomsday scenarios. It’s the difference between living in fear of the future and living well in the moment.

What sustains you?



GARDEN TO TABLE:
JEANZ HOLT '07
PONDERES THE JOY
OF PLUCKING ORGANI-
CALLY GROWN CARROTS
FROM THE GARDEN
THAT WILL FEED HER
TEACHERS AND CLASS-
MATES THAT VERY
EVENING.

Number of
Blacksmithing
Forges: 2



ACTING AS IF “GLOBALLY” IS “LOCALLY”: VERMONT
SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE STEVE KERR ADDRESSED
THE MEDIA WHEN PUTNEY SOLD A BRED HEIFER AND
DONATED ANOTHER TO REINVIGORATE CUBA’S DAIRY
HERDS. COMMUNIST CHILDREN NEED MILK, TOO.

Number of Local
Restaurants No
Longer Discarding
All of Their Used
Cooking Oil Because
of Our Biodiesel
Manufacturing
Plant: 1