

# 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

