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
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 fireworks 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
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.

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 would not 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.
After an accident left Alicia Brelsford Dana ’87 paralyzed from the waist down, she turned to hand cycling.

FINDING A WAY

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.

STORY BY CATÉ MARIAN

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.
FINDING HER FREEDOM
Every August, Dana changed 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. “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, ” 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 PERSERVANCE
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 team mates, 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 spending 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 or things going awry.

“I feel like everybody in the community knows who she is, ” Dana 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 shows me life as it comes, one day at a time, and she taught me to be more flexible and easygoing. It’s so incredible how she does it. I just love watching her; 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 unrealistic limits on yourself. You can find a way.”
Gentaro Yokoyama ’96 knew he wanted to be a ceramicist after Putney. But he also knew he wanted to push what that meant.
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.

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.

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.
STORY BY DARRY MADDEN
PORTRAITS BY LAURA STEWART

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.

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 re-search how brakes work and have as a trick, like jumping on the wrench. But otherwise it was a really easy fix.

But that was only the first fix they accom-plished 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. “At that point, we still thought it would not take too, too long. It wouldn’t be an easy fix. ”

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

“We knew that it needed a lot of work, we decided we were going to ignore it and try to start the car and nothing happened when we turned the key,” said Rosner. “And then it caught fire.”

Then 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.

“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.”

“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 “dis-gusting” 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.”

She would return, over and over, to the jugular—ignition. She wanted it to start.

“Because the brakes didn't seem to be working. So they began, naturally, with the emergency brake.”

So they began, naturally, with the emergence 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 unify-ing 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 ex-plicitly not about instant gratification. The process itself is involved, requiring dedica-tion 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 in-telligent 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 re-tained what she knew. So that made her an especially powerful fledgling mechanic.”

Ultimately, it did take her entire high school experi-ence. Rosner watched as her friend and co-mech-anic 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.

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“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.”
When 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 as “super high stakes.”

“Glam 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 didn’t work.

“It taught me so much about commitment and about the way I should be viewing success and feeling satisfaction with the progress that I’ve made. In the beginning, 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.”

Rosner, who is now a first year student at Carnegie-Mellon studying physics, said Rosner, who is now a first year student at Carnegie-Mellon studying physics, 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.”

“AFTER 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.

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.
It’s ironic we’re handed this topic—learning from failure—as the world witnesses the failure of America’s efforts in Afghanistan. It’s 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 make mistakes. I wasn’t just talking. This wasn’t about movie magic, this was about success by any measure—a roster of top filmmaking awards and a film with a 91% approval rating seeking. I didn’t design a career 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 for 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: “I’m willing to fail and there’s no safety net for you, the actors.” 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.

A cellphone 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. It’s a moment of creative truth. The actual 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 ebb and flow of security in trusting in this dichotomy. That engagement is essential. There are a thousand pitfalls along the way to get something unifying and greater than myself. That notion of “service to” is something I come back to when times are tough.

Do you think your early life set the stage for your courage to be at peace with failure and not to avert it? 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 success. My parents (both artists themselves) have also been lifelong spiritual seekers. In a way I look at life as 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, as if 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 distance. You 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.
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.

“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.

What's an important piece of the job that people might not have any idea even exists?

Christopher: Supporting the board of trustees to be their very best selves and the most effective team in support of the mission.

Emily: About 20% of each group—students, faculty, parents, alumni—are the more vocal and more demanding ones. Keeping in mind the views and needs of the other 80%, and balancing the school's responses, is a constant responsibility.

“Every head of school saves the school!”

Emily: People want a head that can do everything, but I think the next head of school will need to be looking and saying, what’s the weak link at the moment? What needs the most attention? Being able to discern the views and needs of the other 80%, and balancing the school’s responses, is a constant responsibility.

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, but I've spent so much time on the business side of the school, which makes everything else possible. So I came into a school where the academic program was going to be really fun to work on, but it was only possible because Brian 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 have 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 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 $1 million, how would you spend it?

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 the more conventional school. Probably a good idea, as I was a bad-attitude kid, determined to undermine whatever authority was in place. Putney in the 1970s I could have gotten pretty far off the rails.

What qualities will the next head have to possess?

Christopher: You are really 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?”
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
Edible Forest Garden

Four years ago, then-seniors Finn Lester-Niles ’18 and Griffin deMato ’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, 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 milking room 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 laso 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 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 the 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 distant 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. 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’ve given as students to try new things. I would never have tried ceramics if we weren’t given the chance to participate in events arts programs.
Corinne: A month during 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 Corner Center so we could catch the sun rising over the trees and acres. 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.
Survival Skills: Norway, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust: A Family Story
Anna-Marie Foltz '53
Ibpaaks, 2020

"In this stirring memoir... Anna-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' treasured secrets and conflicting memories of how and why they left the Nazi Holocaust in Norway. The parents, Lova and David Abrahamsson, 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. 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. And 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 '05
Springer, 2017
Finding the Bones is a dark romance set against the youth rebellion and revolutionary violence of the 1910s—an era not unlike 1980s America—where idealistic young men and women seek to create a new just society but often fall victim to retribution or disillusionment. Charlie Everett, a journalist on the make, and Olivia St. James, an ardent psychologist, join an aridor Charlie himself experienced among the bones he hid from everyone.
Rescuing the Planet: Protecting Half the Land to Heal the Earth
Anthony Hay '79
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 Hay 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. His 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, botanists, oceanographers, ecologists, and other "Half Earthers," like Hess, 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, this book offers 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...and above all else inspiring, this book offers 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.

From There to Eternity: Alumnae’s ‘77 and Byrdon Harlanfirst ’50
Sentinelese 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 pioners who found a home in the high country of northern New Mexico. The story had its final act for Chris and Baudelio at the same time but in very different ways. Here from the anguish of Alzheimer's, his from a slow decline after a lifetime of anguish of Alzheimer's, his from a slow decline after a lifetime of anguish of Alzheimer's, his from a slow decline after a lifetime of anguish of Alzheimer's, his from a slow decline after a lifetime of anguish of Alzheimer's, his from a slow decline after a lifetime...
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 first-hand 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 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 deNiord
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.
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**


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