

ISSUE  
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WINTER 2023

# PUTNEY POST



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The Putney School

## THE NATURE POEM

The moon  
is Hamlet  
on a motorcycle  
coming down  
a dark road.  
He is wearing  
a black leather  
jacket and  
boots.  
I have  
nowhere  
to go.  
I will ride  
all night.

BY RICHARD BRAUTIGAN (1959),  
in Richard Duerdan (Ed.), *Foot*, no. 1.

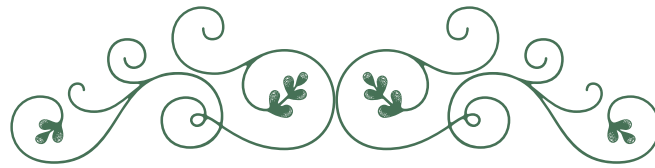
TOC photo: Alumni and  
students alike delighted  
in the return of Harvest  
Festival. Pictured, Lee  
Hirsch '90 and Morgan '24.



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In Memoriam

**On the Cover:** Brian D. Cohen, Hummingbird, relief etching, watercolor, and letterpress, 15" x 11", 2004.

Begun just before Brian and his former wife Holiday Eames learned they were expecting their son David, *The Bird Book* is a children's alphabet book of twenty-eight hand-colored relief etchings of birds by Brian with rhyming couplets written by Holiday modeled after a turn-of-the-century reading primer.

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## DEAR READER,

The students are putting on *Hamlet* right now.

I had that hazy, I-read-it-twenty-five-years-ago grasp of the play, so I revisited it. It's quite a story for high schoolers! For any of us, really. Revenge, betrayal, murder, madness.

It is Polonius, father of Laertes—the Hamlet's killer—who says:

*"This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."*

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This is Polonius's advice to his son as he leaves Denmark for France, but it should be every parent's advice to every child at all stages, I think. And I thought about this sentiment in terms of the school itself, as we transition from one leader to another, through ongoing cultural revolutions, changes in staff, and of course the students who arrive so young and graduate into the world seemingly so grown up a few years later.

How does Putney remain true to itself and grow and thrive? In some ways, the pastoral, handmade ideals embodied on this quaint campus have already stood the test of time, have drawn people here for decades and continue to, and are an antidote to the disposable, digital frenzy of our modern era. And in other ways, the same qualities seem to be in the dustbin of history, as antiquated as Shakespeare. What do we keep? What do we choose to shirk in the name of growth?

Is there something essential that makes Putney Putney?

Ay, there's the rub.

In this issue we explore the concept of growth through a few lenses. We meet Putney's new head of school, Danny O'Brien, who has his own clearly stated commitments to personal growth as part of his vision of healthy leadership (A Little Back Story, page 20). We check in on the literal growth of this little school in the form of two new dormitories (Digging in the Dirt, page 16). We witness the growth of our students through their work growing our food (Locally Grown, page 18). We reflect on the life and work of longtime Putney faculty Brian Cohen (An Artist's Life, page 4), who helped students grow into artists as he honed his own skills and pursued his artistic passions.

It's exciting to be here at moments of change and the growth they bring. Sometimes it's clear and sometimes it's not but it's always happening and always an honor to bear witness.

With gratitude,

**DARRY MADDEN**  
Publisher

Moon, etching and calligraphy on handmade paper, 12" x 9", 2004

Brian created this print for *The Fool's Journey*, a book of twenty-three etchings of the major arcana of the traditional tarot deck modeled on Renaissance cosmography, each print representing a universal archetype of human experience and a parallel, symbolic element or quality of the physical world.

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# Brian D. Cohen

*Story by*

ABBY BRAITHWAITE '92

*Photos courtesy of*

BRIAN COHEN



# an artist's life

ON A SUNNY November Saturday, Brian Cohen, long-time art teacher, sat on the edge of the East Lawn with a small group of his former students. Brian gestured to a young elm tree on the edge of the flagstone patio, commenting that it was planted in his first year at the school nearly forty years ago, after the last of the original elms had succumbed to Dutch elm disease. Now the top branches scratch at the third floor window of the Main Building.

As he talked, Brian's conversation companions leaned in to hear what wisdom he had to impart about time and trees and lessons learned across a rich career and life. "They were tiny," he said, then turned to point to his office window. "The first one died. And this one ended up blocking the view from my office."

Brian chuckled as he settled back into his Adirondack chair and looked out across the lawn to Mt. Monadnock, the November sun bright on the last of the leaves hanging onto the not-so-little-anymore elm.

**Brian** arrived in the spring of 1985, with a brand new MFA in painting and a young family in tow. He went on to serve the school not only as a drawing, painting, and printmaking teacher, but also as the founding director of the Putney School Summer Programs, as dean of faculty, and as a gifter in development. He led Long Fall and Long Spring trips, took students all over New England and the world to study art. And in these years he also produced a monumental body of work. He was and is a prolific artist, an inventive colleague, and a lifelong learner.

Brian's daughter, Lee Cohen '03, moved to J.R. dorm. when she was an infant and was raised with a built-in legion of babysitters and companions. She remembers her dad's commitment to his art this way: "Throughout his career, despite a full teaching load and having a family, he always found time to make his own work. Without any time to spare, he learned the self-discipline of committing to his own work even in short, frenzied spurts. He would bring thick metal etching plates with him on vacation, and always had extraordinarily heavy carry-on. Nearly every day he would spend at least 10 minutes on a piece of art. Even after he was diagnosed with cancer, he would bring drypoint points and drawing pads into his sometimes months-long hospitalizations."

"I don't think there's a better definition for success than continuing to make art. Art in itself can give shape and meaning to your life," said Brian.

**For** most of Brian's 35 years at Putney, the north end of the Art Building (now Wender Arts) was his domain. For student artists, the sprawling unpainted building tucked into the woods was a place of work, refuge, and empowerment.

His willingness to embrace the unpredictable, to be a student beginning at the beginning and forgiving his own imperfections flowed into his interactions with his students. While he lacked formal training as a teacher, it's clear that he arrived at Putney with the instincts of a gifted educator.

For many years, Drawing 1 was a prerequisite for any other visual arts class. As such, Brian had the opportunity to teach a wide array of students, a reluctant sophomore gritting her teeth through Drawing 1 just to get into the darkroom, to the deeply committed, talented artists who earned themselves private workspaces in the loft. Between these two extremes were dozens of students eager to find entry into the world of drawing, painting, and printmaking. And each of these groups of students found a welcome in Brian's classes that allowed them to grow as artists and human beings. He respected any student who showed up ready to work; he deeply appreciated the receptiveness of the adolescent brain; and for those students for whom drawing never clicked, he maintained a hope that he might have at the very least helped them be better observers of their world.



In talking with several of Brian's students from across his time at Putney, it's clear that he carried simultaneous gifts for teaching the technical side of art even as he was at times learning himself and for helping students see themselves as artists, empowering them to ask the questions that would allow their own authentic voice and vision to appear on paper.

"I stressed the sustained development of their own original ideas, as well as their ability to verbally articulate those ideas; the need for patience, focus, self-discipline, and skills necessary to push beyond the familiar; and the inevitability, necessity, and value of struggle and occasional failure in creative effort," said Brian.

He taught his students how to observe the world, how to see in new ways, and how to communicate what they saw in charcoal, paint, pencil, and ink. He taught them how to use their tools and trust in the chemical processes of printmaking.

He also shared the "habits of practice" that were foundational to his own career: show up for your art, and work



Brian in his studio at the University of Washington, 1983; Brian signing the "Diving Bird" print in his studio, 2022.



hard even through a dry spell or a tough time; don't live for other people's opinions, but always stay open to what a different perspective can offer your work. Make goals for your art, and make a plan to reach them.

He helped his students see themselves as artists.

Sara Kazemi '88 arrived as a junior when Brian was in his second year at Putney. From her first drawing class, she was struck by how he saw her in ways she did not yet see herself. His expectations were high, his teaching was generous, and as Sara wrote, "When you have a teacher who sees you clearly without their own story interfering, it helps you to see yourself clearly and be true to who you are."

Brian worked to guide his students on their own paths, providing an extra set of eyes to help them find their way, but without imposing his ideas, or suggesting there was just one way to make "good" art. Luka Negoita '07 remembers Brian's deep enthusiasm for his senior exhibition, which merged biology, drawing, and printmaking, as Luka worked to assemble and record a coyote skeleton he found in the woods behind his dorm. Brian never asked Luka

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—Brian Cohen

to choose between the art and science of this project, but understood that for Luka, this work merged two passions.

Cordelia Fuller '11 arrived at Putney as a junior, Brian's mentorship was critical. Today, Cordelia is a high school teacher herself, and often reflects on the ways that Brian showed up for her when she was at Putney. She remembers his skills in teaching her the techniques and mechanics of printmaking, but she also carries an impression of Brian striking similar to what Sara Kazemi felt 26 years earlier. "If you are lucky," Cordelia wrote, "at some point in your life you meet someone who points you towards

yourself...when someone recognizes you, especially as a teenager, when someone points you towards yourself, it gives you a real place to start as you decide who you want to be

"I've loved teaching high school," said Brian. "A few kids brought in preconceived notions and limiting habits, but students that age are remarkably open, eager, and intellectually curious. Teaching can be exhausting and frustrating, but overall joyful and satisfying. I was fortunate to find my way into teaching."

*Brian* became a printmaker at Putney, with nothing but a single course of formal training. The art department was equipped with a print shop, and it seemed a shame not to put it to use. So, in the summer before he came to Putney and in the years that followed, Brian set about to learn as much as he could about etching. He began at the beginning, and as he learned, he fell in love with the medium that would define his career.

Brian writes of this time, "I studied books about printmaking, aiming to fill the glaring gaps in my knowledge visible in my early etchings and in my own teaching. The craft, history, and look of etching grew on me, and I was, to a point, forgiving of my own incompetence,

understanding that I was unlikely to be good at something I had barely ever done before."

While Brian never went back to the large-scale oil paintings and collage that were his primary focus during his MFA program, he kept color in his life through watercolor. Painted mainly on location, outside in the weather, Brian's watercolors were, like printmaking, a place where he was able to combine his keen sense of observation with an unpredictable medium.

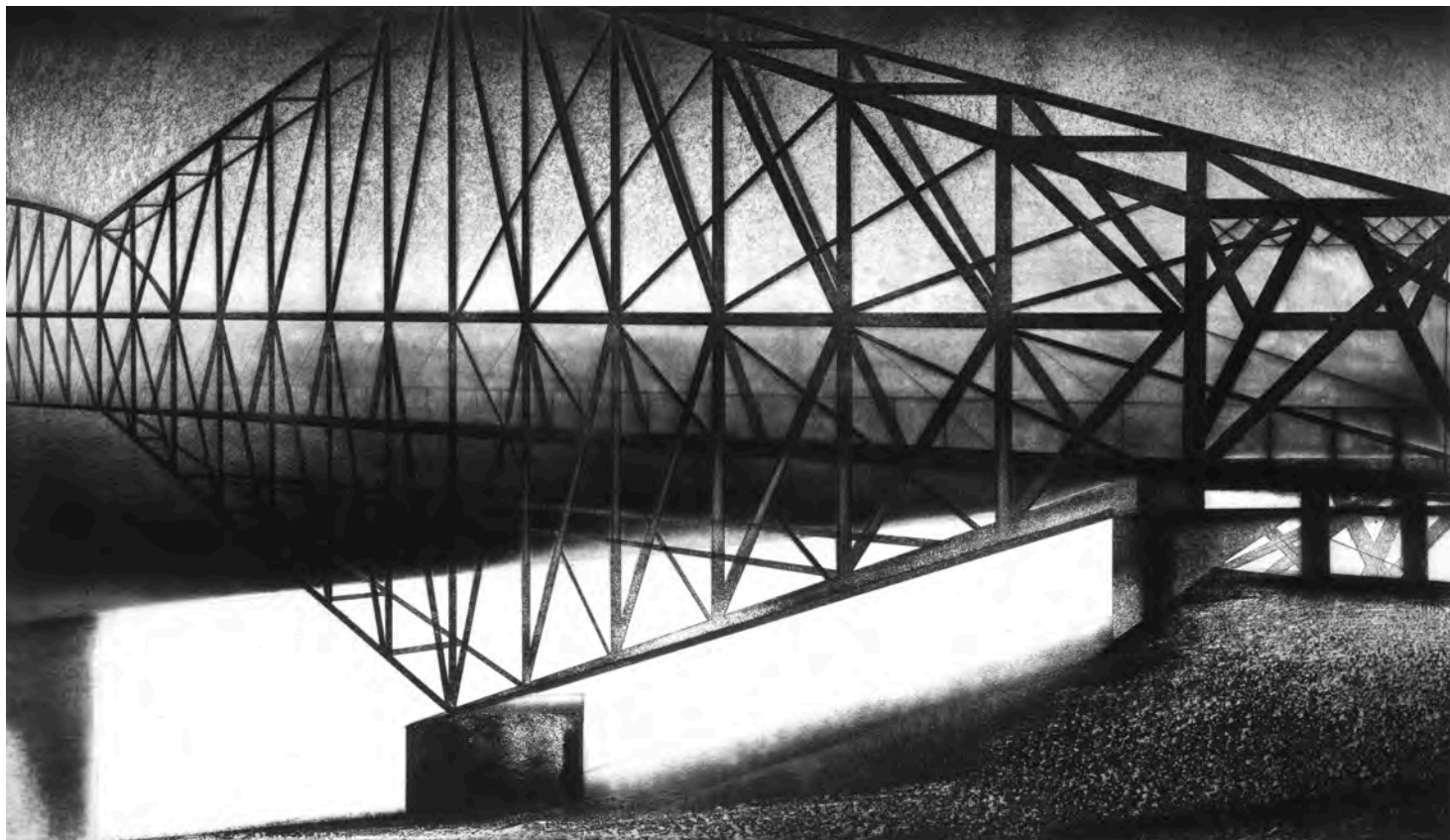
"Experimenting, figuring things out, allowed me to understand etching in its most basic terms and general principles, not as a set of formulas or recipes to follow. Teaching also helps this process of clarification and articulation," he said.

Diana Brewer '92 was an accomplished musician when she came to Putney as a sophomore, but was less confident as a visual artist. While she was taking her first drawing classes with Brian, he was beginning to learn to play the violin, and she remembers the reciprocity of that moment. "We had a mutual envy society," she said of that time when she was learning to draw and he was becoming a musician, "but later, it morphed into a mutual admiration society, when we both started to figure out what we were learning."

As a Putney student, having access to adults in and outside the classroom is an incredibly rich part of the experience. For the faculty, of course, it can be deeply challenging

Below:  
Steel Bridge,  
etching,  
13" x 19", 1991

Brian's glimpse of the Quebec Bridge over the Saint Lawrence River from a road trip became the emblem for the name of his imprint, Bridge Press. The name also underscores the collaborative nature of his work with writers, musicians, and book artists.



I GOT VERY EFFICIENT IN MY WORK, A FUNCTION OF HAVING A FAMILY AND A JOB THAT PUSHED THE AVAILABLE TIME FOR ART MAKING TO THE MARGINS. WHEN I WORK, I GET RIGHT TO THE POINT.

—Brian Cohen



Above right:  
Deer, etching,  
5" x 5", 1995

Brian originally created this image for a 1995 holiday card, and then repurposed it twice for two artist's books with poet and former Putney teacher Chard deNiord, *What the Animals Teach Us* (1995) and *Bestiary* (2022). Animals have never ceased calling to Brian and Chard in silent and strange languages that have beckoned them to listen, observe and wonder.

to find the time to raise a family, run a dorm, teach a full load of classes, lead afternoon and evening activities, and commit to an array of weekend commitments. But Brian seemed to do it all with generosity and good humor.

As a dorm head, his genuine appreciation for the teenage mind often was challenged by the absurd antics of his charges, but he approached the job with his characteristic dry humor and a whole lot of equanimity. Diana Brewer was a J.R. resident for two of her three years at the school, and while the details of a teenage transgression are long forgotten, she remembers clearly Brian's demeanor when confronting her. Even when admonishing her, he brought a grace to the conversation that never undermined Diana's dignity. His willingness to show up as a human being, not just an authority figure, helped set the stage for friendships that carried on through his lifetime, and Brian remains close with many former students from across his time at Putney.

In the weeks before the global pandemic shut the world down in the winter of 2020, Brian received a diagnosis of acute myeloid leukemia. After a year of intensive treatment, Brian's cancer went into remission; at the urging of his daughter, in 2021, he began a retrospective look at his art career. He had saved all his etching plates, and over the course of the past year, he reworked and reprinted work from across his 35 years of printmaking: *Brian D.*

*Cohen: A Retrospective*, a book surveying his career will be published in January, 2023.

Seeing the volume of work, most of it produced in his Putney years, it's hard to imagine how he did it.

"I got very efficient in my work, a function of having a family and a job that pushed the available time for art making to the margins. When I work, I get right to the point," said Brian.

While Brian is putting the finishing touches on his retrospective book, he is recovering from a second bone marrow transplant that became necessary when his cancer recurred earlier this year. He moved to the coast of Maine—a place he has always wanted to live—in the winter of 2021 and is passing his hours moving between the immediacy of his day-to-day life, and the necessary look to the past that a retrospective brings. He is connecting with many former students and colleagues, and he is still making art, returning these days to painting, and finding himself needing to relearn some of what he once knew.

When the pandemic shut down the world, the class of 2020's graduation celebration was brought online. In it, Putney's faculty were given the assignment of offering the graduates advice in eight words. Brian, never one to waste words, offered just seven: *Keep doing what you care most about.*

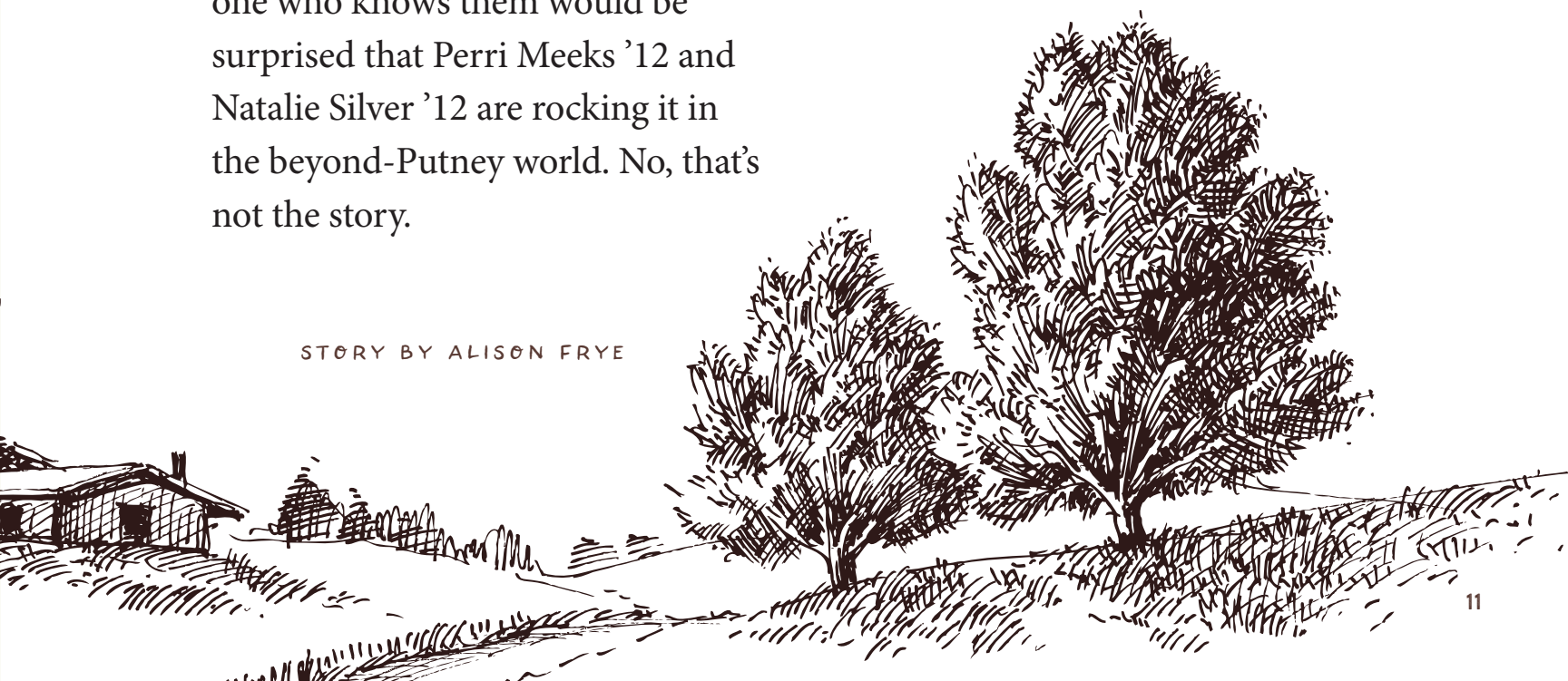
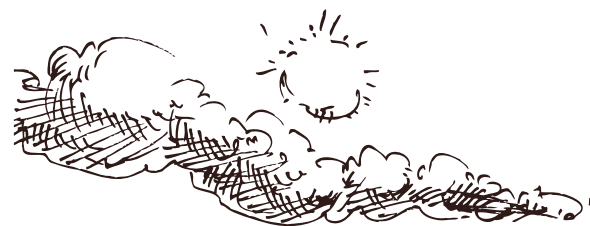
A photograph of two young women standing on a wooden deck in front of a log cabin. The woman on the left has long blonde hair, is wearing a pink t-shirt, blue jeans, and blue rubber boots. The woman on the right has dark hair pulled back, wears glasses, a purple t-shirt with a white tree graphic, and blue jeans. They are both smiling and have their hands on their hips. A window with a white frame is visible on the right side of the cabin. The ground is covered with fallen leaves.

NATALIE  
SILVER '12  
AND  
PERRI  
MEEKS '12

# TWO ROADS CONVERGED IN A WOOD

Two former Putney students excel in careers as young adults. It doesn't sound like breaking news. And no one who knows them would be surprised that Perri Meeks '12 and Natalie Silver '12 are rocking it in the beyond-Putney world. No, that's not the story.

STORY BY ALISON FRYE





Nor is the story Arms Cabin, nestled up Gray Lane on the far edge of Putney's campus, where as seniors Natalie and Perri cemented their friendship, skated up icy hillsides and spent cozy weekend mornings listening to Bob Dylan records, the cabin life a reward for the hard work they had put into Putney.

What's the common thread?

THE HURRIED, harried school administrator trope belies the impact of the work that connection and credibility are born and nurtured in the small moments when a student comes to your office, and you open your door and you listen. Perri, recently hired as dean of the upper school at Brooklyn's Poly Prep Country Day School, welcomes those visits and the conversations that follow. Students call her Miss Meeks. "Miss Meeks! Her work requires taking attendance and other humdrum administrative machinery that makes a school function. College counseling, disciplinary work, and community building also fall under her umbrella.

After several years of working in college and graduate admissions, college counseling, and running an educational non-profit in New York City, Perri's work now draws on her strengths and allows for a day-in, day-out focus on the student experience. Her voice echoes what we strive for at Putney as she speaks with clarity about her value-driven approach: "A lot of our work is trying to speak reason to people whose brains aren't fully developed yet. My approach is to get students to think more slowly and more critically about how behavior has impact. My wanting to change the world has been a smaller, person-by-person piece. It's well connected to what I was interested in at Putney.

Natalie, whose throughline since Putney has been politics and organizing, spent the better part of the last two years running Becca Balint's Vermont campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives. In a state that usually leans left, and against a strong primary candidate in Molly Gray (daughter of Bob Gray '57, granddaughter of Ed and Mabel Gray), Natalie held the power to shape the campaign's message and culture.

She sees herself as one of many Putney-made stewards of the world, whose task is to become useful members of the global community. As a political organizer, she works in earnest for eight or ten months at a time, a fully immersive exercise in intense teamwork toward a common goal. And in Vermont, her home state, she has found a corner of the world where she can have an impact. "My theory of cultural political change is that the small stuff is the big stuff. I am trying to effect political change because there are policies I think need to shift, but I think it is almost equally important to change political culture. The way I run my team feels Putney-esque. We value kindness as much as we value performance. You have to treat people with respect. You have to communicate clearly. You have to be a team member first. In politics, valuing kindness above competition is a radical thing. But as we all know, you can't survive in a small community if you're an asshole.

TWO TOPICS notably changed the tone of our conversation: the power of community, and the harsh reality of bigotry.

Said Natalie, "I first realized at Putney the importance of female friendship, and the start of that was living in the cabin with Perri. Perri echoes an appreciation of this community: 'There's something really special about having friends who knew you before you were all of yourself.' Moreover, she reflects, 'I was super odd, but I was embraced for that. I can think back to that feeling of being loved by the community for being myself. When I am in situations being pushed off of where I hold myself, I know that it's not something innate about me. I learned that from the Putney School and its feeling of community.'

As all students do, they shaped the culture at Putney. It was a time of gutsy, strong women as is always true at Putney living in the most rugged cabin, leading the barn, setting new standards for academic reach.

Both speak of what we call Type 2 fun. Doing AM Barn as a ninth grader, the walk to Arms Cabin in the windy winter darkness, a frozen stack of firewood . . . the memories that make you groan also make you proud. Perri remembers dealing with the winter cold in the uninsulated cabin. "We covered all of the windows with blankets. It was like living in the 1800s. It was so dark. It was miserable, and it was wonderful, because we wanted that cabin.

Natalie and Perri at age 18 contemplated their futures and their big dreams. They each fed the fire to keep the other warm. Natalie visited campus last fall to talk to our students about how her current career started while she was a Putney student, doing summer work on Peter Shumlin P'09, '10's run for governor. When walking to visit the cabin, she felt the familiar pang. "Walking back to the cabin at night, getting to Gray Lane, and thinking 'Yep, we're home.' I still feel that way on Gray Lane, when you see the bower of trees on the way up to the cabin. It's really special.

Both realize that navigating the professional world requires maturity and persistence. Sadly, even in the idealistic circles of progressive politics and non-profits, sexism and racism lurk. Natalie, a petite blonde who advocates fiercely for her candidate, has heard the B word more times than she can count. "I've had to pretty aggressively



I first realized at Putney the importance of female friendship, and the start of that was living in the cabin with Perri.

—NATALIE



Learning that when you are a highly competent person, to stand in your power and not let others bully you and push you around is very much something I learned at Putney.

—PERRI



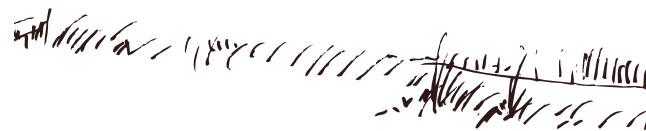
Natalie, left, with Becca Balint (middle) and Julia Barnes, advisor and friend to the Balint campaign; Perri hard at work that matters in New York City.

claim my own space. We read and hear about sexism or hostility toward women in male-dominated fields, but when you experience it, it's a whole other beast. I can't overstate the role and presence it's had in this experience for me. Still, she says with a defiant glint, "I know that it's coming from a place of others' insecurity, and I'm probably doing a good job if people are hating on me."

Perri has felt the extra sting of sexism and racism, been shut out of committees, left out of conversations, been undermined, and told there's no room for her at the table, so to speak. She recognizes that it rears its head

when she's doing her job the best, advocating for students, questioning inequitable policies. Unfappable in her commitment, she says, with conviction, "Learning that when you are a highly competent person, to stand in your power and not let others bully you and push you around is very much something I learned at Putney."

NATALIE AND PERRI left Putney in the rearview ten years ago. They stand now in the early years of their professional careers, having felt the blows of bigotry but also feeling deeply rooted in their belief in themselves and their value systems.



The story is two women standing in their power. The story is values and community. In their hard stretching of themselves, rendering service, and combating injustice, Natalie and Perri reflect back to us our best hopes for what a person's time at Putney can teach, and the power of those lessons as our students go into the world and chase their dreams.

# STICK BUILT

## STUDENTS WORK TO REBUILD ARMS CABIN

STUDENTS BUILT the Putney campus. Yes, this is a simplification, but if you ask people who attended Putney in its earlier days, they often talk about which building they built: Old Boys dorm, New Boys dorm, the Art Building, twice. And they'll ask why this doesn't happen anymore. The school's work toward a net-zero campus complicates things, but if you walk to the campus wood shop, you'll find it abuzz, literally, with progress on the new Arms cabin, and students committed to its construction.

To be built with hemlock posts, maple girders, and cherry joists, insulated and with south-facing windows to supplement the wood stove, the cabin will be beautiful, with student input on design, the work of student hands, and the professional skills of the school's carpenter, Bryce Jewel.

The woodshop welcomes students and offers them a place to learn a skill, explore an interest, perhaps find their first steps toward a vocation or a career. Its organized, clean, busy space bursts with music and laughter even in times of focus and precision. Creativity and order are equal partners.

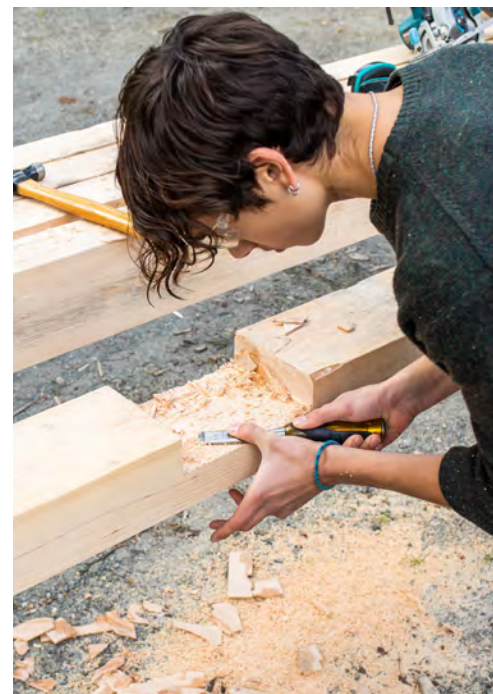


Jaiden '23 came to Putney with an interest in timber-framing, having had an architect father who took down old New England barns and reconstructed them into beautiful homes using the original beams. He sought Bryce out, eager to get involved in building the cabin. Last summer, Jaiden spent two weeks of his summer break planing girders, cutting notches and half laps, sanding and routing. He's continued the work this fall, and will spend his December Project Week on a final push to ready the cabin for ongoing progress this coming winter and occupancy next school year.

Bryce sees the educational value, big-picture, of this work. "We want students to have the experience of carpentry. It's different than training people to be carpenters. You can take it and run with it if you want to, but the real experience is seeing how these things are done—Jaiden sees it that way, too. "I want to further my knowledge and see if this might be a passion of mine. And . . . I really want to live in a cabin my senior year."



Students at work on the cabin under supervision of Bryce Jewel (far left), including Jaiden '24 (upper left and bottom right), Francis '24 (above), and the carpentry afternoon activity last fall.



# Digging in the Dirt



Sing it *Forward*: A Campaign for Putney's Future launched publicly last June, with a joyful celebration during Reunion weekend. Over 200 alumni joined for our first in-person Reunion since 2019. The Caldwell family was fully represented for a poignant groundbreaking ceremony (pictured on this page) at the Hepper House site, the new dorm named in honor of Hester "Hepper" Goodenough Caldwell '46.

The event also honored former Head of School Emily Jones, whose 15 years of dedicated leadership inspired so many to step up and pay tribute through the Emily Jones Fund for Student Support.



Construction on the two new dorms has officially (and finally) begun! Both buildings are on schedule, with footings and foundations poured and some plumbing and basement slabs in place for both. Crews have started framing the first floor and are moving toward closing up the greenhouse site for winter, and the Hepper House site is a few weeks behind that. Both dorms are on schedule to open in the fall of 2023, with the greenhouse site dorm being the first completed.



## ELM LEA CIRCLE

The Putney School Impact Report

July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022

The Elm Lea Circle Report acknowledges the generous giving that has a profound impact on Putney today and for generations to come. Thanks to all who ensure the unique energy that is Putney itself shines on long into the future.

[ElmLeaCircle.com](http://ElmLeaCircle.com)



# A Little Back Story

## Getting to Know Danny O'Brien, Putney's New Head of School

STORY BY  
DARRY MADDEN

PORTRAITS BY  
LAURA STEWART  
AND DARRY MADDEN

When new Head of School Danny O'Brien and his busy, bustling family—wife, Ellie, and their two young kids, Vivie and Henry—landed in Vermont last summer, they did so into a fair bit of necessary chaos.

They came from Colorado (where Danny had served as head of High Mountain Institute), in a caravan of cars and planes filled with houseplants and bric-a-brac, straight into the season of family vacations and new camps and routines (or lack thereof) for the children. The head's home here at Putney, Rockwell House, was undergoing extensive renovation (the first in nearly fifty years on the building), and was not ready for them in time. Ellie worked in an empty office on campus. Danny was handed the metaphorical keys to the school. They stayed in several places here and there in Windham County, including in the apartment above the KDU. And they did it all with astonishing and unwavering good cheer.

When they arrived, the campus was in that brief moment between the end of one year and the beginning of the next—the summer arts program humming along during the pause, the comma, that the summer affords a busy little school. Danny and his family were a generous burst of energy, a vibrant curiosity, a new set of eyes and sense of how to run Putney to be the best possible version of itself—in other words, an exclamation point.

DANNY WAS RAISED in the 1980s and 1990s in what he calls a “really working class area” of Providence, Rhode Island. He attended public schools through high school.

Putney said, his story isn’t cut and dry. There are nuances. Nuances that give it depth. Their family took a step outside of the box in many ways. There are whiffs of the counterculture and progressivism that seem to have him on a path to Putney as early as second grade.

The family bought food from an old-school food coop where members divided up 75-pound wheels of parmesan and 50-pound sacks of whole wheat flour. And they were strictly vegetarian. They bought live, potted Christmas trees that they then planted after the holidays.

The intersection of a dichotomy like this is where sparks fly. It’s the way we begin to see things anew. It’s how a working class kid from public school has come to lead a long-standing and venerable progressive institution like Putney.

## “Kids need an environment where they can trust each other, push themselves intellectually, and create community.”

DANNY ATTENDED Classical High School in Providence, a public school, but one that required admission, and one that pointed its students toward elite colleges and universities.

“I did a lot of different things at Classical,” said Danny. “I was editor of the school newspaper. I was in student government for all four years. I was captain of the cross country team, I did a lot. I learned more from doing all of those extracurriculars, probably, than I did in almost any of my classes.”

At Middlebury College, Danny found himself at yet another stark crossroads of culture. One of the new activities presented to him was (perhaps no coincidence) a Long Fall-like backpacking trip to kick off the school year.

“I thought to myself, ‘I’m going to be walking all day. That’s going to be boring.’ So I brought a *Sports Illustrated* to read

as I was walking down the trail, thinking I would need to pass the time,” Danny remembered.

He smiled his joyful, open-hearted smile that Putney now sees all the time, “But I got a quarter mile up the Long Trail and I remember thinking this was the greatest thing I’d done in my life.”

“I really fell in love with the outdoors and I fell in love with backpacking. I think some of it was the actual process of walking and seeing trees, but a lot of it was the relationships that people build in the woods and how people were having authentic, thoughtful conversations, how people could be goofy and have fun and not judge each other for it. It was the first time, maybe ever in my life, where people weren’t trying to be cool. People were being themselves and you could be yourself. It was a distinct memory that I had right away, and it was the first time I had an experience like that.”

IT’S AFTER COLLEGE that his character really comes into its sharpest focus.

He moved to Seattle with seven friends from Middlebury. They lived like it was an extension of college, a big dorm-like cocoon, sharing the household chores, and getting a taste of working life.

He’d taken a job doing business and environmental consulting, which sounded like it had some potential for moral satisfaction. But the reality was an endless bureaucratic grind—work that was robbed of the joy he had previously found in the other parts of his life, including a summer spent as a camp counselor. So he became a teacher.

His first teaching job was at the Island School in the Bahamas. His second was in a special education class at an underfunded elementary school in Providence. “I showed up and the teacher had left out of the blue and had left nothing, no lesson plans, no nothing,” Danny recalled. “And I had a blast.”

He recalls asking himself “What do these kids need?” He came to believe that all kids need an environment where they can trust each other, push themselves intellectually, and create community.

HE MOVED TO COLORADO to work as a teacher. He spent 15 years at High Mountain Institute. Met and married Ellie Solomon, welcomed Vivie, now age 8, and Henry, now age 6.

“I became a better, more empathetic educator after I had kids, because I was able to put myself in the shoes of parents again and again. I also have made mistakes and failed so often as a parent, I’m very humble about it,” said Danny.

And there is another side to that coin, as well. He sees clearly now how much people love their kids, and how that can sometimes lead to problems of the rescuing-them-and-solving-problems-for-them variety (“Recognizing this has made me a better parent, too,” he says).

Danny brings this self awareness, and a desire to self-reflect, to the job, along with his drive to conquer the challenges ahead of him, and have fun while doing it all. All of this will come to bear on the Putney of the future.

And what is that future, in Danny’s vision? “My goals for Putney are both to identify where we’re knocking it out of the park (and to make sure the whole world knows that), and also to identify where we have to continue to make steps to get better,” he said.

Danny elaborated, “More than any school I have ever seen, Putney knows itself. Our mission and Fundamental Beliefs are clear. What we aspire to be is inspiring.”

He continued, “I am passionate about this school because the world needs Putney to be Putney. We rebuild human connection over difference and what we have in common. We create conditions where students come to trust themselves and each other again. We teach adolescents to see challenges and take responsibility for addressing them.”

Danny is convinced that these skills and habits are not only what Putney teaches, but what the world will need from the next generation of leaders to solve its incredibly vexing problems.

His job, he says, “is to help ensure our teachers and students have what they need to do these things well.”



1: Vivie, Ellie, Danny, and Henry on campus this fall

2: Danny, left, at the top of Mount Washington on his first Long Fall trip.

3: Ellie in her home office in Rockwell House.

4: Danny heading off to Long Fall.

ANJA  
ERIKSEN '22



LOCALLY

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PUTNEY'S GARDENS are the site of much joy and learning. Students and faculty are there in the spring, planting the tender seedlings, in the summer pulling weeds, and through the riot of color and abundance of the fall. "I have learned a lot about growing vegetables, flowers, how to care for the soil, and the importance of being a lifelong learner," said Michael Vercillo, former garden manager. "As soon as you think you have a system figured out, or figure that buying new equipment is going to fix a problem outright, you learn that you're wrong. You've got to plan really intentionally, but you also have to be nimble and flexible, as things change really quickly." Teenage humans

MICHAEL  
VERCILLO



aren't so different from cultivated vegetables," said Holley Evergreen Roberts, assistant garden manager. "Given thoughtful attention and access to resources, they tend to thrive."

Sometimes the connection is obvious: food, and eating. "Purple cabbage was the only vegetable I'd eat when I was young," said Beau Guenther '22. "I ate purple cabbage soup then, and I still do." Anja



BEAU  
GUENTHER '22

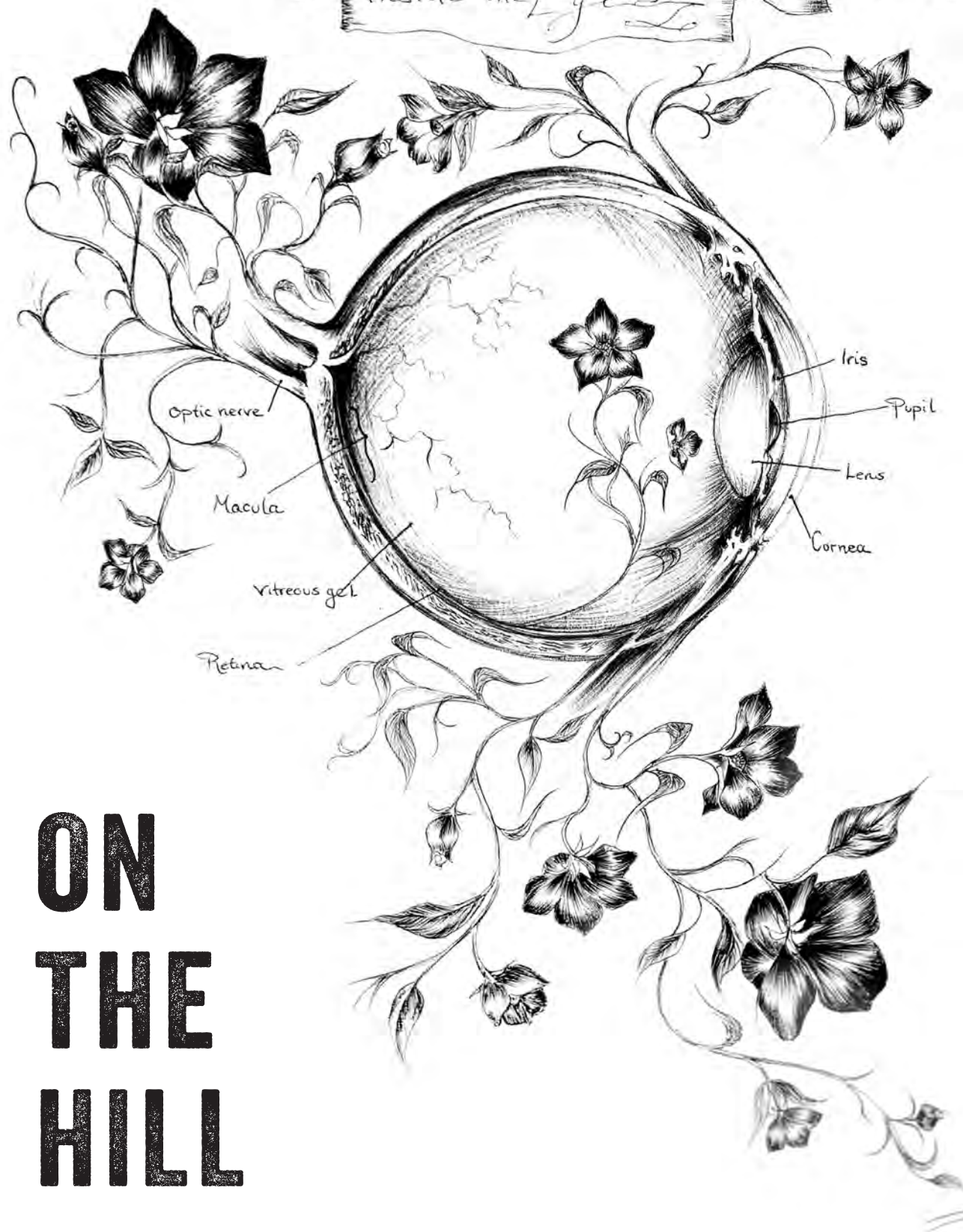


HOLLEY  
EVERGREEN  
ROBERTS



Eriksen '22 worked in the garden last summer after graduation. She learned perhaps the greatest gardening lesson of them all that it's all a metaphor. "Working in the garden I've learned about how to help plants grow best. Weeding helps make room for the ones that we're growing on purpose, but we're fortunate to have garden staff who see the value in every plant even those generally considered a weed"

*inside the Eyes*



**ON  
THE  
HILL**

## LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

*What is The Putney School?*

I have sought answers to this question since I arrived in Vermont. Hearing the responses of community members has been a priority for me. After all, in order to lead the school, I must understand it.

Leading an institution while learning it is daunting. I discovered quickly, however, that I am not alone. The culture of this school, more than the title of one person, shapes Putney. Our mission and Fundamental Beliefs inform decision-making, and the work of our students, employees, and trustees. The barn, evening arts, the work program, Long Fall, and so much more already define the school. Extraordinary faculty and staff are the heart of this place. If they are the heart, our students are the soul. (I have no doubt they will keep me in line!) Finally, our belief in these students and the power of learning for the noble goal of making this world a better place is foundational. Though I am new, these elements of the Putney School are steadfast.

People are already asking me the same question I am posing to others: *What is the Putney School?* Instead of answering, I ask for more time. I still have classes to see, people to meet, seasons to experience, trails to run, cows to milk, and songs to sing.

Thanks to Emily Jones's visionary fifteen-year tenure, I have the time to learn and meet many of you as we begin to chart the next chapter in Putney's story. Already, I have led a Long Fall trip, spoken with many alumni and families, washed dishes in the KDU, done AM Barn, visited classes, and engaged in deep learning with faculty and staff to improve Putney's diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

Putney is audacious, exciting, and complex. It will be a long time before I can confidently share everything that is this school. I worry about this less now than I did before coming here, however. For a single person does not lead Putney; rather, a time-tested vision, clear Fundamental Beliefs, unique programs, and an extraordinary community guides us all.

I am excited to be here with you all, and part of a school I already believe in so much.

I hope to meet you soon.

Warmly,

**DANNY O'BRIEN**

Head of School



**The culture of this school, more than the title of one person, shapes Putney. Our mission and Fundamental Beliefs inform decision-making, and the work of our students, employees, and trustees.**

# Two Alumni Help Recruit the Next Generation

Miyé Lampriere '17 and Brian Quarrier '05 work together on the Putney admission team

## BRIAN

Before returning to Putney, I was working at the Outdoor Academy, a semester school in North Carolina. I worked with 10th grade students and focused on community building, student leadership, and outdoor education. It was wonderful to see students from all over come together and work together to build a tight-knit community. Many students had had eye-opening experiences and no longer wanted to return to their sending schools. They were looking for schools that valued hands-on learning and community. Working with these students, I would often tell stories about my experiences at the Putney School and encourage them to apply. It was exciting to see these students take my stories and then forge their own path at Putney. This experience of helping students find an educational model that works for them made me start thinking about my connection to Putney. I think at some level I always knew I wanted to come back and work here.

I feel like I am doing my best work when I see a spark in a student and can help show them what their experience at Putney might look like. It has been rewarding seeing these students join our community and pursue the dreams we discussed in the admissions process. My job here makes me value working for an institution where teachers believe students can follow their dreams, where students are given trust and responsibilities, and to be in a culture that inspires students to be their best selves. I love walking into the KDU and having a student I worked with come up to me, ask me how I am doing, and then with a sparkle in their eye rattle off all of the cool things they are making and learning about—even if it is telling me about 3D printing a “rocktapus” (a Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson head with octopus legs).





## MIYÉ

Picking up and moving is ingrained in my family history. I am a fourth generation “mover”—my great-grandfather was a Japanese diplomat. After Putney, I moved to California to study immigration and globalization. In college, I moved to Morocco to study migration, and then to Alaska, where I became a commercial fisher.

No matter where I was, I found my Putney experience interwoven with how I navigated the world. Late at night, my college housemate and I sang from the Sing book. Sophie Perry ’18 and I admired many Californian sunrises while recollecting walking the cows to pasture. The Fundamental Beliefs hung above my college desk, overlooking me as I studied for my Japanese final.

Shortly after graduating from college, I hiked the Long Trail, a section I backpacked my first Long Fall. Along the trail, I knew I wanted to return to Putney. It might have been reuniting with the massive rock at Little Rock Pond or the meaningful conversations with hikers I met along the way.

Since being back at Putney, I still run the same infinite loop but with new Putney runners. I witness the care community members have for Putney. I now get to collaborate with my former teachers. It is fulfilling to go to work every day and learn alongside bright students who care deeply about this place and who want to imagine a better world. Students are constantly imagining and creating new possibilities. We need more people to imagine to help guide us into the future. In my little admission office, I listen to prospective students share their first perceptions of Putney. One 8th grader declared: “Wait, this sort of education is possible?” and I got to say “yes.”





## HARVEST FESTIVAL

has never felt so sweet. After an unprecedented two year hiatus due to Covid, the event returned this fall in all its home-spun, quirky glory.



## THE EAST LAWN IN AUTUMN

The East Lawn is perhaps the busiest in autumn. Every day, every time of day, one can look out and find students and faculty gathered there. Here we see fencing and Tai Chi afternoon activities, and the opening circle for Work Day.



Left, a bobolink; right, Forrest '23, searches for bobolink nests in Page Field.

## KEEPING TRACK

A Motus Wildlife Tracking System was installed on campus in October. The system is part of an international collaborative network that facilitates research and education to aid the conservation of migratory animals—in the case at Putney, of bobolinks.



## ON DISPLAY

Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (BMAC) Climate Change Artists in Residence Elizabeth Billings, Evie Lovett P'16, and Andrea Stix Wasserman showed *where are we?* this fall in the Michael S. Currier Center. The museum recently created an artist residency program to support artists seeking time and resources to engage with the profound questions and challenges presented by climate change.

"There is such support and intelligence in our being able to work collaboratively and independently," Lovett said earlier this year in an interview for BMAC's blog, *Art Loves Company*. "There's not a set expectation, and yet we each feel we are working toward something that will be outwardly shared, in synchronicity."



A photograph of a woman with short blonde hair standing on the wooden steps of a rustic cabin. The cabin has a steep, shingled roof and large, multi-paned windows. The woman is wearing a white t-shirt with the text "I BELIEVE IN IT" and dark pants. She is barefoot and appears to be adjusting her pants. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The title "ALUMNI CONNECTIONS" is written in large, white, distressed capital letters across the middle of the image.

# ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Libby Mills hosted many  
Putney visitors last summer  
at her Maine cabin

# ALUMNI BOOKS



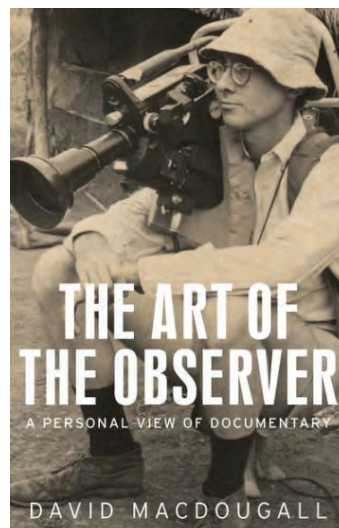
## Hammersteins Töchter

Gottfried Paasche '56  
Metropol-Verlag, 2022

This is the story of Paasche's mother and his aunts, all of whom were involved in anti-Nazi activities in Berlin. Up to now, only Paasche's uncles—who were involved in the 20th of July attempt to kill Hitler—have been written about. With this story, Paasche does an excellent job of putting his mother and his aunts back in the picture, as they were active much earlier than their brothers. This book closes a gap in German history in great detail. If you are interested in reading the book in English, contact Gottfried at gpaasche@yorku.ca.

## The Art of the Observer

David MacDougall '57  
Manchester University Press, 2022  
The Art of the Observer is a personal guide to documentary filmmaking, based on the author's years of pioneering work in the fields of ethnographic and documentary cinema. It stands in sharp contrast to books of academic film criticism and handbooks on visual research methods, being based extensively on concrete examples from

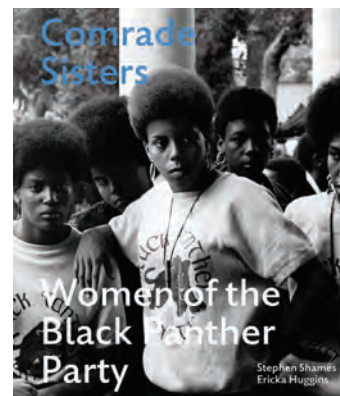


the author's own filmmaking experience. The book places particular emphasis on observational filmmaking and the ways in which this approach is distinct from other forms of documentary. It offers both practical insights and reflections on what it means, in both emotional and intellectual terms, to attempt to represent the lives of others. The book makes clear that documentary cinema is not simply a matter of recording reality, but of artfully organizing the filmmaker's observations in ways that reveal the complex patterns of social life.

## Comrade Sisters

Stephen Shames '65 and  
Ericka Huggins  
ACC Art Books, 2022

Many of us know the Black Panther Party as a movement for the social, political, economic, and spiritual upliftment of Black and Indigenous people of color—but to this day, few know the story of the backbone of the BPP: the women. It's estimated that six out of ten party members were women. While these remarkable individuals of all ages and diverse backgrounds were regularly making headlines



agitating, protesting, and organizing, these same women were building communities and enacting social justice, providing food, housing, education, healthcare, and more to the people. Comrade Sisters is their story told in pictures and the voices of the women. Interwoven throughout the book are 110 photographs by photojournalist Stephen Shames, who was a 19-year-old college student at Berkeley when he first met the BPP in 1966. This marks Stephen's third book about the Black Panthers and includes many never-before-published images of the women of the BPP. At the heart of this historic book are contributions from over 80 former women members and their families—some well-known, others not—who vividly recall their personal experiences from that time.

## With Different Eyes: A Covid Waltz

Paul Smart '74 and  
Richard Kroehling  
Mountains and Rivers, 2022

The book started off as newspaper stories and a daily blog in the late winter of 2020 when the coronavirus began to spread. Smart, a renowned Hudson Valley journalist of 30-plus years, reported on the unfolding pandemic. A temporary



lockdown, New York on pause, workers sent home. Schools closed and playgrounds taped off. Vicious politics and then George Floyd was murdered. Protests spread, met by an increasingly belligerent institutional response. Violence spiraled as Trump doubled down on his bid for reelection. Rough it all, Smart looked deep into his own bereavement for recently-passed parents, even as the lockdown seemed to offer refuge as well as the hope for real change—an epochal forbearance—arising from collective retreat. In turn, Richard Kroehling, filmmaker, installation artist, and the co-maker of *With Different Eyes* started painting, playing with images. He dove into his own stew of loss, regret, and undiminished hopes, even as the national angst and confusion deepened his palette. He shared his evolving imagescape with his longtime friend, who was simultaneously sharing his blog entries. Smart and Kroehling worked with publisher friends at Mountains and Rivers, a new publishing entity formed to bring out books by writers and artists of the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains, to bring their creation to print.



### Lost River, 1918

Faith Shearin '88  
Leapfrog Press, 2022

*Lost River, 1918* is the story of the Van Beest family, which inherits a house at the edge of a magical forest where the dead return from the afterlife. When 13-year-old Anne's mother, a midwife, delivers a stillborn baby and her father, a mortician, accidentally brings that infant back to life, the Van Beests find themselves at the center of a drama that raises questions about the relationship between the living and the dead.

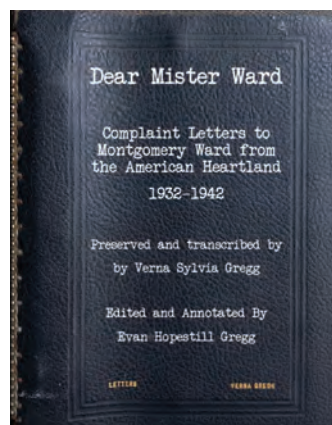
### Dilettante: True Tales of Excess, Triumph, and Disaster

Dana Brown '91  
Ballantine Books, 2022

Dana Brown was a twenty-one-year-old college dropout playing in punk bands and partying his way through downtown New York's early-nineties milieu when he first encountered Graydon Carter, the legendary editor of *Vanity Fair*. After the two had a handful of brief interactions (mostly with Brown in the role of cater waiter at Carter's famous cultural salons he hosted at his home), Carter



saw what he believed to be Brown's untapped potential, and on a whim hired him as his assistant. Brown instantly became a trusted confidante and witness to all of the biggest parties, blowups, and take-downs. From inside the famed *Vanity Fair* Oscar parties to the emerging world of the tech elite, Brown's job offered him access to some of the most exclusive gatherings and powerful people in the world, and the chance to learn in real time what exactly a magazine editor does—all while trying to stay sober enough from the required party scene attendance to get the job done. Against all odds, he rose up the ranks to eventually become the magazine's deputy editor, spending a quarter century curating tastes at one of the most storied cultural shops ever assembled. Written with equal parts affection, cultural exploration, and nostalgia, *Dilettante* is a defining story within that most magical time and place in the culture of media. It is also a highly readable memoir that skillfully delivers a universal coming-of-age story about growing up and finding your place in the world.



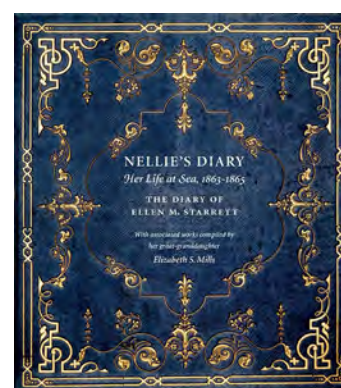
### Dear Mr. Ward: Complaint Letters to Montgomery Ward from the American Heartland 1932-1942

Evan Gregg '97 Editor and Annotator Evan H. Gregg, 2022  
*Dear Mister Ward* is a collection of letters sent to the complaints department of the Montgomery Ward catalog by customers living in the rural midwest between 1932 and 1942. The letters were saved by Gregg's grandma when she worked as a correspondent in the St Paul, MN, catalog office. Hilarious, weird, and occasionally a little heartbreaking, the letters touch on topics that include fashion, relationships, technology, loneliness, debt, and toilet paper, and provide a glimpse at the daily lives and preoccupations of rural Americans from the peak of the Great Depression into the early days of World War II. Available at [www.dearmisterward.com](http://www.dearmisterward.com).

### Nellie's Diary: Her Life at Sea, 1863-1865

Compiled by Elizabeth S. Mills  
Stinehour Editions, 2022

In the 19th century, on the Maine coast, it was not uncommon for a merchant ship captain to bring his wife on extended voyages. Ellen (Cutter) Starrett sailed with her husband, Captain Henry A. Starrett,



from 1863 to 1884, crossing the world's oceans while raising their two children, Anne and Frank, on shipboard. Her exquisitely detailed diary, kept during her first two years at sea, records both the tedium and the excitement of her daily life on the Ship T.J. Southard. Libby Mills grew up in Belfast, ME, in the house where her great-grandparents settled after living at sea for twenty-one years; in this setting she was steeped in all things nautical. She kept her attachment to the Maine coast, living part of the year on an outside island and sailing the coast with her late husband. In publishing this diary, she brings to the public eye a family's life on shipboard in the 1860s. Available at [stinehoureditions.com](http://stinehoureditions.com)

P.S.



Dispatches from this morning's am barn.

FROM THE PUTNEY SCHOOL INSTAGRAM @THEPUTNEYSCHOOL

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**JUNE 9-11, 2022**

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**CLASSES OF**

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<b>1958</b>	<b>1963</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>1986</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2017</b>
<b>1959</b>	<b>1964</b>	<b>1976</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2018</b>
		<b>1977</b>	<b>1988</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2019</b>
		<b>1978</b>	<b>1989</b>			<b>2020</b>

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# The Putney School

Elm Lea Farm, 418 Houghton Brook Road, Putney, Vermont 05346



**Delectable Mountain, etching, 11" x 16", 1987**

Inspired by a view of Mt. Monadnock from a particularly uneventful meeting of the Advisory Council, this image represents "the source and cause of every joy," according to Dante, whose *Inferno* Brian illustrated in 1989.