

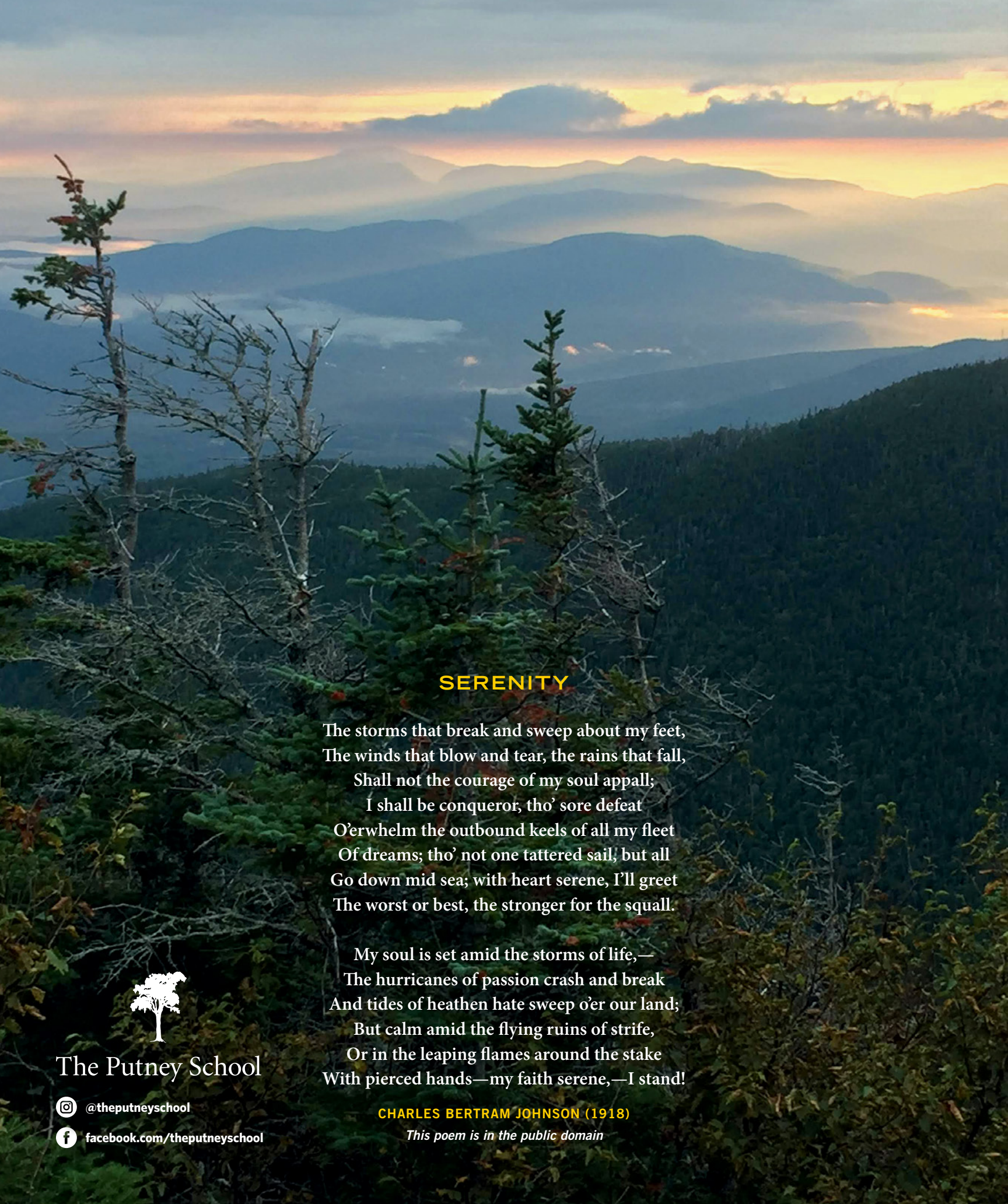
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# PUTNEY POST

FALL 2021





SERENITY

The storms that break and sweep about my feet,  
The winds that blow and tear, the rains that fall,  
Shall not the courage of my soul appall;  
I shall be conqueror, tho' sore defeat  
O'erwhelm the outbound keels of all my fleet  
Of dreams; tho' not one tattered sail, but all  
Go down mid sea; with heart serene, I'll greet  
The worst or best, the stronger for the squall.

My soul is set amid the storms of life,—  
The hurricanes of passion crash and break  
And tides of heathen hate sweep o'er our land;  
But calm amid the flying ruins of strife,  
Or in the leaping flames around the stake  
With pierced hands—my faith serene,—I stand!

CHARLES BERTRAM JOHNSON (1918)

*This poem is in the public domain*



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Detail photograph of a 1965 Volvo restored  
by Merou Rosner '21 over the course of  
her four years at Putney. See p. 15.

TOC photo:

Woven tapestry by Viva Vadim '21 that  
earned Viva two national awards. See p. 32.



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## DEAR READER,

At Putney, we teach failure. We teach *for* failure. We teach about failing often, and well. There is, as you will learn reading this issue's stories, more to learn there than there is in straightforward success.

This issue's theme—Drive—captures the energy that sees people through challenging situations, “failures,” and creative dilemmas. They are the two sides of the same coin. What happens when the coin, with failure on one side and drive on the other, flies through the air, throwing off sparks like a firework pinwheel? It turns end-over-end with frustration, re-starting, inertia, self-doubt, and more. The juicy words that live on the flipside of the failure coin—creativity, problem-solving, persistence, the emergence of a hard-won completion, and *drive*—illuminate failure's importance. That's where the magic lives. That's where the learning happens.

There is a unique beauty in a project seen to completion. In this issue, we'll bear witness to a few, including getting a 56 year old car to run, bringing highly conceptual ceramic art from idea to finished piece, and bringing a movie to the big screen. We also hear the story of an alumna whose striving is ongoing, even when she's arguably at the top of her game.

Current Head of School Emily Jones (who is herself completing her Putney project—this is her fifteenth and final year as head of school) and Christopher Barnes '85 (head of school at Midland School) sat down last summer to talk about their experiences with running an independent school as Putney began honing in on finalists for its new head of school. Now, a few months later, we've shared the exciting news that Danny O'Brien, currently head of High Mountain Institute in Leadville, CO—started by Christopher Barnes and his wife, Molly, in 1995—will be taking the wheel upon Emily's retirement.

This issue will land in your hands as Putney's fall project week launches. In those ten days, students may attempt to fix their first car, make their first movie, or create their first ceramic vase. And while the vase might crack, the car might not start, and the movie might be terrible, we know that every emerging master has to start somewhere. As we continue to teach and learn, we will savor those imperfect outcomes, and encourage the continuing growth of our students and our community.

Best wishes,

**ALISON FRYE**  
*Editor*

**DARRY MADDEN**  
*Publisher*

# Looking

BOARD OF TRUSTEES CHAIR  
**JOSHUA LAUGHLIN '82**, IN A  
LETTER TO THE PUTNEY  
SCHOOL COMMUNITY:

“He will lead Putney’s efforts to grow into an even more robust vision for progressive education and a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just community. His many conversations with our students, teachers, parents, trustees, and friends revealed the humility, self-awareness, and determination essential to the work ahead.”

FEEDBACK FROM  
STUDENTS:

“He would be good at balancing the ideological responsibilities and the pragmatic ones. He would also help with anti-racism and sustainability at Putney.”

ADMINISTRATION:

“I heard thoughtfulness, compassion, a love of the mission and place.”

PARENTS, TRUSTEES, AND ALUMNI:

“I feel like I would hit the ground running becoming a better teacher and member of the community if Danny were head of school.”

In July, Putney will welcome Danny O’Brien as its tenth head of school. O’Brien currently serves as the head of school at the High Mountain Institute (HMI) in Leadville, Colorado. At HMI, O’Brien has worked to develop innovative educational programs and increase the diversity of students, faculty and staff. He will join the community on July 1, 2022 with his wife, Ellie, and their children, Vivie and Henry. Stay tuned—the Post plans to dive in and learn all about Danny and his hopes, dreams, and plans for Putney in future issues.

“Putney is clearly in a position of strength and can take tremendous pride in all that it has accomplished. At the same time, if we are to live Putney’s fundamental beliefs, there will always be work to do. I heard loudly and clearly, for example, the need to continue to make progress in living out Putney’s commitment to anti-racism and to ensuring all people who enter campus see this school as a home.”

Read more [www.putneyschool.org/putney-to-welcome-new-head-of-school](http://www.putneyschool.org/putney-to-welcome-new-head-of-school)

# aHead



## Q&A with Danny O’Brien, Putney’s Next Head of School

**What books that you’ve read in the last year have impacted you deeply?** I found *The Smash Up* by Ali Benjamin both entertaining and very thoughtful in representing the complexities of the current cultural moment. *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson placed me in the shoes of Black Americans struggling with systemic and individual racism to achieve the fullness of their dreams during and after the Great Migration. I don’t know how it could not inspire people to fight for change.

**How do you decompress?** I love to take off on a run through the woods. Camping with my family is (mostly) a joy. I find myself cooking more-complicated-than-is-really necessary meals on most weekends. I keep my phone out of my bedroom, and have learned not to check email until we have had breakfast and the kids are on their way to school in the morning!

**What are you most proud of from HMI?** 1) A couple of years ago, I received an email from an alum who had attended several years prior. She was a first generation Latina who shared the ways in which she thrived at HMI and the ways in which we had fallen short of meeting her needs. As I read her email, I realized we had already addressed the specific facets of our program that she articulated as needing improvement. This does not mean HMI is perfect; I know this student and others from historically marginalized identities have had other experiences with us that were unacceptably harmful. It was nonetheless affirming to reply to this student sharing how we have made changes to address many different issues rather than simply talking about the need to do so. And 2) We expanded financial aid packages to include not only wilderness gear and airline tickets for students, but also transportation for parents/guardians/caregivers to attend our Family Weekend. It was important for us that every student see a loved one in the crowd on this important day.

**What surprised you about Putney when you visited?** The number of students who cared enough about the school to show up for my optional, after school Q&A session during my candidate visit shocked and impressed me. I don’t know if you’d see this anywhere else.

**What is something that people wouldn’t know about you by looking at you?** I am the product of incredibly diverse, under-resourced public schools in Providence, Rhode Island. I am grateful for all of my experiences in these environments; they shape my aspirations for education today.



# FINDING

**A** After an accident left  
Alicia Brelsford Dana '87  
paralyzed from the waist down,  
she turned to hand cycling.

# WAY

**Left:** One of the first rides after years of time off, while daughter Willa was still little (Three Notch Century, White Mountains) **Right:** Bike race in Keene, NH, between Alicia's junior and senior year at Putney

STORY BY  
 CATE MARIAN

Strapped into her handcycle on a quiet country road, water splashed from Alicia Dana's tires as the rain soaked through her clothing. Drenched and determined, she got her workout in.



She had asked her sister, Carlotta Brelsford Cuerdon '80, to pull over during their drive from Putney to Madison, WI, for the 2018 U.S. Para-Cycling National Championships. Cuerdon knew Dana planned to stop along the way to train for the race, but when it started to pour she assumed they would just keep driving.

Not the case. “It was terrible,” Cuerdon said. “I looked at her out there—cars going by and spraying her with water—and thought, ‘This is it. This dedication to training, even under the most adverse conditions; this is what separates the champions from the rest of us.’”

Indeed, Dana is a three-time Paralympian in women's handcycling. During her senior year at The Putney School she had an accident that paralyzed her from the waist down. For her, pushing through tough situations has been a way of life. Rain is the least of her challenges.

Last Summer, Dana won bronze medals in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games [Note: The 2020 games took place in the Summer of 2021]. She had been on track to win a gold but that got derailed when the chain on her handcycle slipped off mid-race. As her team fumbled to fix it, she watched in horror as seconds turned into minutes. By the time it was re-positioned, she couldn't make up for the lost time.

Despite the defeat, at age 52 she's at the top of her game in a sport she helped shape—and her coaches say she can still get faster. She's come a long way from the 17-year-old girl grappling with the fact that she would never walk again.

“You learn to adapt,” Dana said. “Human beings are incredibly adaptable. You don't know it until you have to, but you find a way.”

## FINDING HER FREEDOM

Everything changed on a sunny day in September. While hanging out with some friends at the school, Dana climbed about 40 feet up a tree in Tripping Field. She tried to move onto one of the smaller limbs but it wasn't strong enough to hold her weight and she fell, landing flat on her back.

“I was instantly paralyzed,” Dana said. Before the injury, she was a nationally ranked nordic skier and cyclist. “Being an athlete was a huge part of my identity,” Dana said. “It was where I got my confidence from and my self image.”



Now, she was in a wheelchair and re-learning basic mobility skills. “I was so impatient to get out of rehab—I got out in record time,” Dana said. “I remember the physical therapist trying to teach me to do this, do that, and I had no patience—just send me home and I'll figure it out.”

She was so eager to get back to normal, and she graduated as planned with the class of '87, but nothing was the same. “I underwent this huge transformation, and came back to school and felt so distant from my friends,” she said. “Like a world had opened up that I couldn't let them into, and I couldn't climb back into their world. It was really disorienting and I really struggled.”

After graduating from Putney she moved to Miami and began wheelchair racing, particularly in marathons. She later went to California to attend UC Santa Barbara, and eventually returned to Vermont to finish up her degree at Marlboro College. It was during that time, in the mid-'90s, that she got her first handcycle. They were just starting to become available, but still few and far between.

“That was really great,” Dana said. “I could ride my old bike routes, and I felt a new sense of freedom and strength, exercising that athletic part of myself.”



Left: The day of Alicia's release from rehab, November 1986, with her father Center: On handcycle in Tokyo Inset right: Wearing bronze medal at the Tokyo Paralympic Games

In 2000 she and a group of other cyclists rode across the country for ten weeks to raise funds for disability-related causes. The next year she qualified for the United States Paralympics Cycling National Team—but it wasn't quite her time. That path was put on pause when she decided to take a break from the sport to raise her daughter, Willa '22—as a single mother, without the use of her legs. She had gotten married, then divorced soon after.

“I was very tired,” Dana said with a laugh. “But you figure out pretty quick as a mom that you adore this little being. Like becoming disabled, you find a way. One day at a time, and the days accumulate and things change.”

She didn't return to handcycling until eight years later, when a friend encouraged her to participate in the Burlington City Marathon and she won first place in her division.

“It just kind of gave me the bug again,” she said. Handcycling was also becoming more

prevalent, in part due to a rise in wounded war veterans who had lost limbs.

“I thought, hey, this sport really is something now,” Dana said. “My competitive spirit got reignited.”

## THE POWER OF PERSEVERANCE

In less than a year she had made it back onto the U.S. National Team, securing the very last spot for the 2012 Summer Paralympics in London, then diligently working to the 2016 Games in Rio—where she earned a silver medal—and continuing to the most recent Tokyo Games.

“Once I put my mind to it, and started training regularly and updated my equipment, I really did get back to the top of the field pretty quickly,” Dana said.

Her love for the sport goes beyond the motivation of racing. The camaraderie she

has built with her teammates, and the support she has found in the para-cycling community, have been incredibly important for her mental health and wellbeing.

“I feel very much like I belong to this certain culture,” she said. “It develops close bonds. I feel like I have some really close friends now.”

Not to mention her family. When she's not loading her equipment into a van or onto a plane for far-off training trips and races, she's speeding along the tree-lined roads in Putney, making water stops at her mom's house or the occasional call to Carlotta for an emergency pick-up if things go awry.

“I feel like everybody in the community knows who she is,” Cuerdon said. “The whole community is so proud of her and just wants to help. It's really heartwarming. It definitely takes a village. Even if she may not be aware of it, there are so many people

who will tell me how impressed they are and how amazing she is.”

Cuerdon also works as the assistant director of development at The Putney School.

“In my role I talk to alumni all the time,” she said. “I get to hear from the network of fans who are cheering her on from afar.”

Dana's relationship with her hometown is a little more complicated.

“In some ways I feel like I stick out and I'm different,” she said. “I navigate my way through life in a way that most people don't understand, and I can feel like a loner.”

But it's also where she was born and raised. It's home.

“I've lived in other places, but I always come back to Putney,” she said. “Being disabled is a really integral part of who I am. And this community is a really integral part of who I am. They co-exist.”

In addition, Dana's daughter, Willa, is a student at the Putney School, and her ambition has certainly rubbed off.

“My mom always tells me to pursue my passions, however unrealistic or impossible they seem to be,” Willa said. “In doing that I've had some pretty incredible experiences, so I appreciate her endlessly for that. She also takes life as it comes, one day at a time, and that taught me to be more flexible and easygoing. It's pretty incredible how hard she works, and watching her train motivates me to pursue my own interests with renewed passion and drive.”

Dana makes it back to The Putney School to watch her daughter in numerous plays and, of course, for Harvest Festival.

“I love being up there on campus,” she said. “It's such a beautiful spot.”

Although she can't change what took place there years ago, her experience has instilled new perspectives and fresh wisdom that she would give to her young self, or anyone else going through a similar situation.

“Your life can still be great,” Dana said. “It's going to look different. But the sky's the limit. You can create what you want, you can be who you want. Don't be unrealistic but don't put unnecessary limits on yourself. You can find a way.” ■



# NEW MOVE- MENT

Gentaro Yokoyama '96  
knew he wanted to be a  
ceramicist after Putney.  
But he also knew he  
wanted to push what  
that meant.

Gentaro Yokoyama '96  
in his Tokyo studio eats  
pasta from a ceramic  
pillow he designed that  
doubles as a bowl.

ART & DESCRIPTIONS BY GENTARO YOKOYAMA '96



## 1 I ALWAYS PUT MOVEMENT INTO MY WORK.

Humans are naturally interested in movement—looking at a fire or at the waves breaking.

In many cases, Japanese ceramics try to create movement by making something look like it is in the process of cracking, so it looks like it might crack more. Many old ceramics have that, but I'm not very interested in copying something else that has already been done, so I created this kind of new movement. I put feet on my work, so it seems like it might start walking around. That brings more strength. Instead of it being just a thing it becomes more like a creature. I feel like it has more soul by putting on feet.

This is a cup and a sculpture. I like to have more than one purpose in one work. And many times it's been sculpture and been something functional. Many times I put a little hole where you can put a flower into it, which becomes functional. I've been working really between craft and art, and I'm always in the middle.



**THERE IS A TEAPOT CULTURE** in American ceramics that we don't have in Japan. And it really got me interested in ceramics.

This teapot was inspired one day when I was making flower vases out of small pipes. It gave me the idea to make a teapot in this way.

This teapot is made from one continuous length of clay pipe. I really like this kind of fluidity.

I look for inspiration in everything. Every day I'm thinking about what to make, what's fun to create, how can I make people happy. Whatever I'm thinking becomes my creation.



[ Editor's Note: Yes, this is a teapot. ]

## 3

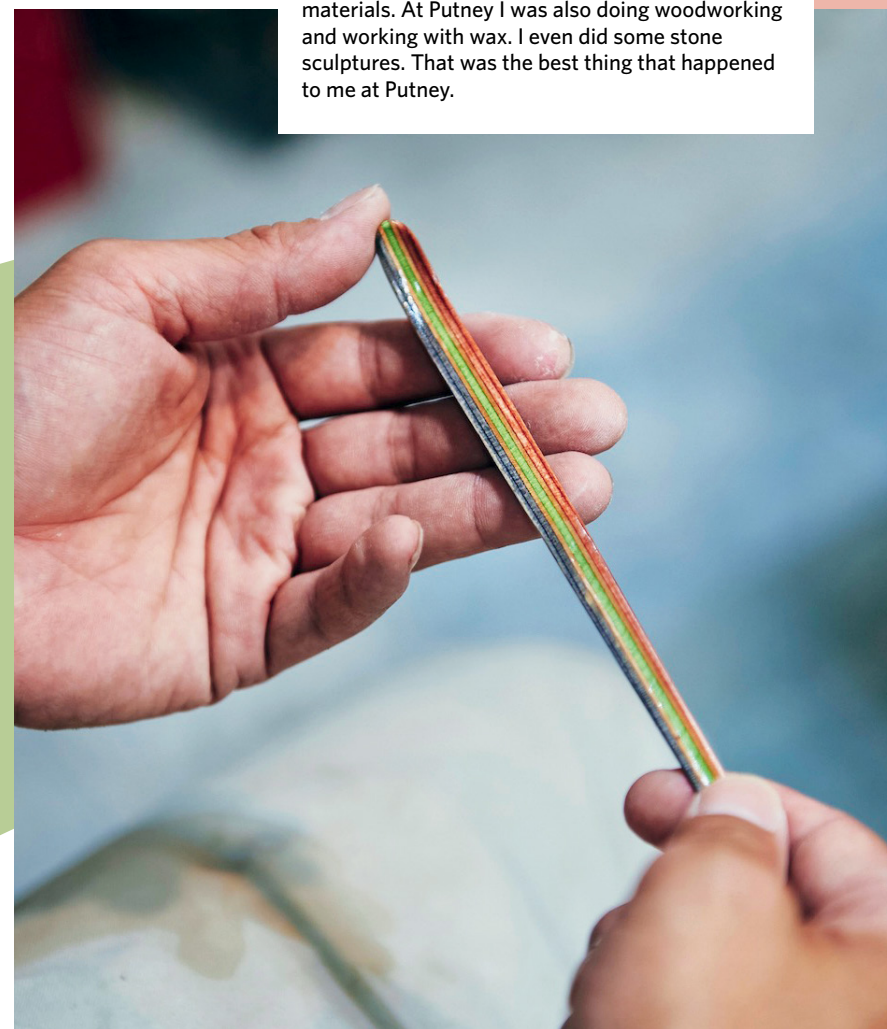
**THIS IS A TOOL TO SCOOP** the tea powder for a tea ceremony. I made it out of a skateboard.

I actually bought my first skateboard when I was at Putney. I learned many of my first tricks at Putney too. I thought it would be interesting to put these two elements together—the tea ceremony and skateboarding.

This isn't ceramics, but a different medium. I am part of a group called The Tea Room, which produces art tea ceremonies.

To be creative, first you have to like it. You have to have some kind of passion for it, and you have to have some kind of dream. My dream is to create something new every day.

Putney introduced me to ceramics. But Putney also showed me that I can work in different materials. At Putney I was also doing woodworking and working with wax. I even did some stone sculptures. That was the best thing that happened to me at Putney.



## 4 TWELVE YEARS AGO MY FIRST DAUGHTER WAS BORN.

However, while she was in her mother's womb, there was a little problem. The doctor didn't know exactly what the problem was, but the water in the womb was more than it should be, so doctors thought there might be some problem with the baby. She was about eight months pregnant. In those final months, every day I was thinking of many things. And I was really scared—was she going to be OK, was she going to be alive? Is she going to be healthy? I didn't know what to do about it, and I was scared. After she was born, the next day she had surgery on her intestinal tract. She was fine.

After that, I started thinking about that experience, and I felt like that was very similar to looking at a ghost. It's kind of covered by a veil, the baby is covered with mother's skin, and it's very mysterious. You don't know what's inside and what it's going to look like, and it's very scary. I thought an unborn baby was like a ghost. I've been making them ever since, using different shapes and materials. This one is made of cloth that is soaked in liquid clay before firing. The cloth burns off in the kiln.

My job is to push what ceramics is. I don't want to be making what someone has already made. To me, that's not interesting.



**Merou Rosner '21**  
**wanted to fix up a**  
**1965 Volvo during her**  
**first project week as**  
**a commuter vehicle.**  
**After four years of**  
**stops and starts, it**  
**made the commute.**

STORY BY  
DARRY MADDEN  
PORTRAITS BY  
LAURA STEWART

The silver and rusted '65 Volvo in unknown condition arrived one early winter's night, and was dropped beside the carpentry shop to await its fate.

In the morning, ninth-grader Broden Walsh '21 got behind the wheel while classmate Merou Rosner '21 and their advisor Glenn Littledale '76 pushed it into the shed under the gas kiln where Rosner and Walsh would take their first ever whack at fixing up a car. Their goal was to have it running soon enough for the two day students to use it to commute from Marlboro to Putney.

Merou Rosner and her project car at her home in Marlboro, Vermont, in 2019

By this point in their first-ever project weeks, Rosner and Walsh had spent one week of the two finding the car, leaving one week to get it running.

They had noticed while unloading the car that the brakes didn't seem to be working. So they began, naturally, with the emergency brake.

For his part, Littledale told them to research how brakes work and have at it.

"The hardest part was some really rusted parts. Trying to get the brake drum off was a difficult task," said Rosner. "Glenn would come help and show us a trick, like jumping on the wrench. But otherwise it was a really easy fix."

But that was the only fix they accomplished that project week. The Volvo was towed back to Rosner's house in Marlboro one December afternoon, where it was tucked into the barn as the winter sun went down.

It was too cold to work on it that winter, said Rosner, too dark. And besides, they needed too much from Littledale to do much on their own.

"But then spring came and we decided to continue. We didn't feel like we'd done enough—we hadn't fixed the car," said Rosner. "At that point, we still thought it would not take too, too long. It wouldn't take our entire high school experience."

Ultimately, it did take her entire high school experience. Rosner watched as her friend and co-mechanic Walsh moved on to other art forms and ideas and experienced a range of project weeks. She watched as nearly every other student at Putney did the same. She would return, over and over, to the car. She worked slowly and deliberately. She worked alone in the garage under Keep dorm, where, if she closed the door, she could capture some of the heat from the faculty apartment. She soldered, welded, wired, bent steel, disassembled and reassembled.

Before heading off to other horizons, Walsh stayed on for a second project week. They wanted to skip all the other likely issues with the car and go straight for the jugular—ignition. They wanted it to start.



From left to right: Merou Rosner and her dad, Raphael, when she started ninth grade at Putney. Walsh and Rosner working. Rosner in Marlboro over a holiday break.



"We had an emergency brake. That's enough, we don't need full brakes. Let's just get it started," remembered Rosner.

To begin, they drained all the fluids and performed an oil change (The oil was "disgusting;" the gas was so full of rust, it was red, and viscous.)

"We knew that it needed a lot of work, but we decided we were going to ignore that for the moment. And so we tried to start the car and nothing happened when we turned the key."

They tried to hotwire it. They observed that the starter motor and solenoid were not

working properly. They still didn't know if the engine was working, but they knew they couldn't even test without a functioning starter.

They took it off the car and into the classroom. There, with Littledale's help, they disassembled the starter, cleaned it out, soldered and braided a new connection.

"We got it back on the car and hotwired it again to see if it would turn over, and it sounded promising. You could hear stuff working," said Rosner. "And then it caught on fire."

Glenn Littledale has served as the advisor on this and many other projects that involved car repair, bike building, or, really, anything mechanical that needed creating or fixing.

"I'm a congenital gear head. I feel like my highest best use is as someone nursing old machinery and that I'm a fake teacher and really more of a machine nurse," he said.

He has seen many longer term projects through, including individuals with one project, like an orrery (a mechanical model



of the solar system), and projects that are passed from student to student, like the telescope that has been the main telescope of the astronomy project for over a decade.

"You can string time together either as the same individual or you can string time together with the project being the unifying idea. The idea of continuity can take a couple of different shapes," he said.

He thinks of these longer term projects as similar to Putney still teaching traditional chemical darkroom photography—it is explicitly not about instant gratification. The process itself is involved, requiring dedication and investment.

Persistence is, of course, also a key ingredient.

"Merou worked with persistence, she worked with intelligence, she worked with attention to detail. There are very few people who you can hand a wiring diagram to and say, 'Make sure you have continuity everywhere there appears to be continuity in this system.' She was not only able to do that, she was able to identify where her car departed from the wiring diagram in front of her. You're talking about an unusually intelligent person with phenomenal analytical skills. I might offer direct instruction about a thing and then she was routinely able to generalize the result. So she was always looking to leverage what she knew. She retained what she knew. So that made her an especially powerful fledgling mechanic."

**W**hen we left our mechanics, they had made a connection between the starter motor and the solenoid. But it didn't make a strong enough connection, and that was the part that caught aflame. Solo now (Walsh had gone abroad), Rosner started tracking the ignition system wiring so that she didn't have to hotwire it for every attempt at a start. And when that was working, she took apart the carburetor, cleaned it, and (miraculously) it was functioning properly. She adjusted the valve timing, which she describes at "super high stakes."

"Glenn made it a huge deal, which was good because I had to be really careful that no gunk was getting into the engine—I was in the engine at that point."

There was still no evidence that the engine would function even if all the moments leading up to it turning over were. But all the steps ahead of it were, now, ready to go. And so, with an external fuel system perched on the roof, with Littledale and Pete Guenther '80 under the hood spraying starter fluid and poised to extinguish any fires, Rosner turned the key.

"And it worked, the car started. The engine ran, the engine worked. It sounded pretty amazing, it sounded like a nicely working engine. It wasn't making some sort of gross sound, it was just purring. I was so happy. In my head, I was like, 'Wow, we're so close to being done. This is so cool.'"

"So close" is relative. Over the course of the next two years, she stayed with it. She repaired the entire brake system and the fuel system. By the spring of her senior year, she was ready to try and drive it. (It gave her another run for her money by not starting when she tried, but eventually she won out).

With fire extinguisher in hand, she and Littledale backed it out of the garage under Keep. The fifty-six-year-old car drove up the hill past Noyes, past the bare-branched apple trees, up the truck road, turned around at the barn, down to Wender Arts, and back to Keep. Perfectly.

 **WATCH THE MAIDEN VOYAGE**  
Visit [putneyschool.org/volvoo](http://putneyschool.org/volvoo)

**O**n the day of her graduation, Rosner sat behind the wheel of the Volvo and waited with the tractor and hay wagon to process down to the ceremony. Since it had not been ready to commute before graduation, the procession became the goal. She had eight other students crammed in it—maybe more ("I wasn't sure if that was too heavy for the brakes that I'd done," she said). When they got to the stand of locust trees and the waiting crowd of family and friends on the East Lawn, they streamed out one after the other—a clown car. Rosner left it there, on the truck road, and ran off hand in hand with a classmate to join the group.

What had she taken away from this experience? Had she, as some teachers had suggested, lost out on the diverse and eclectic opportunities afforded her from a Putney education?

Littledale believes there was an "opportunity cost" to sticking with one project, but that it was worth it. "It's the same for kids in the theater who are year in year out participating in theater. Or kids who are involved in the arts and just dance all the time. Are you going to tell them not to dance? No, you're not going to tell them not dance. They are dancers and they love to dance."

He gave her exhibition about the project the working title "How I Wasted Four Years at Putney" as a nod to that. "That's true," he said. "But is it true enough not to do it? Under the umbrella of working on this car there was an awful lot of development."

**"And if I had given up, or if I had stopped, or if I had decided it wasn't giving me enough instant gratification in the beginning, I wouldn't have learned about that and I wouldn't have developed a mindset that it doesn't always have to be solely product-oriented. The project itself can be the reward."**



"It taught me so much about commitment and about the way that I should be viewing success and feeling satisfaction with the progress that I've made. In the beginning, I really thought it was going to be a quick project, I didn't realize how much it took to fix up a car. And it initially felt disappointing to have the first couple project weeks not really result in something



that felt like a huge change. But now after so much time, I've learned that none of it was really about having a drivable car. That was always the general goal but there was so much value hidden in every single step," said Rosner, who is now a first year student at Carnegie-Mellon studying physics.

"And if I had given up, or if I had stopped, or if I had decided it wasn't giving me enough instant gratification in the beginning, I wouldn't have learned about that and I wouldn't have developed a mindset that it doesn't always have to be solely product-oriented. The project itself can be the reward."

**A**fter graduation, the car was parked near the field house, overlooking the alpaca field and the solar panels, an anachronism between a half dozen Subaru Outbacks.

Towards the end of July, Rosner's father arrived to help get it back to their property in Marlboro. He had helped numerous times before, always with a truck and trailer, but this time—this last time—they decided to drive it home.

The plan had been to inspect it, register it, have it fully legal. Time ran out and it didn't happen. So they took the back roads to avoid being stopped. He drove the Volvo and she followed behind in the family vehicle. About two miles from their house, two Vermont State Troopers came around the bend in the other lane. Rosner saw them slow down, pause, look at the Volvo with curiosity and suspicion. Her father saw this too.

Clockwise from left: Rosner and Littledale; Project week 2018; Littledale helps out under the hood; Friends jammed in before processing down to graduation.

So he floored it. "My dad makes it go as fast as he possibly can get it to go, pushing as hard as it will go those last two miles to my house. It was crazy. It felt like we were in a car chase, but we made it."

Littledale got a kick out of this story. "I hope Merou remembered to torque the tie rods and torque the axle nuts," he said. In the end, it did make the commute, if only once. ■

There's No Success Like **Failure**, According to  
Oscar-Winning Filmmaker Darius Marder '92

# The **F**-word

Anyone familiar with filmmaker Darius Marder's 2020 Oscar-winning feature film *Sound of Metal* or his 2008 documentary *Loot* already knows he's an artist unafraid to explore one of America's most feared and loathed conditions—failure.

This doesn't mean you'll find the F-word (failure) dropping from Marder's lips. That's too on-the-nose for this much lauded writer/director. Rather, this Putney School graduate chooses to embrace error, court catastrophe, and dance with possible defeat.



**MARDER WAS RAISED IN CONWAY, MASSACHUSETTS**, in a community that adhered to the teachings of philosopher and Russian-born mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff, who believed most people live in a state of waking sleep, unaware of their connectivity to everything around them. Finishing his formal education at The Putney School, a learning environment that “trusts people who want to be in that vulnerable landscape...where there’s a magic in the unexplorable” was a natural choice for a young man coming to terms with his artistic legacy (grandparents and parents are all artists) as well his own urge to push boundaries into the unknown.

As a filmmaker, Marder has garnered a reputation as a lone wolf, not beholden to the Hollywood Machine with its endless remakes, comic book movies, and sequels to franchises that long ago lost their luster. Instead, he heeds a voice “inside telling me to make films.” By listening to this voice, by allowing himself to live in a place of uncertainty, the Academy Award-nominated Marder connects with what most of us would call success by any measure—a roster of top filmmaking awards and a body of work that leapfrogs over obvious characters and clichéd plotlines. But don’t congratulate him. To Marder the pass/fail mentality stymies creativity and keeps people from risking breakthroughs leading to artistic truths that would otherwise remain hidden.

Marder and I spoke twice while he was with his youngest son in Arkansas. (Marder’s eldest son, Asa ’18, as well as his older sister, Gabriel, ’90, are also graduates of The Putney School.)



Darius working on set during filming of *Sound of Metal*.

**It’s ironic we’re handed this topic—learning from failure—as the world witnesses the failure of America’s efforts in Afghanistan, a disappointment many say could have been avoided had our leaders learned the lessons of Vietnam.**

When something goes terribly wrong, people seem to go one of two routes—they blame someone else, or less often, they admit failure. Assigning blame is a way for us to avoid being uncomfortable because being wrong is not allowed in our society. We do a Hester Prynne number [from *The Scarlet Letter*]; we cancel people who fail. Meanwhile, we’re fascinated by train wrecks; people get endorphins looking at other people’s failure when the only appropriate response is to accept that failure is the human condition. Or is there a third, and maybe more interesting route to take after something goes south? When you don’t look for someone to blame; when you’re willing to be in that space of discomfort, that’s where you find the greatest riches.

**Can security exist side-by-side with failure?**

The creative process is by definition insecure. You have to be able to live in a place of failure to find even a glimmer or glimpse of success. Success isn’t a product. It is a moment of creative truth. The actual



*Sound of Metal* lead actor Riz Ahmed, Oscar nominee for Best Actor, with Darius during filming

around people needing to say “yes” to me. Which is a long way of saying that there have been a lot of years with little to no money. However, I do deal with The Machine That Doesn’t Get It. Hollywood wants to see everything before it’s made. If you’re talking about an idea, they ask, “What happens next?” They want to apprehend the whole thing before it’s written... so we see superhero movies and remakes; they’re already written, bottled, and packaged. Hollywood has a hard time with the unknown. They think they can avoid making costly mistakes by asserting control. But that’s not how I work. I do a lot of unorthodox and reckless things to facilitate an entirely different process.

**Such as?**

I shot *Sound of Metal* on 35mm film because it signals energy, the aesthetic is different. Also, it’s finite, you can’t shoot forever. There’s a danger quotient to film. Video makes people lazy. You can try this or that all day... [and that affects] the energy level of the whole set. I wanted to raise the film’s energy level, increase the precariousness.

For instance, in *Sound of Metal*, the music performances were filmed live, in a club with an audience. I wanted to signal to the actors that something was at stake; this wasn’t about movie magic, this was about the actors’ magic. My message was: “If I’m willing to fail and there’s no safety net for me, then there’s no safety net for you, the actor.” I wasn’t just talking. This wasn’t about failure as a hypothetical; I had to be willing to risk it all to get the film I wanted.

I also shot the film sequentially, so we couldn’t go back and “fix” shots. It was like life; it exists in the moment and then it’s gone.

**What makes you willing to take these risks?**

It’s almost hubristic to think you can make something perfect. There is no success without failure. There’s no success if you try to avert it. I tell my actors, “This is a place to make mistakes.” A script is a platform that wants to be solid. Just like a parent with a child. You want to be solid, not to control your child. You’re solid so that your

process of finding something creatively, something transcendent, does not come from a pre-scripted place—there’s never a destination. For me there’s an odd sort of security in trusting in this dichotomy.

**You chose a career in one of the most difficult industries in which to achieve success. There are a thousand pitfalls along the way to getting a film on screen. What keeps you going?**

My true north is connecting with something unifying and greater than myself. When I was 18, I was in a dark place, driving cross-country with no particular

plans. A phone call from Ruth Charney, my favorite middle-school teacher, came out of the blue asking me to help her teach English. I said “yes.” Working with kids over those years put me in service of something greater than myself. That notion of “service to” is something I come back to when times are tough.

**Is it difficult to deal with the industry’s “gate-keepers”—those responsible for green-lighting a film’s production?**

Professionally I haven’t done much approval seeking. I didn’t design a career

child can make mistakes, knowing you won’t fall apart. The director and script are there so an actor can fail. If the actor can’t fail, there will be no magic, no transcendence. That engagement is essential. The paradox is you can’t remove yourself from failure. Failure is something that doesn’t match your intentions. It’s not linear. It feels bad. We are taught to hate it. That’s natural. Yet it molds us. When we allow ourselves to exist in that void, that’s where the gold is found.

**It sounds like you welcome failure.**

It would be disingenuous to say I welcome it. In fact I’ve always been a perfectionist. I’ve spent years creatively blocked trying to avoid failure. I didn’t hand in one single paper at Putney for that very reason. I’m constantly wrestling with this. Sometimes it gets hard to see. But I’ve spent my time in the hell of perfectionism. When I lose my way I let certain guideposts help me. I follow intuitive patterns; I’ve learned to trust even when they don’t make sense. I follow synchronistic events that help in that landscape of the unknown.

**Do you think your early life set the stage for your courage to be at peace with what most of us would call failure?**

No. My family’s relationship with failure is complicated. They are eccentric intellectuals and artists who have largely (at least in the context of art) chosen obscurity over scrutiny. My parents (both artists themselves) have also been lifelong spiritual seekers. In a way I look at the life of an artist from this vantage. Filmmaking for me is a continuation of their work. Gurdjieff talked about how we mostly walk around in a dream, asleep to the larger truths. The Putney School touches upon that same realm. It sets the stage where things can be messy and uncomfortable and at its best [gives students] a way to do that safely. It’s wonderful to see Putney exploring this notion of failure. It’s just such a delicious paradox. When we don’t confront our own failure, we create pain. While we try to protect, we harm, we create discord. We think failure is for others. “I’m not a part of that catastrophe!” But then, in every good story—as in life—the villains always think they’re right. ■



# Thought Leaders

As Putney prepared to meet its tenth head of school, the *Post* sat down with current head Emily Jones and Christopher Barnes '85, the current head of California's Midland School, to talk about headship, the independent school landscape, and the Putney that its newest head is inheriting.

## Emily Jones and

## Christopher Barnes '85 in conversation

**"Heal the sick and raise the dead"**

**Emily:** The mandate from our board is "Putney must remain unique." Our strategic plan states that mandate. But you have to figure out how to be unique in useful, educationally valid ways. Everybody is trying to be progressive now, even if they're not necessarily using those terms.

**Christopher:** This is really about domain expertise, being the very best in an unusual niche. Putney does look a little bit different, and that is its charm, its strength, and also, frankly, its weakness. Who sends their child off just to be unique and different? You send your child off for excellence.

**Emily:** There was a huge explosion of progressive schools in the 1930s, when the alternative was to sit in rows at desks and be drilled, to have no freedom, to have to dress in a certain way and think in a certain way. That's not the generation of kids now looking at schools. Today, student agency is difficult to





## People underestimate how frequently heads of school are called upon to play King Solomon, to pull out the golden scissors and make really hard decisions

forced me to spend more time thinking about adults than I did in the first half of my time here, when I focused on the experience of the students much more. I think my successor will inherit a list of things to focus on—how you design job descriptions, how you house people, how you actually get the work done.

distinguish from students expecting to be able to do anything they want to do, and from schools catering to students' every whim.

**Christopher:** No kidding.

The joke about being a head of school is that all you have to do is heal the sick and raise the dead, and you're all set.

But for this question of what headship means in a progressive school, you really have to pick your time and era. Is it the progressive school of 1935, when Carmelita Hinton was founding Putney? Or do you mean the progressive school that Emily runs today in literally the next century? Does "progressive" mean being out on the edge of whatever's progressive and progressing today? Or does it mean something that once was—and we want to be that?

**Emily:** I think it has to be both.

Being head of a school is like being the mayor of a small town. Everything that happens is part of the same fabric: every time somebody's spouse gets sick, or somebody's kids gets kicked out of college and winds up at home. I was slow to figure some of that out. There are also systemic issues that have

Morgan had gotten a grip on what was going on in the Main Building.

**Christopher:** I think every head of school saves the school in their era. Each head takes on the challenges of their moment. I've informally known you, Emily, for 20 years. I think one of the things Putney needed when you started was to get pushed to think deeply about Putney's commitment to the pedagogy.

### Is Putney in a position of strength?

**Emily:** One of Putney's strengths is that we have some of the nicest parents out there. I actually told the search committee to use that as a lure, because I spend a lot of time with other heads of school listening to their trials and tribulations, and I come back happy not to be in their shoes. I think that our educational model is cool again, which it wasn't for a long time. That's a position of strength.

### If someone gave your school \$15 million, how would you spend it?

**Christopher:** Roughly half for long-term capital projects (faculty housing!) and half into the endowment to support the annual operating budget and financial aid.

**Emily:** Half for financial aid endowment, half for capital projects, including faculty housing.

### What are some challenges for the new head of school?

#### Housing

**Emily:** As Christopher said, I have looked at the educational piece of Putney more than the business piece of it. And there are things that had been assumptions about how you run boarding schools that have changed. Right now, we're running hard into the idea that boarding school teachers live in a dorm for a certain length of time while they save up enough money for a down payment on a house locally. It's not realistic anymore. When you add the fact that most of our young faculty have student loans, housing becomes a huge impediment. I was slow to recognize it. The school has bought three

houses in the last six years and we've just rented another one. We have decided to put back on the master plan something that fell off a while back, which is freestanding faculty housing on our 600 acres. So, we are not right now in a position to do what we need to be doing for our faculty in the longer term. That's going to be expensive, and it changes the whole model of how you finance things in a boarding school.

**Christopher:** From the other side of the country, I can also attest to the housing challenge. It's not special to Putney, right?

**Emily:** Right.

**Christopher:** When I was writing my board report in May, the cheapest house available within a 20-minute drive from our campus was \$1.1 million!

#### Financials

**Christopher:** People underestimate how frequently heads of school are called upon to play King Solomon, to pull out the golden scissors and make really hard decisions. It's obvious that we don't pay or compensate our faculty enough, whether it's in dollars or in housing. But that's 70 or 80% of where we spend money. We can't pay the faculty more by using less paper at the photocopier. It doesn't move the needle. You want to move the needle? You need more students, or you need less financial aid, then you can have more compensation. But both of those approaches present challenges. There are some very powerful limitations. For example, we're definitely not going to mess with financial aid. If anything, we want to offer more financial aid in this day and age. And then you end up with only a couple of dials you get to adjust. Things like a copious endowment and a robust and strong annual fund make a huge difference. That doesn't come from us hoping that one person's going to make a big gift. It comes from people like me and every single other alum, writing that \$1,000 check every year. Saying, "I believe. I want to make sure that all of Emily's efforts translate into the future, and carry on to the future, to the next head," and that comes from that robust support.

### What qualities will the next head have to possess?

**Christopher:** You really are looking for that person for whom the mission and the fundamental nature of the school resonates so firmly that whatever their weaknesses are, they will address them and fix them, because they're so passionate about the mission. It might be that the perfect person isn't a savant with Excel, but everything else is perfect. So if that's the person, and if they're passionate enough about the mission, they'll backfill that gap.

**Emily:** I agree that people want a head who can do everything, but I think the key is to look at the school and ask, "What's the weak link at the moment? What needs the most attention?"

**Christopher:** If you end up with a checklist, you end up looking for perfection you'll never find: "We need somebody who has raised \$10 million in one capital campaign, who has been on at least two or three accreditations for independent schools, someone who is an artist and a singer. We need somebody who's a brilliant writer..." If you do this, you eliminate the very thing you need more than anything, which is somebody who comes to the table and inspires folks with a commitment to and passion for the fundamental mission of the school.

### What is a major takeaway from your Putney education?

**Christopher:** Ever since Putney, off and on, I have done real things with my hands—building and construction, maintenance, and crafts (post-Putney I went through a serious knitting phase!), all of which have been an important part of my life and stem from my time at Putney.

**Emily:** I asked my parents if I could go to Putney, and they rolled their eyes and sent me to a more conventional school. Probably a good idea, as I was a bad-attitude kid, determined to undermine whatever authority was around, and at Putney in the 1970s I could have gotten pretty far off the rails.

I agree that people want a head who can do everything, but I think the key is to look at the school and ask, "What's the weak link at the moment? What needs the most attention?"



# ON THE HILL

A photograph by Anna Hubbard '22, for which she received a national scholastic arts gold medal for original photography.

## LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

I am often interviewed by educators who visit Putney or find me at conferences, and of course I can talk the ear off anyone who wants to talk about Putney. Over the years, I have realized that one of the most unusual features of our educational model is that our students start learning from scratch over and over and over while they are here. At most high schools, it's hard to start something new—you don't make the soccer team if you don't know how to play, you can't start learning a new instrument, and you certainly don't have to learn how to milk a cow. Putney students have job training three times a year, so over four years students will have learned twelve jobs. The same is true for evening arts classes. Our academic program almost always can give students the courses they choose, but in the evening arts program, students often wind up with their third or fourth choice because studio space is limited. So twice a year a new group of students shows up in Latin dance or ceramics or printmaking and has to learn from scratch. Since everyone is starting together, whether in a new job or new evening art, there is no embarrassment about not knowing.

What this produces is a lovely undauntability in graduating students. They head off to college confident that they can figure things out, and do what needs to be done. As young adults they take on projects that intrigue them and talk themselves into jobs they have no experience in. They have an internal gauge of success, and not too much angst about being evaluated. If you are an alum, I bet you can recognize this in your Putney friends, and, I hope, in yourself.

This issue of the *Post* is all about persisting, through hardship, through what may look like failure. It reminds me that as we make changes in the program and curriculum here, we must be sure to hang on to this habit of making kids start new things often. And hang on to the piece of the Putney Core that says that graduating seniors need to have, or be actively working towards, resilience, perseverance, gumption, and internal fortitude.

All the best to all of you,  
**EMILY JONES**  
Head of School



“Be actively  
working  
towards  
resilience,  
perseverance,  
gumption,  
and internal  
fortitude.”

# Edible Forest Garden

Four years ago, then-seniors Finn Lester-Niles '18 and Griffin deMatteo '18 dreamed up, designed, researched, officially proposed, and created an edible forest garden. Sited with what is arguably the school's prettiest view—looking north to Green Mountain Orchards and Ascutney in the far distance—the garden was an intentional green space containing edible plants and trees, with canopy, understory, shrub, vine, herbaceous, and ground-cover layers, aimed at producing food with the lowest amount of maintenance required.

Designed with a U-shape to maximize exposure to sun and minimize exposure to elements, Finn and Griffin envisioned a “robust ecosystem and an ideal space for rejuvenating relaxation, agricultural experimentation, and place-based learning.” In the fall of 2017, the students finally got their hands dirty after months of planning, siting, and consultations with local nurseries. A garden emerged. That spring, the students graduated. As can happen with student-led initiatives at a bustling boarding school, the project eventually stalled in their absence.

Fast-forward to spring of 2021, when a new crop of ninth-grade students on the school's Sustainability Squad saw in the languishing project the chance to reinvigorate the garden. Moreover, during Covid, students needed outdoor spaces simply to spend time with friends. With the help of science teacher Dawn Zweig, a handful of students dug in—literally—to the forest garden. They cleaned, pruned, planned for weed management, planted, and built an arbor out of grape vines, and by the end of the spring 2021 campus-wide work day, had transformed the space.

What's next for the edible forest garden? The students envision building a bridge to the school's swing and bonfire pit, a hammock, a bench, a hedge to define the space, and a bridge to the adjacent faculty garden near Old Boys dorm. Meanwhile, they will grow and enjoy pears, plums, strawberries, blueberries, mint, thyme, currants, and grapes. In the words of Charlotte '24, “It grows snacks!” something that always makes a teenager's heart happy.



## FARM UPDATES

Small changes make Putney's farm more resilient in the face of a changing climate.

### URINE FERTILIZER PROJECT

Putney is partnering with the Rich Earth Institute, out of Brattleboro, to study the impacts of urine-based fertilizer on the growth of hay.

### NEW MANURE LAGOON

Putney's “lagoon” is where rainwater that falls on the manure pit and milkroom discharge is held, and it serves a crucial role on the farm. By getting water out of the solid manure pit, space is created for food waste compost. Plus, the liquid “waste” in the lagoon is used to fertilize and irrigate fields and crops. But it's too small. This year, in partnership with the USDA, the lagoon will be redesigned and expanded.

### LOW TILL/NO-TILL PRACTICES

The farm has been moving toward more low and no-till cultivation methods for its fruit and vegetable crops. Machine tilling the soil to prepare beds and manage weeds kills beneficial organisms and creates compaction, which negatively impacts root growth for the plants. New techniques include using a power harrow, which only disturbs the top layer of soil, hay and woodchip mulch from our own land, and tarps to manage weed growth.

## Q&A WITH STUDENT HEADS OF SCHOOL >>

**As a student head of school, what are your goals for this year? What do you hope to accomplish?** **Emma:** We wish to serve as models and bridges to communicate by encouraging everyone to speak their minds and contribute to making Putney a student-governed school. **Corinne:** I would like for us to be considered friendly faces on campus. With the pandemic and the new protocols that followed, connecting and communicating with our peers (student, faculty, and staff) effectively was quite a challenge so I hope we can aid the community in bridging that gap.

**What's your ideal vision of how Putney students can have an impact on the culture at Putney?** **Emma:** Since Putney students have diverse backgrounds, it is important to make sure Putney is an inclusive place and everyone feels comfortable about their own identities. My ideal vision for Putney students is that they would respect each other, and at the same time bring their own perspectives to the community. **Corinne:** Every Putney student has an impact on the culture by just being their most authentic self. Putney students offer a wide array of opinions while also having the mental capacity to accept and understand that our opinion alone is not the only one that matters, the only one that is correct, or the only one that should be treated with respect.

**Masks, social distancing, and other Covid restrictions have certainly affected life at Putney. What is some advice you had for students heading into the school year?** **Emma:** Just keep in mind that doing this is for the whole community, and we are slowly making progress. One thing I keep telling myself is that instead of thinking negatively

about these restrictions, we could view it as a new experience. How do we adjust to a time when we need to spend a lot of time being distanced from each other? **Corinne:** Be kind to both yourself and others. We all had a pretty rough time dealing with the pandemic during the past two years, and as we move closer to our new norm, many people could use some kindness and room to readjust.

**When you graduate and move on to whatever is next, what will be one of your favorite memories from Putney?** **Emma:** When I was a freshman, I got addicted to ceramics. Every day after school, I would head straight to the studio. There usually would be other students there, but I was too shy to start a conversation. After a trimester, my ceramics got better and

better; I got to know people who had the same interests as me, too. Eventually, we became really close friends. Even after their graduation we still keep in touch, and made a plan to visit Japan's ceramics museum one day. It's awesome to think about how many possibilities we're given as students to try new things. I would never have tried ceramics if I weren't given the chance to participate in evening arts programs. **Corinne:** AM Barn during the fall of my sophomore year. More specifically, the journey back to my dorm after my barn shifts were completed. During these walks, my friends and I would try our best to brave the cold for a few extra minutes to take the road past the Currier Center so we could catch the sun rising over the tree line above Noyes. And from there we'd walk to the KDU for breakfast, still in

our barn clothes which smelled of manure, hay, and milk.

**Anything else you would like to share about your new role?** **Emma:** I'm really grateful to be elected as one of the student heads of school. I will do my best to coordinate every task. I want the students to feel comfortable reaching out to us; the more student-oriented the Putney administration is, the better it will be for our future. **Corinne:** I feel both excited and grateful to have been given the opportunity to continue to give back to this wonderful community and I can't wait to see where this year takes us!



## SPORTS ARE BACK!

Whistles! Cheers! Buses! Putney students were back on the fields and trails this fall, playing soccer and running cross-country. While competitions were altered slightly because of Covid, the small inconvenience of wearing a mask at the starting line or on a bus was well worth it for the joy of racing through the woods and cheering on a friend's goal on the soccer field.



**WHO COOKS FOR YOU?**  
In early September, the KDU staff found this injured juvenile barred owl in the corner of the dining room. Many staff members stepped up to help it find its way to the Vermont Institute of Natural Sciences to be (hopefully) rehabilitated and released. Good luck, little one!

## NATIONAL AND STATE Art Award Winners

From the quiet nooks of Putney's campus, darkrooms thumping with music, and the ever-welcoming weaving studio, Putney students create art. During the 2020–21 school year, two students received National Scholastic Art Awards: Viva Vadim '21 for a woven tapestry that won both an American Visions Medal and a national gold medal (shown on Table of Contents page), and Anna Hubbard '22, who received a national gold medal for original photography (shown on p. 28). At the state level, a total of 23 Putney students received recognition for their poetry, photography, weaving, ceramics, painting, and more. The Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center featured this work in a student exhibition last spring.



The Putney School  
**SUMMER ARTS**

4 WEEKS TO  
CREATE AND  
CONNECT  
THROUGH ART  
Ages 14–17

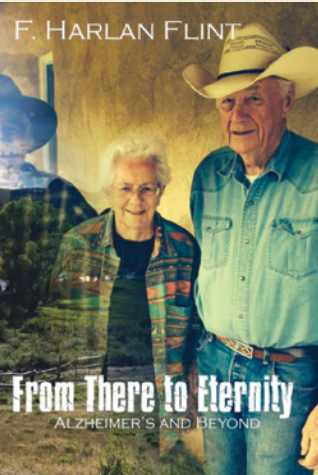
JOIN US  
THIS  
SUMMER  
July 2–29, 2022

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**SUMMER.PUTNEYSCHOOL.ORG**

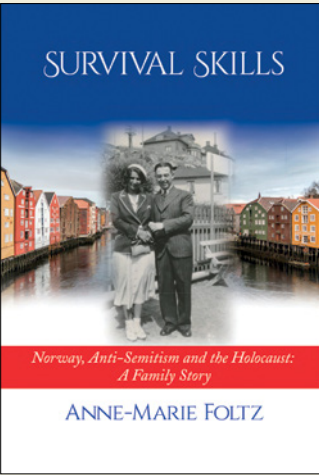



Hannah Reimann '83  
is making music in  
New York City.

ALUMNI BOOKS



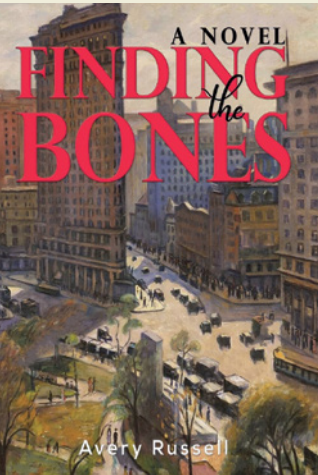
**From There to Eternity: Alzheimer's and Beyond**  
*Harlan Flint '50*  
*Sunstone Press, 2021*  
This is the story of the end of life journeys of two dissimilar but treasured people. One was the author's wife, Chris, who joined him on a path that brought them close to the community of people whose ancestors were among the first European settlers of New Mexico. The other, his friend, Baudelio, was the last of a long line of pioneers who found a home in the high country of northern New Mexico. The story had its final act for Chris and Baudelio at close to the same time but in far different ways: hers from the anguish of Alzheimer's, his from a slow decline after a lifetime of hard work. Other characters are the people met along the way and the places where they came together, including Santa Rita, the ephemeral Hispano community where they built a straw bale cabin, and a roadside cafe in a small town on the way to and from their remote cabin.



**Survival Skills: Norway, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust: A Family Story**  
*Anne-Marie Foltz '53*  
*Ipbooks, 2020*  
“In this stunning memoir... Anne-Marie Foltz tells the astonishing story of her family's displacement and survival from World War II Norway. In adulthood, Foltz finally found the questions that unlocked her parents' theretofore silent and conflicting memories of how and why they left the Nazi Holocaust in Norway. The parents, Lova and David Abrahamsen, he a distinguished psychiatrist and author targeted by the Nazis, and she an extraordinarily courageous woman and mother of two daughters, saved their treasure trove of letters. David fled by ship to America, hoping the family could later reunite. During the winter 1940–41, Lova saved her life and the lives of her daughters in an epic trek from Norway to Sweden to Moscow, across the Soviet Union to Japan, by ship to Hawaii and San Francisco.

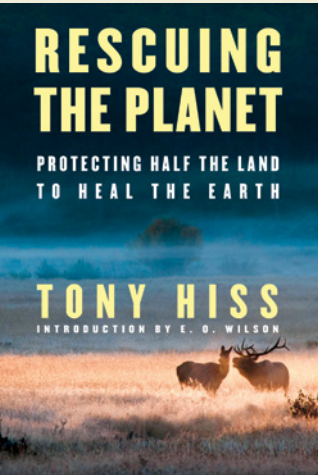
In their rich surviving letters, both Lova and David use the word “unbelievable” to describe their realization that they will once again reunite, that a family can survive the most evil of forces. This story is almost unbelievable, except that we as readers are swept along on a well-documented odyssey. At once a work of retrieval, history, personal revelation, Jewish consciousness, and wonderful storytelling, this book reminds us brilliantly that we are our pasts, as well as the presents and futures we make out of them. This is a book about loss, but also renewal and the universal meaning of why life matters.” —David W. Blight, Yale University

**Finding the Bones**  
*Avery Russell '55*  
*Austin Macauley, 2021*  
*Finding the Bones* is a dark romance set against the youth rebellion and revolutionary violence of the 1910s—an era not unlike 1960s America—where idealistic young men and women seek to create a more just society but often fall victim to retribution or disillusionment. Charlie Everett, a journalist on the make, and Olivia St. James, an ardent feminist and journalist in her own right, find themselves caught in a deadly embrace from which neither can escape. Author Townsend Ludington calls the book a “fine, sophisticated historical novel, [whose] omniscient narrator moves deftly among her substantial cast of characters, showing us the lives of bohemians and

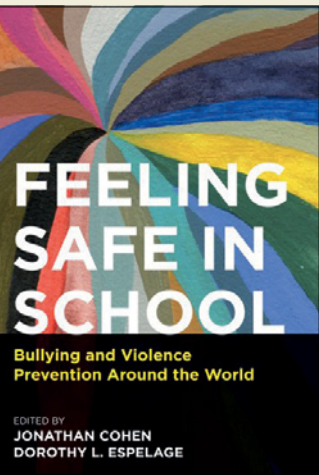


expatriates of pre-World War I and beyond. If there is any symbol of the partially thwarted lives that the central characters endure, it is in Hartley's poem *Finding the Bones*... where the bones of a dead bird are found with its wings still on and its feathers attached, the last vestiges of a life and an ardor Charlie himself experienced among the bones he hid from everyone.”

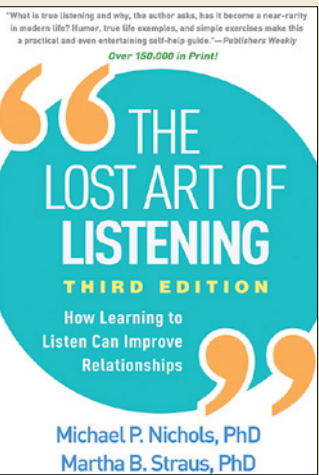
**Rescuing the Planet: Protecting Half the Land to Heal the Earth**  
*Anthony Hiss '59*  
*Knopf, 2021*  
Beginning in the vast North American Boreal Forest that stretches through Canada, moving across the continent from the Northern Sierra to Alabama's Paint Rock Forest, from the Appalachian Trail to a ranch in Mexico, Tony Hiss sets out on a journey to take stock of the “superorganism” that is the earth: its land, its elements, its plants and animals, its greatest threats—and what we can do to keep it, and ourselves,



alive. Hiss not only invites us to understand the scope and gravity of the problems we face, but also makes the case for why protecting half the land is the way to fix those problems. He highlights the important work of the many groups already involved in this fight, such as the Indigenous Leadership Initiative, the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, and the global animal tracking project ICARUS. And he introduces us to the engineers, geologists, biologists, botanists, oceanographers, ecologists, and other “Half Earthers,” like Hiss himself, who are allied in their dedication to the unifying, essential cause of saving our own planet from ourselves. Tender, impassioned, curious, and above all else inspiring, *Rescuing the Planet* is a work that promises to make all of us better citizens of the earth.

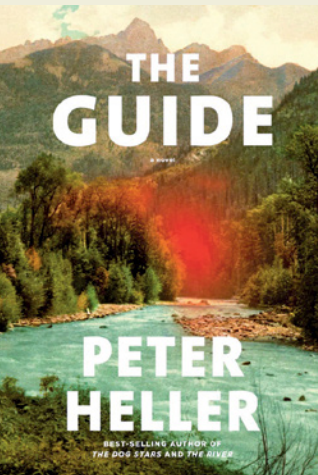


**Feeling Safe in School**  
*Jonathan Cohen '70 and Dorothy L. Espelage*  
*Harvard Education Press, 2020*  
Jonathan Cohen and Dorothy L. Espelage, two leading authorities in the fields of school climate and prevention science, have gathered experts from around the globe to highlight policy and practice recommendations for supporting children and adolescents to feel and be safe in school. Featuring analysis and commentaries from experts in public health, psychology, and school improvement, *Feeling Safe in School* addresses social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of safety as well as physical safety. The experts offer candid and unique insights into the way 11 different countries view and define what it means to feel safe in school, the types of goals and strategies that are being used to promote safety, and whether and how measures are being used to gauge progress. Interest in supporting the physical as well as the social and emotional safety of students as a prerequisite for



learning and healthy development is now a global phenomenon. *Feeling Safe in School* adds to the understanding of the possibilities for increasing student safety by examining the experiences of other countries that are tackling this issue.

**The Lost Art of Listening (Third Edition)**  
*Martha B. Straus '73 and Michael P. Nichols*  
*Guilford Press, 2021*  
*That isn't what I meant!* Truly listening and being heard is far from simple, even between people who care about each other. This perennial best-seller—now revised and updated for the digital age—analyzes how any conversation can go off the rails and provides essential skills for building mutual understanding. Thoughtful, witty, and empathic, the book is filled with vivid stories of couples, coworkers, friends, and family working through tough emotions and navigating differences of all kinds. From renowned therapist Michael P. Nichols and new co-author



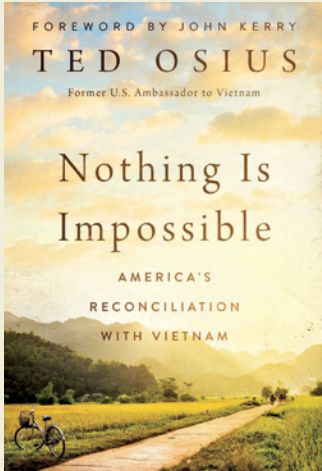
Martha B. Straus, the third edition reflects the huge impact of technology and social media on relationships, and gives advice for talking to loved ones across social and political divides.

**The Guide**  
*Peter Heller '77*  
*Knopf, 2021*  
Kingfisher Lodge, nestled in a canyon on a mile and a half of the most pristine river water on the planet, is known by locals as “billionaire's mile” and is locked behind a heavy gate. Sandwiched between barbed wire and a meadow with a sign that reads “Don't Get Shot!” the resort boasts boutique fishing at its finest. Safe from viruses that have plagued America for years, Kingfisher offers a respite for wealthy clients. Now it also promises a second chance for Jack, a return to normalcy after a young life filled with loss. When he is assigned to guide a well-known singer, his only job is to rig her line, carry her gear, and steer her to the best trout he can find. But then a human

scream pierces the night, and Jack soon realizes that this idyllic fishing lodge may be merely a cover for a far more sinister operation. A novel as gripping as it is lyrical, as frightening as it is moving, *The Guide* is another masterpiece from Peter Heller.

**Nothing is Impossible:  
America’s Reconciliation  
with Vietnam**  
*Ted Osius ’79*  
*Rutgers University Press, 2021*

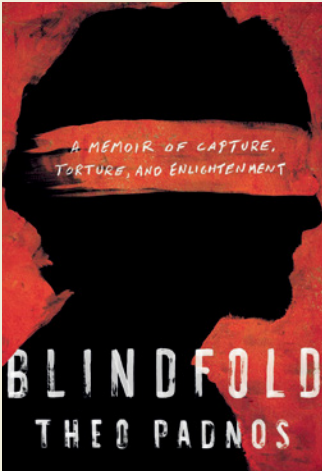
Today Vietnam is one of America’s strongest international partners, with a thriving economy and a population that welcomes American visitors. How that relationship was formed is a 20-year story of daring diplomacy and a careful thawing of tensions between the two countries after a lengthy war that cost nearly 60,000 American and more than three million Vietnamese lives. Ted Osius, former ambassador during the Obama administration, offers a vivid account, starting in the 1990s, of the various forms of diplomacy that made this reconciliation possible. He considers the leaders who put aside past traumas to work on creating a brighter future, including senators John McCain and John Kerry, two Vietnam veterans and ideological opponents who set aside their differences for a greater cause, and Pete Peterson—the former POW who became the first U.S. ambassador to a new Vietnam. Osius also draws upon his own experiences working firsthand with various Vietnamese leaders and traveling the



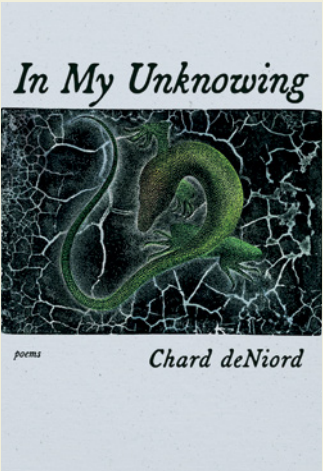
country on bicycle to spotlight the ordinary Vietnamese people who have helped bring about their nation’s extraordinary renaissance. *Nothing is Impossible*—with a foreword by former Secretary of State John Kerry—tells an inspiring story of how international diplomacy can create a better world.

**Blindfold: A Memoir of  
Capture, Torture, and  
Enlightenment**  
*Theo Padnos ’86*  
*Scribner, 2021*

In 2012, American journalist Theo Padnos, fluent in Arabic, Russian, German, and French, traveled to a Turkish border town to write and report on the Syrian civil war. One afternoon, while walking through an olive grove, he met three young Syrians—who turned out to be al Qaeda operatives—and they captured him and kept him prisoner for nearly two years. On his first day, Padnos was given a blindfold—a grime-stained scrap of fabric—that was his only possession throughout



his horrific ordeal. Now, Padnos recounts his time in captivity in Syria, where he was frequently tortured at the hands of the al Qaeda affiliate Jebhat al Nusra. We learn not only about Padnos’s harrowing experience, but we also get a firsthand account of life in a Syrian village, the nature of Islamic prisons, how captors interrogate someone suspected of being CIA, the ways that Islamic fighters shift identities and drift back and forth through the veil of Western civilization, and much more. No other journalist has lived among terrorists for as long as Theo has—and survived. As a resident of 13 separate prisons in every part of rebel-occupied Syria, Theo witnessed a society adrift amid a steady stream of bombings, executions, torture, prayer, fasting, and exhibitions, all staged by the terrorists. Living within this tide of violence changed not only his personal identity but also profoundly altered his understanding of how to live. Offering fascinating,



unprecedented insight into the state of Syria today, *Blindfold* combines the emotional power of a captive’s memoir with a journalist’s account of a culture and a nation in conflict that is as urgent and important as ever.

**FORMER FACULTY**  
**In My Unknowing: Poems**  
*Chard DiNord*  
*University of Pittsburgh, 2020*

In his new poetry collection, Chard deNiord explores the paradoxical nature of unknowing. Says best-selling poet Carolyn Forché, “To read these poems is to float at a holy distance over the earth, herein recognized as the heaven it has always been, as no other place would do for living forever. It is a world about to evanesce, but is as yet legible to us in these masterful poems, which are in themselves a species of musical awareness.”



Have you written a book?  
Let us know by contacting  
[alumni@putneyschool.org](mailto:alumni@putneyschool.org).

P.S.



Ninth graders constructed a chalk geologic timeline of the history of earth on the path between the Currier Center and the KDU. Seen here: an artistic representation of the first organic molecule.

FROM THE PUTNEY SCHOOL INSTAGRAM @THEPUTNEYSCHOOL



# Reunion 2022?

It's too soon to know whether we will host reunion next summer.

We hope we will be able to do it.

If it's a go, here's the plan:

FRIDAY, JUNE 10-SUNDAY, JUNE 12, 2022

Classes of 1950-57, 1960-62, 1970-72, 1979-83, 1996-98

50th reunion group (classes of 1970, 1971, and 1972)  
will start their reunion on Thursday, June 9.

Stay tuned. We will know more when spring is here.

*Covid: Vaccinations will be required for all guests who are old enough to be vaccinated.  
Masks will be encouraged, and possibly required, for indoor events.*



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Weaving by Marcie Cummings '21, recipient of a 2021 Vermont Scholastic Gold Key Arts Award.