



Graduation 2007

THE 72ND COMMENCEMENT EXERCISE of The Putney School marked beginnings and endings for more than just the graduating seniors. It was Director Brian Morgan's final opportunity to bid students their Putney farewell. It was College Counselor Joyce Vining Morgan's last chance to see her underlings cross one finish line in pursuit of the next. It was Board Chair Elizabeth Eisold '80 Blaylock's parting stint as the person who hands the brass elm key rings (handcrafted by Science Chair Glenn Littledale '76) to seniors as they reel in the shock of finally having their individually-designed diplomas in hand.

The ceremony was held outside on the East Lawn, despite the threat of clouds that managed to resist shedding drops perhaps a tad better than those in attendance that day. It was a day of transition punctuated with singing and heartfelt words that ran from supercilious to sublime.

Eric Reeves proffered the commencement address, which was not your typical litany of “I’m not going to give you any advice, but here’s some advice.” In addition to his professorship in Renaissance literature at Smith College, Prof. Reeves is also arguably the world’s foremost expert on Darfur. “Not a single person has done as much for Darfur as Eric Reeves,” says Samantha Power, a Harvard expert on genocide. If his address so moves you, learn more about the situation in Darfur and how you can lend a hand by visiting www.sudanreeves.org.



Our senior speakers, Nikki Abramowitz and Bayley Sweitzer, had considerably lighter takes on the commencement speech experience and provided some much-needed levity and introspection to the emotionally-charged day. For a look at each of the diplomas awarded, visit www.putneyschool.org.

DARFUR IN CRISIS

Commencement Address by Eric Reeves

To the graduating senior class, and to your families, I offer my heartiest congratulations. I commend you for all your successes to date, and wish you well in your future endeavors, most of which are of course wildly unknown to you. For the world into which you take a further step this day is a very large place—much larger, more complex, and alas more troubling (I would guess) than you are aware, despite your fine educations to date.

I’ll presume nothing in particular on this occasion; I’ll try to avoid the clichés of exhortation; and I can assure you that having participated in dozens of commencements, I understand the importance of brevity, or at least respect for my designated time at this podium.

But as you now know, I stand before you today because of my own attention to one especially troubled part of this world, and it would seem

presumptuous to pretend that I have much to offer you on this occasion other than some thoughts about what I’ve seen and heard, and the questions I’ve felt forced upon me, with growing urgency.

Elie Wiesel once wrote an essay that asked in its title, “Why were there so few?” Why were there so few who cared at the time about the realities of the Holocaust—the vast, purposeful destruction of European Jews, as well as Slavs, homosexuals, Gypsies, and others? Why were the obscenities of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor, and so many other death camps not sufficient to compel greater efforts to rescue and protect Jews? Why were there so few like Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who risked, and ultimately lost his life by issuing protection papers to thousands of Jews in Hungary facing deportation to Auschwitz? As Wiesel wrote in amazement, “The victims [of the Holocaust] perished not only because of the killers, but also because of the apathy of the bystanders. What astonished us after the torment, after the tempest, was not that so many killers killed so many victims, but that so few cared about us at all.”

In the Darfur region of western Sudan, another genocide has been underway for over four years—and Wiesel’s question forces itself upon us, I believe, with irresistible and unsurpassable urgency.

Why do so few care about genocide in this place? How can it be that the deliberate, ongoing, ethnically targeted destruction of Darfur’s African tribal peoples brings no greater response from the international community? Why, in place of forceful humanitarian intervention to stop genocidal destruction, orchestrated by Khartoum’s brutal Islamist regime, has the world offered only unprotected humanitarian assistance, meaningless UN resolutions,



Life after Putney for the Class of 2007

Amherst College
Arizona State University
The Art Institute of Vancouver
Bard College (5)
Barnard College (3)
Boston University
Bowdoin College
Brandeis University
Carnegie Mellon University
College of the Atlantic
Dartmouth College
Earlham College (2)
Elmira College
Elon University
Eugene Lang College
The New School
The Evergreen State College (2)
Grinnell College
Hampshire College
McGill University
Mount Holyoke College (2)
The Naropa University
New York University-Gallatin School
Northeastern University
Otis College of Art & Design
Pitzer College (2)
Pratt Institute
Purdue University
Reed College
Rhode Island School of Design (2)
Smith College (2)
SUNY New Paltz
Swarthmore College
Syracuse University
University of the Arts
University of Maine-Farmington
University of Glasgow
University of Guelph
University of King's College
University of London
University of New England
University of St. Andrews
University of Vermont (3)
Warren Wilson College
Washington University-St. Louis
Wellesley College

and a hopelessly inadequate observer force from the African Union—a force on the verge of crumbling entirely, even as it remains even now the only international presence on the ground?

The world community cannot, I believe, be allowed to hear these questions with its present indifference and diffidence.

The number of dead is in the range of 500,000; more than 2.5 million people have been displaced from their homes, most losing everything; and UN humanitarian officials estimate that some 4.5 million people in Darfur and eastern Chad are increasingly in need of humanitarian assistance, primarily food aid. This vast man-made crisis has also spread in significant fashion to the Central African Republic, about which we hear virtually nothing.

The agricultural economy in Darfur has largely collapsed and there is no evidence that remotely adequate food production will resume within the next year or even two. This follows four years of largely failed harvests, and growing donor fatigue on the part of organizations that have sustained the massive, if still inadequate, supply and distribution of food to the region. Every month thousands of innocent women, children and men die. Last August, in a final briefing of the UN Security Council—this is nine months ago—Jan Egeland, then the UN's senior humanitarian official, warned:

“Our entire humanitarian operation in Darfur—the only lifeline for more than three million people—is presently at risk. We need immediate action on the political front to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe with massive loss of life. If the humanitarian operation were to collapse, we could see hundreds of thousands of deaths. In short, we may end up with a man-made catastrophe of an unprecedented scale in Darfur.”



In fact, humanitarian operations continue their year-and-a-half-long collapse, and in all three Darfur states. Nearly all humanitarian personnel have already withdrawn from camps at any distance from the three capital cities in Darfur. More than 1 million people are now without any access to assistance, and this number only grows as aid workers continue to withdraw amidst Khartoum's accelerating military offensives and a general breakdown in security. Egeland concluded his Security Council briefing by declaring that:

“[The humanitarian gains of the past two years in Darfur] can all be lost within weeks—not months. I cannot give a starker warning than to say that we are at a point where even hope may escape us and the lives of hundreds of thousands could be needlessly lost. The Security Council and member states around this table with influence on the parties to the conflict must act now. Hundreds of humanitarian organizations from around the world are watching what you will be doing or may refrain from doing in the coming weeks.”

Again, this is nine months ago...

Terrifyingly, Khartoum's genocidal actions have brought Darfur's larger society to the point of disintegrating, with perhaps irreparable cultural damage done to the non-Arab or African tribal populations of the region. Cataclysmic human destruction has begun, with no end in sight. And the violence has begun to bleed ever more consequentially into eastern Chad and the Central African Republic.

This is the 21st century's first great episode of genocide and the response of our country—superbly chronicled for the 20th century by Samantha Power in her Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*—our response is largely unchanged.

But it must also be said that the response of the rest of the world has been no better, and I think this forces deeper questions—questions broader in implication, questions ultimately moral in nature.

I must confess that my own pessimism about the moral evolution of the human species has grown steadily since I began publishing my analyses of genocide in Darfur almost four years ago, most prominently in the *Washington Post*, where one piece was given the apt title “Unnoticed Genocide” (this appeared in February of 2004—over three years ago).

I declared, without precedent at the time:

“There can be no reasonable skepticism about Khartoum’s use of these [Arab militia forces, the Janjaweed] to ‘destroy, in whole or in part, ethnic or racial groups’—in short, to commit genocide.”

I was using language from the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, to which all Western nations are contracting parties.

“Khartoum has so far refused to rein in its militias; has refused to enter into meaningful peace talks with the insurgency groups; and most disturbingly, refuses to grant unfettered humanitarian access. The international community has been slow to react to Darfur’s catastrophe and has yet to move with sufficient urgency and commitment. A credible peace forum must rapidly be created. Immediate plans for humanitarian intervention should begin. The alternative is to allow tens of thousands of civilians to die in the weeks and months ahead in what will be continuing genocidal destruction.”

Every word of this remains as true today, more than three years later.

Foolishly, I could not imagine that, in the wake, an international community would allow genocide to continue not for weeks or months, but for years—or that the death toll would not be measured in the tens of thousands, but in the hundreds of thousands of lives lost.

But yet again the world has failed, abjectly, in the face of genocide in Africa. Darfuris—poor,

black, largely invisible, Muslim, and living over no internationally valued resources—have been judged not worth the effort. What Jan Egeland has called a “humanitarian Band-Aid” has been applied to a gaping wound of ethnically targeted human destruction.

Advocating for the people of Darfur has been a task exhausting in many ways, but one I’m unable to escape. I write and speak constantly, to quite various audiences. Among students I have found my most passionate following, and this has been immensely gratifying. But I often sense an impatience—a frustration that more can’t be done more quickly. Some can’t bring themselves to commit fully to action without the prospect of near-term changes.

But do we have the luxury of impatience, or frustration, however understandable these responses to Darfur may be? Let me ask you to consider what I have come to call the “parable of the last child.” Let us imagine that it is three or four or five years from now, perhaps even longer, and we stand before a girl fifteen years old.

Her name we’re told—because she has only Arabic, no English—is Halima. She is presented to us as the “last child”—the last child who would have died in Darfur’s genocide if it were not for the arduous, fitful, but finally successful efforts of people like you and me.

Because this is a parable, I don’t feel any need to explain just how we know that she is indeed the last child, but she is—and we’re looking into her smiling eyes, at a face wreathed in a beautiful happiness, not etched with terror that seemed unending when she fled to a refugee camp as a frightened 10-year old, having seen her mother raped and her father and brothers killed and her village burned to the ground.

She has returned to her village, with surviving members of her extended family. The village

There are 61 seniors in the class of 2007. One student will attend a university in Japan after taking entrance exams this summer. One student decided to wait until next year to apply to college. Approximately seven students have arranged to defer matriculation for a year.



itself has been partially re-built, agricultural production has resumed and evenings are peaceful.

Staring into Halima's smiling eyes, I would ask, could any of us say that our efforts were in vain—or that we should have yielded to frustration or impatience?

You will, I suspect, find yourselves asking versions of such a question at various points in your life. I certainly hope so.

With that hope, let me conclude with another parable, this one of ancient origin, though I offer it here in a compelling modern version.

I would ask that you imagine a place, outside of history or geography, where people of all ages enjoy a magnificent happiness—a rich, sustained, at times ecstatic, happiness. I don't have time to give you all the details, but Ursula LeGuin has described this place in her haunting story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas."

What we learn in this story is that the extraordinary happiness of those in Omelas is just as extraordinarily contingent: it depends entirely upon the suffering of a single child, who is confined to a basement, denied adequate food, medical attention for her festering sores, and denied, most consequentially, all human companionship.

The people of Omelas know of the child's suffering; indeed, the terms of their happiness are such that they must know of this suffering, even as they can do nothing about it. Were the child to be rescued, this happiness would end immediately, for everyone.

It's not easy to accept, but they do, because their joyous and collective happiness depends upon the child's suffering. So, too, do the various impressive cultural achievements that are integral to happiness in Omelas.

These are the terms, and everyone both knows them—and knows as well that any attempt to change them will bring an end to the community's happiness. When adolescent children first learn of these fiercely strict terms, there is regret, but

quite remarkably, sometimes a young woman or man doesn't accept these conditions—sometimes they leave Omelas, each alone. They leave Omelas, Le Guin writes, "walking into the darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas."

My wish for you, on this occasion of commencement, is that you never cease to wonder how it is that the young people of Omelas know where they are going.

WONDERING ABOUT EVENTUALLY

Student Speaker: Nikki Abramowitz

At about 10:30 or so last night, while at the *Urinetown* cast party, I was taking a break from crazy dancing to stand at the corner of the stage on one foot while drinking Pepsi with my pinky out and, as I pretended to tip an invisible top hat to Sam Erlanger, it suddenly dawned on me: in less than 24 hours, I will be an alum of The Putney School. It was a sort of epiphany, I suppose, even though I rather dislike that word. Sure, I knew I'd be graduating soon. I'd been feeling June 3rd creeping up on me for weeks—months even—but somehow with the clock ticking away mere hours, it really struck me that there was less than a day left before I (and the rest of our class, of course) became an official high school graduate. It was a pretty strange feeling to be standing there at the edge of the stage, pretty tired from having danced almost nonstop to "Sweet Dreams" and "Barbie Girl" (both of which are a lot longer songs than they seem they should be), and realizing that my educational rank was about to change from high-school senior to college freshman.

Lately I've been thinking about change a lot, actually. I'm constantly wondering about "eventually." Before I started dancing I had signed my name on the theater's bathroom ceiling as a lasting record of my work as a techie on the play and, almost from the moment I dragged the nearest stool into the bathroom so I could actually get stuff written without standing on the toilet, I wondered how much whatever witty



in-joke I scrawled out would mean to future years—just as the scribbles of previous students mean pretty much nothing to me. In Sing, for instance, some of the songs we sing have a certain word or phrase we shout out. Ten years from now, are students still going to yell “SHANK PAINTER” during “Spanish Ladies”? And if they do, would they even know what that meant to us? I know this year is probably the last class to say “Oh Mary” in between verses of “Oh Mary Don’t You Weep” and even though I find it pretty annoying, I’d still miss it if I came back to Sing and it wasn’t there. It’s become a part of the song to me now—a part of my Putney experience. It’s strange to think how this place will continue to change after we’ve left and how much it’s changed while we’ve been here. Will future students ever be able to look at our yearbook and understand the significance of Freaky Juice Tuesday?

But we’ve changed, too, I think. That’s why some of our application essays are so completely baffling to us now. Or at least I know I’ve changed a lot—for the better, I hope. Putney, weird as it may be, was a pretty good experience, which I hope is something at least the majority of us can agree on. There are parts I’ve hated, yeah, and I can’t say I’ll miss things like the smell of barn or the woefully inadequate plumbing system (or at least in the toilets in Keep Dorm—Yeech). But I’ll miss the weird little things, like those funny heat vents underneath the seats at the Jeffrey Campbell, or my favorite library book about Johann Sebastian Bach because it’s just the right size for my computer, or even the white-out writing a previous roommate of mine wrote in our room, “I made a god out of blood, not superiority,” that has since been re-written to say, “I made a goat out of bloopers, not super-soup.” It’s the weird little things like that I’ll remember and take to heart. And even though most of us probably won’t see each other again—for a long time, at least—I think I’m ready to go, get out of here and meet new roommates who’ll write different, stranger things . . . or maybe not. Because Putney’s a pretty unique place that caters to pretty unique people and maybe it’ll be a long time before I can say I’ve felt the same about another place or another group of people and, even though I’m ready to hightail it out of here and never ever come back to Vermont again (no offense everyone who lives here, but I’m more of a city person), I’ll miss you all, or at least most of you, and I hope you guys had as great of a time here as I did.

KNOWLEDGE AND THE END OF THE WORLD

Student Speaker: Bayley Sweitzer

I now know that I don’t know as much as I thought I knew a few weeks ago. I definitely don’t know enough about things to make generalizations about human nature, or the universe, as I often find myself doing. I also definitely don’t know enough to do this task any justice, but I do know that I can say whatever I want in this speech. However, I don’t know enough to fully capitalize on and/or exploit this opportunity. I don’t think I know enough to return to the world after four years on this hill, and live life effectively, but then again, I don’t really know whether effectively means “make lots of money or have lots of sex.” I can only speculate. I do know, because we get newspapers and *Soldier of Fortune* here, that the comfortable days are numbered, and soon there will be riots at the gas stations, or something like that.

Up until recently, I didn’t know, and couldn’t even imagine, why anyone would choose this terribly windy and infertile piece of rocky land to make a school, let alone a farm. I now know that the reason for choosing this wide-open hill on which to create a self-reliant community, is primarily because of the clear kill zone surrounding the location for when the zombies come. I estimate that our entire senior class could hold their own on this hill for four or five months against a full scale epidemic of the undead. Granted this number depends upon the time of year, ammunition surplus, and the amount of scrap metal in the Art Building that could be forged into close combat weapons when the zombies get through the perimeter defenses. We could also use the tractors to demolish useless buildings like the Currier Center and move the rubble to form roadblocks, forcing the attackers straight up the steep, open fields. Additionally, the





school's high elevation would keep it above water when the Connecticut River floods, which Al Gore assures us will happen soon. If the river really floods, then our elevation here will only buy us, I estimate, a few days. In that case we'll have to take advantage of the school's close proximity to Putney Mountain and check out at the dean's office and go play hacky-sack there until the water recedes, which will definitely happen, because no water can get higher than Putney Mountain.

I know that after we have left this place and return to the world, life on Planet Earth is going to change, but I'm not worried because, based on our performance at the paintball game, I'm confident in our class's ability as an effective fighting unit.

I know a few more things. I know, for example, that a Wendy's 99-cent Junior Bacon Cheeseburger is a much better deal than a 99-cent Arizona Iced Tea, and is also a heartwarming or terrifying concept, depending on how you look at it. For those unfortunate souls out there who have never experienced one of these wonder burgers, I'll enlighten you: bottom bun, burger, cheese, bacon, tomato, lettuce, mayonnaise, top bun—all for 99 cents. I also know that *Soldier of Fortune*,



a magazine which runs articles such as: "Marine Snipers' Revenge: A Cold Dish Served with Hot Lead," is the best periodical in circulation but, if taken seriously, can be very dangerous. Nancy subscribed the Putney School library to this fine magazine after overwhelming popular requests my sophomore year. I know that the code to all the copy machines on campus we aren't supposed to use is just the four-digit phone extension of the given building. I know that New Hampshire is a terrible place, and I only venture across the river on occasion to go to Taco Bell or The Alstead Gun Shop. I know that we're all hypocrites and that I contradict myself constantly, and that's because I don't know very much and, as I learn more, I alter my conclusions. After all, that's science. I know that a zombie apocalypse probably won't happen, but I hope that an apocalypse of another sort will.

I know that I won't tell you what to do, not because I don't have advice, but because, in the grand scheme of things, nothing that we do matters. I know that the light from the Sun takes eight minutes to reach us and that the light from some stars in the sky takes over 13 billion years to get here, and those stars haven't burned out yet. I know that that means everything is really old and really big and that everything will continue to happen, no matter what, and at the rate we're going, humanity probably won't be around for Y3K. So don't worry.

Over time humans have designed life to be as easy as possible, and because of that, we have grown used to there always being an easier option—Hot Pockets and Valium, for example. Our minds are not used to comprehending infinity or the expansion of the universe because there are people whose job it is to do that for us. So when Glenn tell us that the universe has no edge, but does not go on forever, we feel nauseous and walk out of class. And when we wake up early in the morning and work in a barn for two hours, we become tired and complain. We live lives which do not require us to fully utilize ourselves, and that's fine. It's fine as long as we are aware that there will come a time very soon, when laziness

could be fatal. In the near future, our way of life will change drastically, and we will be forced to fully utilize ourselves. I can't wait.

If I have a point, it's that the more we know or the more we know we don't know, the better we realize that things aren't actually as important as they seemed in the moment. Sing is not a big deal. Project Week is not a big deal. This event is not a big deal. This school, as much as we would like to think otherwise, is not a big deal. I say this because looking back on things puts them in a much broader, more relevant context. The more you live the present retrospectively, the funnier things become, the easier it becomes to live a futile life, and the more annoyed people become with you because you start saying stuff like, "In retrospect, jumping off that was wicked hilarious," or, "This event is not a big deal."

The Putney School is not the world. We've spent some time in the world, but most of us were young, and most of us knew less than we do now, so I can only speculate what it's really like out there. I speculate it'll be sweet, but harder to get things, because most things cost money or require you to do something. We have been on vacation from the world, some of us for four years. We'll be going back soon, and will actually have to deal with the stuff Eisenhower and Malthus and Chomsky warned us about and the stuff we've been hypothesizing and theorizing about during our vacation.

As we leave this school, and return to the world, try to remember that this hill is a really good place to defend from when this shit hits the fan, and remember that the shit will hit the fan.

Thank you.

Senior Exhibitions

The following seniors were granted senior exhibitions, a major project that takes from the end of March break to spring Project Week to complete. These seniors drop two exhibition-related classes to accommodate these time-intensive independent projects. Granting Senior Exhibitions is as close as we ever come to conferring honors on our graduates.

SAMIA ABBASS *The Green Project: Sustainability at The Putney School*

NIKKI ABRAMOWITZ *The Cartoon History of 20th C. Art*

ALYSSA BILLINGSLEY *Icons in Stone*

ROBIN CROFUT-BRITTINGHAM *Food for Thought*

DAVID CROOK & NATE SHAPIRO *Klezmer Klub*

EMELYN DALY *Ceramics and the Golden Mean*

BRYANT DOSSMAN *The Putney School Amphibian Monitoring Project*

NICO FALLON *Dance and Monologues*

HALLIE HERZ *Form in Poetry*

JEANZ HOLT *Drum/Body Art/Short Story*

HANAE JONAS *The Poetry of Pictures*

CONNOR KILLIGREW *Agricultural Engineering*

DYLAN LATTIMORE *Astrophotography & Constellation Guidebook*

MOLLY LEHMANN *Greetings*

SAMAR LICHTENSTEIN *The Golden Ratio Visualized Through Weaving*

SIEDRA LOEFFLER *Jewelry: The Social and Environmental Impact*

CHRISTIE LONG *Natural Jewelry*

JAWAD MASTAKI *Translating Calvin*

KATHY MEYER *Malaria and the Masses*

LUKA NEGOITA *Coyote Bone Construction*

MAARIT OSTROW *The Roots of Country Blues*

GEMMA PENTLAND *The Art of Anatomy*

JULIA RICHARDSON *Niche Installation*

ALI ROWELL *Female Fashion and Fiction in the 18th Century*

GRYPHON ROWER-UPJOHN *Digital Audio Production & Songwriting*

BIT SMITH *Theatrical Monologues & Dialect*

JAMES SOUTHCOTT *Media Analysis/Information Landscape*

MIEKE SPARROW-PEPIN & CLARA ROWE *Physics of Baseball*

RACHEL WATERHOUSE *The Power of Play: Early Childhood Development*

ELISABETH YAZDZIK *A Culinary History of the Middle Ages*

