

REMEMBERING Gordon Jones



Gordon Jones in flight on a bike; Gordon working with Leo Gadick '17 during spring work day; portrait of Gordon Jones by teacher and artist Cai X. Silver

On March 6, 2022, Gordon Jones, husband of Emily, died. As he and Emily planned their departure from Putney, we knew we wanted to thank Gordon for his impact at Putney. Now, we feel more deeply the need to remember him, and we hope he knew how much he shaped our school. At a recent memorial service, both Desi Smyth '23 and Brian D. Cohen shared their memories of Gordon (Brian's being read by English teacher Nathan Zweig). We share excerpts with you because they capture Gordon as a person and as a teacher, and glow with delight in their friendship, even in their grief.

From Desi Smyth '23: Gordon always expected you to bring your best to the table, but he also had the incredible sense of knowing what was your best given any moment. I learned an unimaginable number of things from Gordon, most pertaining to Shakespeare. Shakespeare is the leading man in my life, and when I visited Putney, I sat in on Gordon's art history class. He asked me why I was sitting in on art history. I stuttered, and my tour guide butted in and said that I was a fan of Shakespeare. Gordon immediately brightened up, and asked if I was a performer, and if so, had I been in any Shakesepare productions recently? I said, "Yes. I had played Macbeth, in *Macbeth*." He smiled, and said "If it were done when tis done, then twere well it were done, quickly." After a beat, I sensed that I was to continue. "If the assasination could trammel up the consequence, and catch with his surcease success," and Gordon picked it up again. We went back and forth, mystifying his students. I was not yet sold on the idea of Putney, but Gordon sold it to me in minutes. Our instant connection never diminished. Gordon was maybe the first person I met that had truly no obligation to care for me, and yet he did. I felt very understood by Gordon; he had the same gift as Shakespeare, an innate understanding of human nature. And I miss that. I miss him. The last thing Gordon began to teach me was about creating my own memory palace. He talked of it all the time, and I was so honoured when he sent me an email, asking to meet to begin the process. I accepted, and we began to meet almost every week to create my memory palace. Unfortunately we did not get very far, but I think it is only right that I create one in his honour. It is only right that in my memory palace, Gordon has his own room.

From Brian D. Cohen: Gordon did more varied things well than anybody else I've ever known. He was a gourmet chef and ran an Italian restaurant in the north of England. He was a letterpress printer at a book press. He was a psychological counselor, and I don't mean just informally — he was trained as one. He was a Latin scholar and translator. He was a gifted pianist and artist. He was an erudite and captivating classroom and studio art teacher. With Emily he started and ran a school in the jungles of Thailand, clearing the land, designing the buildings, creating a curriculum, hiring the faculty, and enrolling students. He wrote a prominent reference book on grammar, then decades later he wrote a prominent reference book on JS Bach's choral works. Gordon was a protector of the things he cared most about, his family, the English language, his Shakespeare, and traditional painterly values. He also relished removing the delusory structures and formalities that held up any situation he couldn't abide, if only to see the disorder he could create. The protective and anarchic didn't battle within Gordon; they simply took turns. The same scholar who reproached me for mangling an English vocabulary work I had no business using possessed an inner nine-year-old who, at my 50th birthday party, released my French Bulldog from his leash in order to see him knock over every food table and little kid in sight. He's still laughing about that now, I am sure. Gordon could be unsparing and dismissive, and funny about it. He was the opposite of a virtue-signaler. Notwithstanding his oft-repeated comment "remind me to send \$50 to Planned Parenthood" every time he saw an unruly little kid, he rarely spoke about the hours he volunteered counseling paroled young offenders in the criminal justice system, the difficult, detailed, and unseen work (as well as the many paintings) he contributed to community arts organizations, or the time, tutelage, and art supplies he gave to any student with a spark of interest in visual art, and how very proud he was of what they accomplished.

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