

ISSUE NO. 147 / SPRING 2024

PUTNEY POST

Old Court Athletic Space

•THE•
Farm
•ISSUE•





The Putney School



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The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons. I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will.

EXCERPT FROM "LIVING LIKE WEASELS" BY ANNIE DILLARD

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In Memoriam

On the Cover: Pete Stickney taking the cows out. Photo by Laura Stewart

TOC photo: Nicole '26 walks the herd up Houghton Brook Road, from their autumn pasture near the Field House.



Putney's current barn in its early years. Insets: the old barn (right), and the "new barn" under construction (left)



DEAR READER,

The Putney School began, as so many stories do, with the planting of seeds. In May of 1935, four months before the first students arrived, “...there could be no turning back. It was seed time on the farm, the anchor of the school, and thus the Putney School had already begun,” wrote Susan McIntosh Lloyd ’52 in her definitive book about Putney. Before Putney had students, it had seeds, cows, a working farm: “The anchor of the school.”

But. The school opened in the fall of 1935, and its barn **burned down** a year later, in the fall of 1936. Science Teacher Hugh MacDougall—heroically, one could argue—saved the school’s bull at the last minute. Roofs of neighboring buildings were doused, those structures spared. A local milk company filled its tanker with water from a nearby brook and contributed to the firefighting. The barn was a total loss. Animals adopted Lower Farm’s barn as a temporary habitat. Despite the steep financial setback, Carmelita Hinton dug in, dreamed up, and then built the most modern dairy barn in southern Vermont. It stands to this day, a testament to and cornerstone of the Putney story, and our students’ experiences here through the decades.

Now, almost 90 years later, the rhythms of this school are deeply rooted. Each decade writes its own verse to the song that is The Putney School, but the refrain remains the same, a work song with the steady downbeat of an early morning walk to the barn, of shovels in stalls and milking machines.

In this issue, we endeavor to capture the reach of The Putney School’s barn in both scope and depth: China, California, the *New York Times*, the school’s fiber arts studio, science labs, and history classrooms, even a bright pink sweater from The Gap. Throughout the issue, alumni reflect on their time in the barn and the impact that experience has had in their lives. We also celebrate Pete Stickney, who has spent almost 30 years caring for our dairy herd and our students, centering the farm as an essential piece of the Putney education.

Before you read this issue, close your eyes and think of the barn—the smell of hay and manure, the sounds of animals and of work, the cows’ liquid eyes. Put yourself there if you can, and ask, “What’s my barn story?” We hope you’ll think about it. We hope you’ll share your story with a friend.

Best wishes from the hill,

ALISON FRYE
Editor

DARRY MADDEN
Publisher



SMILE PETE LOVES

Dairy MAN

Pete Stickney
Bids Farewell
After 27 Years
on the Farm

STORY BY
ALISON FRYE



THIS STORY about The Putney School's dairy herd, and the bleary-eyed teenagers who wake early to work with that herd, starts in Norway. Trondheim, Norway, a lush and colorful historic city on the Trondheim Fjord, six hours north of Oslo. The city of 200,000 people hosts the annual World Cheese Awards.

The 2023 World Cheese Awards—the most important cheese competition that exists—received over 4,500 entrants. Only seven “Super Gold” awards were given to U.S. cheesemakers, and two Super Golds were awarded to Parish Hill Creamery in Westminster, Vermont, owned by Pete Dixon '76, whose milk—*all of it*—comes from The Putney School.

JOIN US for a Zoom event celebrating Pete on May 14. Register at putneyschool.org/alumni

Pete Stickney with the bustle of PM Barn crew in the background

Which is another way of saying that the milk that produces the best cheese in the United States is brought to market by a crew of teenagers that rotates and learns anew six times a year.

How do they do it?

“It’s hard work. It’s attention to detail. It’s a lot of kids who care. My friends who are dairy farmers think this is nuts, that you can take 16-year-olds who have never seen a cow before and produce this quality milk,” says Pete Stickney, Putney’s farm manager since 1996.

Pete insists that he is not the center of this story. But the quality of the Putney herd, and the experience students receive in the barn, reveal his genius.

****ORIGINS****

In the 1990s, Pete saw the writing on the wall. His family had been dairy farmers in Saxtons River for generations, and Pete worked with his father on that farm for 15 years after college. Small dairy farms across Vermont were closing at an alarming rate. What did Pete, a lifelong farmer, do when he got the job at Putney? “I started reading *a lot* about progressive education.”

As it turned out, it was the learning he’d been doing his whole life. “That’s how I was raised. Hands on. You meet the child or student where they are and say, ‘You can do *this*.’ It’s never occurred to the kid that they can do that because they’ve never done it before until they’re empowered to do it. That is how I’ve met students. ‘You can do this. I’m going to teach you.’”

Pete adds, “The kids who have been empowered by the farm experience are not necessarily farming now.” A barn sub, for example, walks into the barn and says, “Give me any job.” Shovel gutters, feed, milk, you name it. “I love that. It’s so powerful for that student to walk in there and say that. A lot of these kids are doing something their parents can’t do, or most of the faculty for that matter. Many of these kids think the only thing they can do to impress their parents is to get an A. This school is about something different.”

Many of the best teachers are themselves eager learners who stay open and curious, willing to grow. Pete felt especially encouraged by Emily Jones, whose trust in Pete grounded him. “Emily created a safe space to fail, if you fail with your eyes open and learn something from it. ‘This is what I thought. This is what I did. This is what I now realize. This is what I’ll do next time.’ She created that atmosphere for all of us. And it’s a really good way to work. Failing with some humility. She created that, and I’ve always appreciated it.”



Three generations of dairy cows at Harvest Festival 2023: from left, Freckle, Fiji, Fresno, Francine, Falaise

At the end of this school year, Pete will hang up his hat and turn over the keys to the farm truck.

****SMILE PETE LOVES YOU****

If you've been to the barn, you remember how it feels. Its smell, its size, the sounds of the cows and students working. Alumni visit regularly. Pete rarely remembers their names. "I'm terrible with names!" he confesses. But he knows their stories. He knows who they *are*.

"Sarah Ross Bussey '99 and I had this great fight outside the ring of Tunbridge Fair. We were all wearing Putney School t-shirts. She was there ready to show a calf. I said, 'Tuck in your shirt.' She said, 'Why?' I said, 'It shows respect to the judge.' She said 'I haven't tucked in my shirt since I was five.' And I said 'I don't care, tuck it in.' She refused. I said I'd get someone else to show the calf. She was furious. And she did it. She went through Reed College, working in the court system. She said she'd be in the courtroom, and was the only woman, and was the only white person. She's so ballsy." Sarah returned to the barn (and happily ran into Pete) last summer. She recalled, "Pete was one of the most influential people in my life as young person. He saw in me capacities that I had not yet tapped. During a period in life when I needed guidance but lacked that insight, Pete stepped in like a second father offering support, mentorship, and opportunities to push me." Indeed.

Leo Gadick '17 also recently visited Pete at the barn. Soft-spoken with an observant eye, Leo seemed to be on a philosopher's track during his time as a student. Instead, he has become an EMT in Boston. Leo was thrilled to see Pete. "He didn't come out and say it, but he implied that doing this made him know he could be an EMT. It's the Leos that interest me more than the kids who are farming now. The fact that they came into that barn—it was a huge challenge,



and they surmounted it. Alice Green [see p. 10]. Leo Gadick. Sarah Ross. People carry it with them." He pauses, moves on, then returns to this vignette. "The Leo thing. It really lifted me."

Graham Berwind '47 endowed the farm with a \$4 million gift in 2008 after a visit to campus. Pete led Graham and his daughters on a tour of the barn. Ever wise, Pete knew what to do: "I kept my mouth shut. And Graham's stories flowed, 'I remember there were horses here. I remember taking a truck with no brakes down to town to get gravel, I remember . . .' At the end of it, he said, 'Pete, that was amazing,' and I didn't say a word. I know enough to keep quiet. You just let the memories wash over. He hadn't been in that barn since 1947." After receiving the gift, the school was able to tackle deferred maintenance, and the mandate of "Keep the farm going" made its way into the school's budget line.

Every iconic bit of Putney lore has a backstory. Take, for example, the "SMILE PETE LOVES YOU" painted on the barn's silo. For people who came to Putney in this century, it's always been there, a humorous wink, sweet and straightforward. Sarah Ross—of the Tunbridge Fair fight—and friends

painted this as their senior prank the night before graduation, as "a way to blast to the community how cherished Pete was and is." This is what this is about. You're shoveling shit, you had to tuck your t-shirt in, and you know that Pete loves you.

****THE WORK OF TEENAGERS ****

Glenn Littledale '76 ran the Putney barn for a handful of years in the late 1980s, and teaches science at the school now. He knows his dairy cows, and pulls back the cover on how important Pete's work has been. "Pete is a cow man. He's a two-millionth generation dairy farmer. Pete has always concentrated on spectacular cows who have wonderful type, can stand in the barn for a long time, and can make milk over the long haul. That brought pride and joy in having a barn where you see perfect legs and feet. You see rear udders that go way up high. Level udders. Everything is straight out of *Hoard's Dairyman*. Everything is as it should be. If you're a dairy person, that's poetry."

It takes attention and patience to create top-quality milk with a crew of students, a balance of oversight and experiential

lessons



Pete, left, takes comfort in the wisdom of Putney's first farm manager, Hutch Maynard, right, whose gravestone reads, "Seed time and harvest shall not cease."

education. Usually students do the job correctly, but not always. "It's *constant* reminders to the kids," says Pete. "A kid might do something right five times in a row, but that does not mean they're going to do it right the sixth time." For example, washing a cow's teats. "You're doing two things: you're cleaning the teats, and you're stimulating milk let-down. So you have to rub them with warm water and then dry them carefully with a clean dry towel. That stimulates a hormone release. Kids will tell me there's no milk. 'Well, you haven't washed her, and you've thrown down a perfectly dry towel.' It's an example of something that comes up over and over and over."

LESSONS

How can the barn's impact be measured? Is it in the number of farmers the school graduates? Is it in the award-winning milk? It might better be measured by the stories alumni tell in the back half of this magazine, memories of empowerment, early mornings, and pride in a job done well.

Again, Glenn Littledale fills out the picture. "Pete is incredible in his capacity to have a joyful time being with kids. Without that, the farm is still the farm experience, but the tone is different. In Pete's heart, he loves being with teenagers. That's pretty special, and you don't always get that. There's a skill set that you absolutely need in that

position, and that doesn't always come with being good with teenagers."

Typical of Putney, Pete, who is usually wearing a hat, wore many: search committees to hire both Emily Jones and Danny O'Brien, girls' basketball coach, trustee, chair of the field house committee, history teacher. Pete went back to school to get a history degree to teach when he was in his 40s, and earned a reputation as a person who holds students accountable, creates a safe space for girls, and for teaching that having empathy for people who you don't relate to matters. In the classroom, Pete found a balance. "There's a contrast between constructing a curriculum and managing cows. It's night and day. You use different sides of your brain."

Former English teacher Zoe Parker introduced Annie Dillard's "Living Like Weasels" to the curriculum. One day, while Pete was teaching that reading, things went sideways. In "Living Like Weasels," a woman sits on a stump, sees a weasel, wonders what the weasel thinks, and ponders the purpose of life. Pete sees "a harried woman who got the kids to school, has a job, has to take care of her mother. She looks at this weasel and thinks 'Are you happier than I am?'" Pete asked the kids, "Who wrote this poem? What do you see?" He loves open-ended questions with

no correct answers. The boys in the class started criticizing the woman, saying she's an art school dropout. Pete kept them after class, and had a clear message for them. "I don't tell you guys how to think very often, but what the hell was that? We take one of the most brilliant pieces of writing in the American canon, and you guys are making fun of the author? Is it because she's a woman?" They didn't say a word. I gave them something to think about."

Pete, attuned to classroom dynamics, opens doors for students who don't easily feel confident speaking in class. "I'd have an online dialogue with kids—many of them girls—who couldn't elbow their way in. I'd know what they were thinking about that reading, and I'd be able to say, 'Isn't that similar to what we talked about?' It gave them a space. I didn't want to put them on the spot, but wanted them to know they were a part of the conversation." His strong presence in the classroom opened space for the women and held the men accountable. "I wasn't perfect at it. Recognizing it for something to strive for is important."

** PARTING THOUGHTS **

After almost three decades, what sticks with him?

"It was a mutually beneficial relationship," he reflects. "I got to stay home next to my parents, live in this gorgeous place, and meet people from around the world."

Pete also expresses appreciation for his wife, Patty, and her patience with the day-to-day demands of his work. After years of life as a farmer and farmer's wife—cows need to be milked on national holidays and weekends—Patty and Pete have a stretch of freedom ahead that they haven't known in more than twenty-five years. Travel. Kayaks. Bikes. Family. Maybe another teaching gig for Pete, at least for a few years, as he's not yet ready to retire. In late March of 2020, Pete's scheduled afternoon activities—cleaning sugaring lines and setting up fencing—needed to be done, but the student crew was home, learning online. Pete and Patty took on the tasks together. "We loved it. That was a really sweet time for us, working together in early spring weather."

In a career of meaningful work, the ups and downs level out, and contentment takes

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IT'S BRILLIANT. IT'S PUTNEY.

root. The "kids are different these days" refrain floats around on campuses from one decade to the next. Pete sees it too. "The helicopter parent has become the bulldozer parent: *my child will never experience discomfort*. Yes, that makes my job harder, unless I get up on the other side of the bed, and then it makes it more important."

What advice does Pete have for the next farm manager? Patience. With the kids. With the whole scene. "It will always require patience—you don't ever come up to speed. If you think we're going to get there, it's going to be hard for you." Teaching and learning. It's messy. It's brilliant. It's Putney.

As we turn off the lights and close the door on this chapter, the story does not end, because the rhythms of life and death, of milking, learning, and growing, are not tied to any one person. In fact, Pete's favorite cow is bred to his favorite bull. "She's not going to calve until the week after I leave. It's the feeling of . . ." Pete searches for the words, his eyes looking out to the long horizon. He's smiling. "...It's best said by Hutch Maynard, Putney's first farm manager: her gravestone at Lower Farm says, 'Seed time and harvest shall not cease.'" ■



BEFORE THE SUN RISES

New York Times Reporter
ALICE CALLAHAN '98
on the Gifts of the Farm

STORY BY **BETH STICKNEY P'23**



THE SUMMER AFTER her first year at Cornell, Alice Green Callahan '98 came back to Putney. Specifically, she came back to the farm. She found herself back at Putney again the following summer.

Maybe it was because she didn't arrive at Putney until junior year. Maybe it was the cows she had grown so fond of, like Milly and Nicky. And maybe it had something to do with Pete Stickney. The two forged a deep connection as the 16-year-old from a small, rural town in Kentucky made the transition to broader horizons (or should I say, pastures?).



This page and following:
Alice and Pete showing
calves at the Addison County
Fair in the mid-1990s



Pete was there for her from the beginning, perhaps in a more profound way than he realized at the time. You see, Alice's father had died when she was twelve. Right away, she sensed that Pete understood her, and she saw him as a father figure. "I knew I could count on him," she says. Working under his guidance on the farm, she "felt solid" in herself again.

Pete's wife Patty says there is "magic" in the way he "engages with kids, particularly the kids that show such an interest in the farm." Clearly, Alice was one of those kids, fitting right in on the farm, and at the Stickney home, too, as Patty recalled. Over the years, the Stickneys have hosted many boarding students, for meals and afternoons of hiking and baking and tender loving care when homesickness sets in.

As much as Alice counted on Pete, he knew that he could count on her, too. He saw right away that she was "enormously capable and curious." He's known for taking the measure of a kid, sensing what challenges and responsibilities they might handle, and then giving them "the opportunity to take on what they can take on," as he puts it.

Pete told me recently that his most clear memory of Alice is the moment when he sent her off to the Addison County Fair to show some Putney calves. "I sent her with a string of cattle and left her...she just did it," he said.

Alice says her memories of the fairs all blend together, though she's pretty sure the photos she supplied to us are from that particular one. "Maybe it's notable that I don't remember much from [that day]. I must have felt completely capable of caring for those cows and preparing them for the show, and that was in large part because I knew that Pete believed I could handle it. And if he thought I could do it, I was game."

In fact, Alice says she was much more active on the farm at Putney than she was on her parents' farm. In the winter of her first year on campus, she was tossed right into the thick of it—AM Barn, the proving ground of a boarding student's commitment to life on the hill, the bonding experience of a lifetime, and perhaps the muckiest job of all. She was able to see the beauty in those early morning hours. She remembers the exhilaration of "being the first person in, flipping on the lights, feeling needed by the animals." By senior year, she was living in one of Putney's rustic cabins and had taken on the responsibility of doing the last

The Putney farm program is a gem. For most students, it is their first opportunity to see a calf being born, to name it, and to get up before dawn to care for it and the rest of the herd. Some take pride in the fact that milk from Putney's herd helps create the award-winning cheeses produced by local cheese-makers. All take comfort in the fact that Pete is right there with them for early morning barn duties.

But not many students come from farm life *and* find their lives transformed by the Putney farm. That was the case with Alice. Feeling bored with the education she was receiving in Kentucky, Alice began thinking about boarding schools. Vermont seemed to make sense, given the fact that she fondly recalled visits to her grandmother's small cabin in Cabot. But still, Alice says, "I think that when I arrived at Putney, my sense of identity was shaken." She felt "how strange it was to be surrounded by people who knew nothing about me, didn't know my parents, didn't know the stretch of creek where I grew up." While she had indeed grown up on a small farm, Kentucky was a much different environment than Vermont.



barn check as she made her way back for the night.

"Pete really counted on me to do that," Alice says.

Alice and Pete both recall walking the sheep pastures together, one summer after Alice did a college semester abroad studying rotational grazing in New Zealand. (Her major at Cornell was animal science). She remembers being the cheeky college student with lots of "new" ideas. Pete, in fact, was already practicing the method. He doesn't recall Alice being at all brash or pushy, only how they trod the hills, "making decisions together." Again, Pete's magic at work—treating the young adult as a peer and colleague, meeting her where she was and helping her see where she could go.

"I was a hard worker, I knew that, and Pete valued my work ethic and made me feel like if I was willing to put in the work, I could handle the cows at the fair, or getting in the hay, or speaking up as a student trustee in a room full of intimidating-looking adults," Alice says.

As she rose to whatever challenge Pete presented, her confidence grew. "I think I have carried that belief in myself through grad school, book projects, parenting and now as a

IN THE WINTER OF HER FIRST YEAR ON CAMPUS, SHE WAS TOSSED RIGHT INTO THE THICK OF IT—**AM BARN**, THE PROVING GROUND OF A BOARDING STUDENT'S COMMITMENT TO LIFE ON THE HILL, THE BONDING EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME, AND PERHAPS THE MUCKIEST JOB OF ALL. SHE WAS ABLE TO SEE THE BEAUTY IN THOSE **EARLY MORNING HOURS**.

reporter at *The New York Times*," Alice says. "And learning at Putney how much you can accomplish before the sun rises hasn't hurt either." ■



Alice has a PhD in nutritional biology from the University of California–Davis and writes about nutrition for *The New York Times*, working remotely from her home in Eugene, Oregon. (Pete and Patty report that they regularly read her articles.) She is also the author of *The Science of Mom: A Research-Based Guide To Your Baby's First Year* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

Callahan uses the barn in a creative writing assignment while a student at Putney. Brian Morgan, mentioned in the piece, is a former head of school. >>

Thursday Paragraph

Alice

keep it
quiet
with ya?

what is this
the
middle
ages?



~~At 10:00~~ The barn is like a hushed cathedral, and I move about quietly and quickly. It is 10:00 feeding for the cows, a late night ritual for us all. ~~It is the time~~ Brian Morgan is driving around on his night check, homework is being finished or started, and a couple of students share ramen from a pot between them. In the barn, the cows heave their tired-mother bodies to their feet, shift in their stalls, and wait for food. I break a bale in front of them as they watch, ~~tearing~~ attention towards the smell of good rowen labored over last summer. Some patiently wait for me to throw them a flake, and others eagerly drop to their knees and stretch towards a neighbor's ration. Gem gets a half a scoop of grain because she's losing weight. I call the calves in for the night and shut the door against the cold. I glance around to see that all is as it should be and then walk ~~towards~~ ^{through} the door, turning off lights as I go. The thought of the barn ghost passes through my mind as I feel my way in the dark to the door, but I hear the ~~quiet breath~~ of cows munching on hay, and knowing security, ~~with~~ wish them goodnight.



Alice, Alice, I love that silent meditation feel, the halt-silence, the sumant cherry, the steam, and getting to know them and the ghostly intention when you come in...



BARN. BUSINESS. LEADERSHIP.

Cyane Dandridge '84 found her love of leadership in AM Barn. Since her time at Putney figuring out how to get the best work out of sleepy high schoolers, she's started eight different businesses. One of those—The School of Environmental Leadership (SEL)—is now in its 27th year. SEL seeks to transform public education by building leaders for a just and sustainable world, through an innovative model which is sustainability-focused, equity forward, and centered in rigorous, interdisciplinary problem-based learning. Dandridge spoke with us about the rigors of being barn head, how it nurtured her interest in entrepreneurship, and how Putney was the perfect place for her to grow.

You were barn head when you were a student?

I did two terms as barn head. That's how much I loved it.

But I also did a lot of other things around the farm. I was really involved. I did maple sugaring and just loved it. It was so much fun—going around and drinking the sap, which I'm sure was really bad for you, but right out of the bucket. And then going in and getting the early cup of hot sap that was just kind of barely warmed through, just a little bit more sweet. And then having a cup of actual syrup.

I remember driving the tractor and getting stuck in the mud and having to figure out how to get out. All of those different things were just amazing.

I actually really liked the winter barn. That was one of my favorite parts.

Did this experience spark your interest in entrepreneurship?

I did already have those proclivities—my father was an entrepreneur. But what Putney enabled me to do is to test it out and make a lot of mistakes, but in a very safe place. So I could be barn head and try and roll people out of bed and have them absolutely refuse. And then I had to figure out what to do. Putney didn't give me a list of things and say, okay, this is how to be a barn head. They said, you're a barn head. You need to have your crew at the barn or else everybody's going to have to take up their work. And so how do I motivate somebody, a teenager, a teenage boy who doesn't want to get out of bed? And then when I get in there, all he wants to do is lean on his shovel and sleep. What do I do with that?

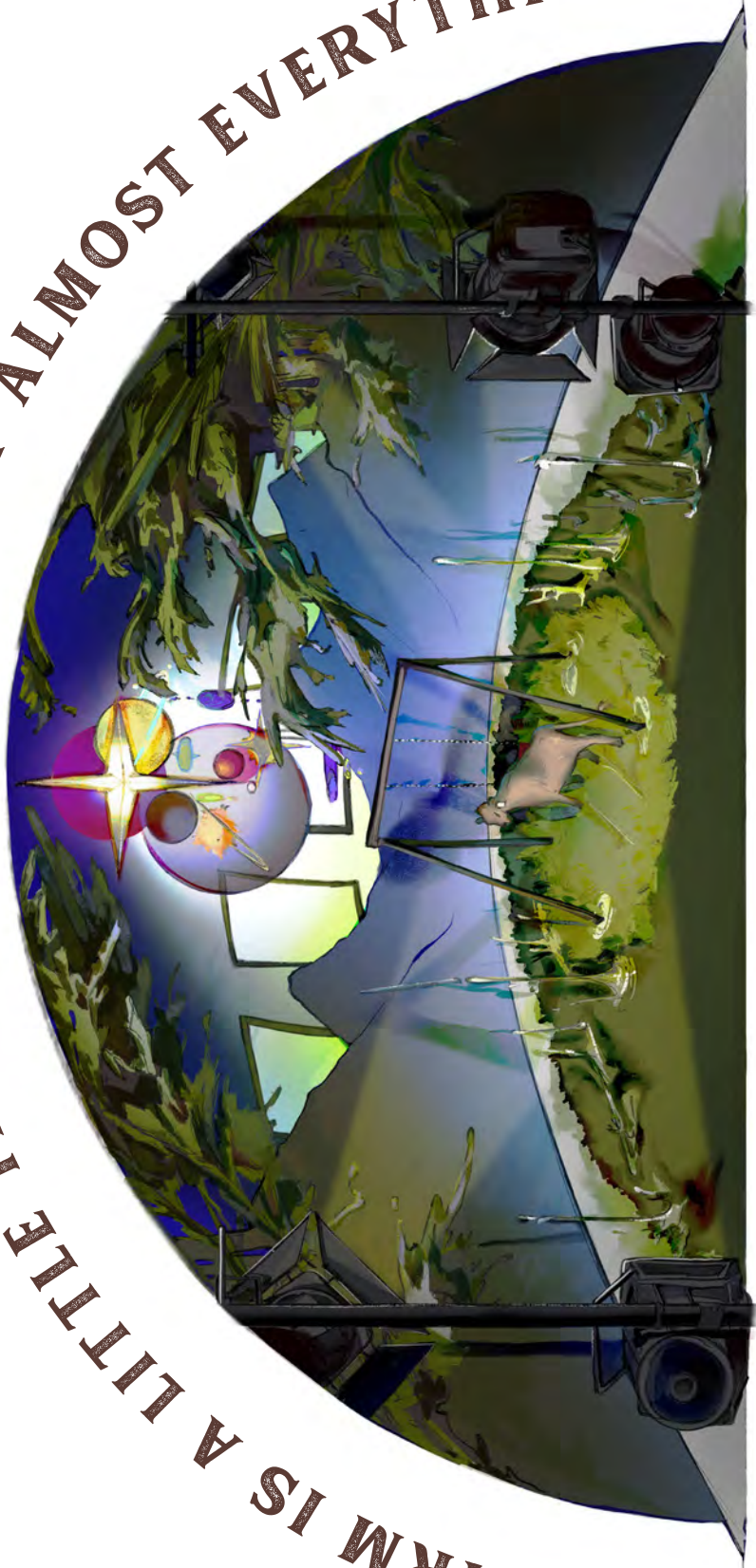
And how did the experience with barn inform your most enduring ventures, The School for Environmental Leadership and Strategic Energy Innovations (SEI)?

The whole focus of my job and everything that I do is about sustainability and climate protection. A lot of it is centered around the built environment and building energy efficiency and climate work. But that's all with the really core vision of that our earth is a system. It's the Gaia principle. How can we make sure that our world is supported and that we're reducing our impacts on the earth? I was already on this path since childhood, so Putney was absolutely pivotal for me. That was absolutely the place that I wanted to go and where I wanted to be. ■



<< Dandridge in a poncho she wove, collecting eggs from Putney's farm.

THE FARM IS A LITTLE TINY MICROCOSM OF ALMOST EVERYTHING.



NEW LAMBS

ART, HISTORY, BIOLOGY

For Melissa Johnson '77, teaching weaving is teaching history. In the late fall of 2022, a few very engaged weavers asked Johnson if they could really start at the beginning of the weaving process—the very beginning—by breeding two ewes, seeing them through their pregnancies, delivering the lambs, raising them and then onto shearing, carding, and spinning the new lambs' wool.

And so, that winter the small animal barn became an extension of the weaving studio and the history classrooms.

STILLBORN LAMBS

BIOLOGY

The news of the two stillborn lambs traveled through the campus community. It reached Sofia Sigman '23, a senior at the time, in the middle of an anatomy independent study.

Sigman had designed this self-directed study because she is interested in medicine. The story of the lambs created another opportunity, one to hone her dissection skills. As a student, science teacher Dawn Zweig said that Sigman was always engaged with the dissection process, and always pushing herself to learn and improve.

THE DAIRY OPERATION

ECONOMICS

In order to teach the abstraction of economics, history teacher Kristin Dawley leans on the solid red reality of the dairy barn.

Every entry-level economics class will teach supply and demand. It is the bread and butter of the field. Dawley has noticed, however, that while teenagers can readily connect with what it means to be a consumer, most cannot connect with what it means to be a producer.

But Putney students—every last one—have a personal experience in the dairy industry, for though it is small, Putney's operation is,

THE LAND

ENGLISH, SOCIAL SCIENCE, NATURAL SCIENCE

In order to learn genetics, students must first learn about the bedrock under Elm Lea Farm.

That is the very first thing Putney freshmen are asked to grapple with. They take soil samples. They ask, "How did this place come to look the way it does?" They make sense of the tectonic plates beneath their feet, the mountains and valleys carved by glaciers that surround them, and finally, up into the autumn day in which they find themselves to begin to see how an

The days grew longer, Moon Unit and Kiwi grew heavy. In April, winter and spring at the same time, the ewes were observed as restless, and without appetite. One day, Kiwi began to labor. She delivered a **stillborn lamb**.

At this very moment, Brian Quarrier '05, who had provided the ram for this project, drove by and noticed Johnson's car. He saw Johnson and the students, the lifeless baby, the shock. And he knew that they had to see if there was another.

Johnson scrubbed up and, having never done it before, reached inside of the ewe and pulled out another lamb. And finally, a third.

For Augusta '25, a self-described city kid, these were many life-altering firsts at one time.

"It was the first time that I had seen anything be born, but it was also the first time that I had seen anything die," she said. "It was a really transformative experience."

The beauty of this project, said Noah Hoskins, a teacher in Putney's history department, is that it allows students to experience the history of the human species in the world.

"When we look at the **10,000-year history** of humans, the experience of animal husbandry, of the domestication of animals, and of our reliance on products produced by other animals and harvested from other animals, we understand something about what it means to be human that can't be taught in a classroom," he said.

For Augusta, this program, and its gentle weaving of the animals and the classroom together, is so much bigger than the sum of its parts.

"Being on a farm and working with animals, it's life and death, it's day to day. And I think that this is what makes all of Putney's philosophy about education *real*."

In this case, she pushed herself one step farther. Beyond a straightforward dissection, Sigman learned how to conduct an autopsy.

"For this project," said Sigman, "I took it upon myself to figure out what the issue was with these lambs, whether this was a case of infection, disease, mismothering, etc."

Zweig, for her part, supported the academic change of course.

Zweig teaches a lot of dissection, and she doesn't love the industry that raises animals specifically for it. Not only are they raised to be killed, but they are preserved in chemicals that make their tissues no longer feel right. For Sigman, there was more benefit. In preparing for the autopsy, she had to plan a dissection that allowed her to use the guide she found.

"This taught me a lot about how to prepare a dissection and how to best explore the autopsy guide through dissection," she said.

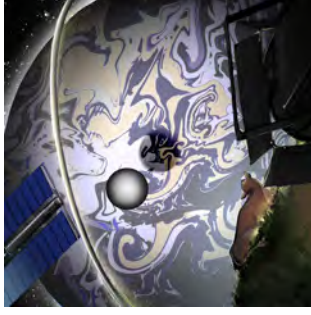
The upshot is not just that one senior prepared herself for medical school in a self-directed and hands-on way—the farm itself will feel the effects.

"By looking at the lambs from our farm and figuring out what had happened to them, I was looking at information that would be relevant to the farm in the future," said Sigman.

**STORY BY
DARRY MADDEN**

nonetheless, a dairy farm subject to all (but one—labor) of the vicissitudes of the market.

Her lesson begins by looking at how technological solutions like **selective breeding** and robotic milking systems and specialized feeding plans for cows based on lactation cycles have shifted the supply of milk and how that, in turn, has impacted its price.



Of course, the advances in technology and the increase in supply have, for the most part, not translated into better prices for farmers. Pete Stickney comes in at this point in the lesson to talk about his lifetime of experience in the Vermont dairy industry, and how these technological changes affected it writ large, and right here at Putney, and the way that milk does not operate in a perfect free market and is subject to price volatility.

"It's great. Students process this information—supply, demand, what shifts them—and look at how it has all played out on our farm," said Dawley, "which is a little tiny microcosm of almost everything."

agricultural economy might be born from these conditions.

Once the geological stage is set, the actors arrive: indigenous people, colonists, farmers.

There is the drama of history—the triumph, the catastrophe. Wolves, mountain lions, sheep. Farmsteads. Production and goods. Surplus. Commodities. A booming dairy industry.

It is then, with this sweeping scientific and historical background, that Putney freshmen enter the barn with fresh appreciation for the softly lowing cows and get a very hands-on education in genetics.

This involves not just understanding how genes work through the lens of the attributes of Putney's dairy herd, but also the analysis of data that farmer Pete Stickney has on his herd and their potential bulls. They do a mock breeding—choosing a sire based on the genetic traits they are hoping to create, from physicality to the components of her milk.

"The buy-in from students is so much stronger when the work feels authentic, relevant, and tangible," said science and Humans in the Natural World Teacher Abby Verney-Fink. ■

**ILLUSTRATIONS BY
MAYA '25**

*completed as part of her junior year
Studio Art class*



From the Archives

FROM A FARM NEAR SIAN

EXCERPT OF
JOAN HINTON '39 LETTER,
"FROM A FARM NEAR SIAN"



1966. Joan Hinton on a Beijing farm.

In our last issue, we shared a *New York Times* piece about Geoffrey Hinton, Carmelita Hinton's grand-nephew. In it, Hinton, known as the "Godfather of Artificial Intelligence," warned about AI's dangers, following his much-publicized resignation from Google. At the time, we also thought about Joan Hinton '39, daughter of Carmelita. Joan, a physicist, worked on the Manhattan Project, and then, horrified at the use of the atomic bomb in Japan, became an activist for peace, and in reaction to the Cold War's emergence, moved to China and spent the rest of her life there on a dairy farm. In a 2002 interview with NPR, Joan said, "I did not want to spend my life figuring out how to kill people. I wanted to figure out how to let people have a better life, not a worse one."

Joan and her husband, Erwin "Sid" Engst, designed and built China's first mechanical farm, inventing and refining agricultural systems and equipment, including a continuous-flow automatic milk pasteurizer, managing a herd with 200 cows over the course of more than four decades.

Joan Hinton's contribution to a January 1963 publication, "Letters from China," by Anna Louise Strong, captures this moment in time. We share an excerpt of Joan's letter, "From a Farm Near Sian," here. It was written at a time of revolutionary fervor, the Cuban Missile Crisis had just happened, and mechanization was just starting to reach rural China.

I WANTED TO
FIGURE OUT
HOW TO LET
PEOPLE HAVE
A BETTER
LIFE, NOT A
WORSE ONE.

JOAN HINTON '39

AS

AS FOR LIFE HERE on the Sian farm, things are certainly on the move these days. In line with the directives of the tenth plenary session of the Chinese CP central committee, this whole huge country is going in for agriculture in an unprecedented way—our farm of course included. Hundreds of healthy, laughing, enthusiastic students have come from the city to join in our production. New Chinese-made tractors and farm machinery of all kinds are on the way. Bulldozers have been leveling the fields day and night preparing them for irrigation while our farm trucks have been put on special duty hauling bricks for new buildings to house our rapidly increasing population of both dairy cows and people. The new thing this year is the stress on technical improvement. The peasants throughout the country, having completed the job of organizing their collective economy, a job which culminated in the consolidation of the people's communes, are now turning to the job of mechanization, of finally and completely liberating themselves from the back-breaking toil that was old China. The whole of the country's industry is being geared to support them in this task. On

Joan Hinton, center, with husband Sid, left, in 1949.



THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE MACHINE IS TO LIGHTEN THE BURDEN OF OUR DAIRY WORKERS WHO NOW HAVE TO DUMP THOUSANDS OF POUNDS OF MILK A DAY THROUGH OUR PRESENT PASTEURIZER BY HAND.

JOAN HINTON '39

our farm, people everywhere are thinking up all possible means of mechanizing, especially in those parts of the farm work which require heavy manual labor.

As for me, in line with all this, I am working again on that continuous flow automatic milk pasteurizer which I started in 1958. The main purpose of the machine is to lighten the burden of our dairy workers who now have to dump thousands of pounds of milk a day through our present pasteurizer by hand. We had to stop working on the machine in 1958 because it was so difficult to get parts, but now conditions are much, much better. I can just go to the city and buy all sorts of things I couldn't get before.

As I hunt around for parts, I get a chance to see quite a bit of the city too. It is really amazing how much food there is these days. Literally mountains of Chinese cabbage lie piled on the sidewalks, while meat is sold all over the city and the butcher shops are lined with neat fresh carcasses. There are fruit stands everywhere, selling not only local apples and pears, but oranges and tangerines too, sent up from the south.

... The people's minds and energies are occupied with the colossal creative problem of the modernization of China's agriculture, with the immediate task of preparing the conditions for an exceptionally good harvest next year. ■

FALL 2023

PM BARN CREW

PHOTOS BY ANJA SCHUTZ

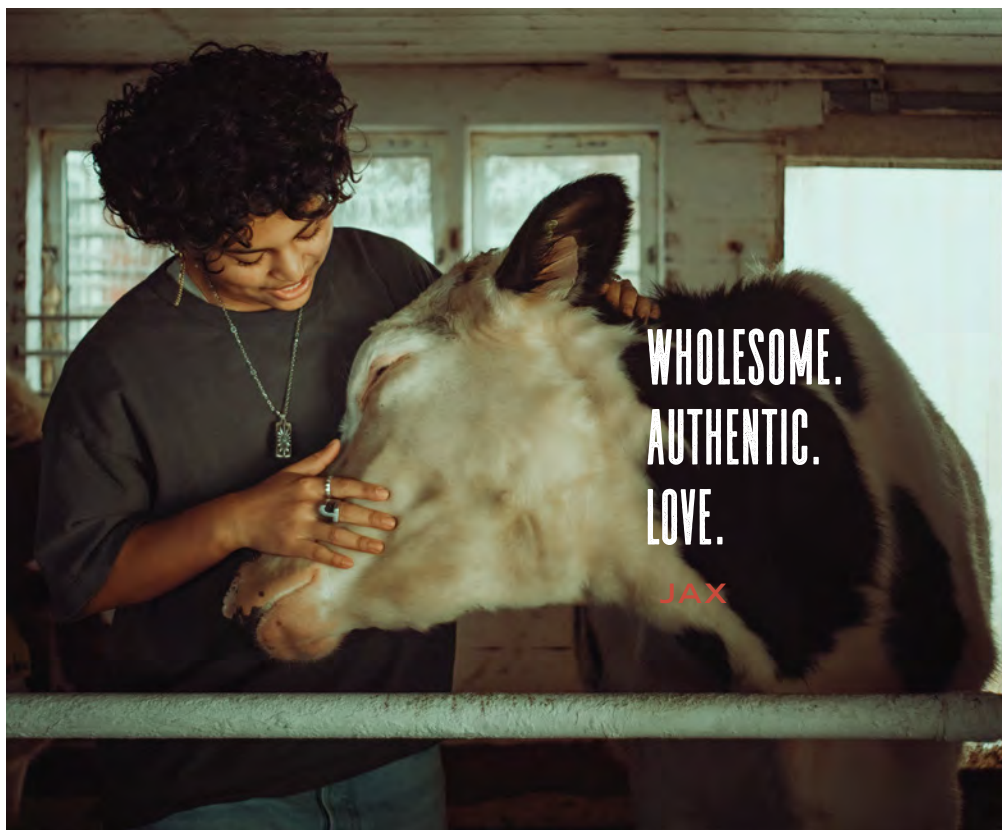
TOGETHERNESS.
MOTIVATING.
STRONG-WILLED.

KING



WHOLESOME.
AUTHENTIC.
LOVE.

JAX



We asked
members of the
fall crew to give
us three words
to describe their
experience with
PM Barn.

FUN.
EDUCATIONAL.
REWARDING.

MAX

MATERNAL.
TENDER.
ROCKIN'.

ILONA

Putney's barn has a brand new roof!
The old roof was more than 30 years
old and leaking in several places,
causing structural damage and spoiling
the hay inside. Crews did an excellent
job stripping off the deteriorating
shingles, repairing the subsurface—
most of which was around 85 years
old—and installing new shingles and
flashing on the nearly sheer-faced
pitch. The best feature? It doesn't leak!

ON THE HILL



LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

Before there was The Putney School, there was Elm Lea Farm. The venerable plot Carmelita Hinton discovered ninety years ago had supported generations of farmers before she arrived at the hilltop. This rocky soil has enriched thousands of Putney students since then. It is core to who we are: the farm operation is partially endowed by a generous gift from Graham Berwind '47. As long as there is a Putney School, Elm Lea Farm will be part of how we educate adolescents.

Our farm teaches students so much. In an early school viewbook, Carmelita explained, "Another purpose of the school, equally fundamental, (is) to promote an expert use of the hands, as well as the intellect, thus fostering a deep respect for all types of work. The students assist on the farm, they work on the lawn and in the forests. Hard physical work is a welcome challenge and a good mental balance."

Fast forward almost 100 years, and Elm Lea Farm serves the same role for our students. Last year, in anticipation of Pete Stickney's retirement from his role as our long-serving farm manager, we convened a committee to reaffirm the school's goals for the farm. We surveyed alumni and students, talked extensively with Pete and other farm employees, and engaged with employees who interact with the farm. At the end of the process, the goals we affirmed for Elm Lea Farm remain remarkably consistent to Carmelita's original vision. (see Farm Goals sidebar)

While our mission is more comprehensive now than in the early years of The Putney School (I doubt folks were throwing around terms such as "food systems" then), the core reasons for why a working farm is part of our school remain the same. Putney stands at the cutting edge of student-centered, progressive, and experiential learning because we remain true to the principles that are as old as our school. Our farm is just another example of how The Putney School balances tradition and innovation to help students—and the world they will inhabit—thrive.

All the best to all of you, and thank you.

DANNY O'BRIEN

Head of School



FARM GOALS

- Engage students' minds, bodies, and spirits in meaningful, consequential work
- Connect students to Putney values: educating on stewardship and sustainability, self-reliance and responsibility, interdependence and service, collaboration and teamwork, the joy of working outdoors, and reverence for the land
- Provide the opportunity for students to learn connections between different and integrated parts of the food system
- Attract families to a boarding school in Vermont, support the mental health of students, and engage with alumni and the wider community who feel connected to the farm



Athletics Update

Throughout the school year, Putney's teams have taken their "everyone is welcome" approach and successfully show up on the court, the field, and the trails. Three rowers competed in the Head of the Charles in Cambridge, MA. in October. Sadie '24, Aden '24, and Skylar '24 raced the largest three-day regatta in the world in an historic Putney first. Girls' soccer put together a league championship season built on a foundation of hustle and teamwork. Our cross-country running teams raced hard all season, and the boys took first place in the league, the girls third. Nordic skiers went in search of snow during a warm winter and participated in the Craftsbury Marathon. We also saw the return of GHoops ("girls basketball") this year, after a several-year hiatus. And our intrepid crew of mountain bikers headed to Mt. Snow in the fall for a spectacular day of downhill riding, with only a few bruises to show for it. Go sports!





NIMBUS DANCE

Professional dance company Nimbus Dance returned to Putney Dance residency and performance in February. Nimbus has performed at Putney annually for 12 straight years, making this unique creative and educational partnership one of the most enduring programs of its kind in the country.



Sarah '60 and
Geoffrey Gund,
leaders in education
and philanthropy.

Learning, Living, Leadership

The Legacy of Sarah Kerlin Gray Gund '60

Longtime Putney trustee and former board chair Sarah Kerlin Gray Gund '60 died unexpectedly in August of 2023. The impact of her lifetime of leadership and generosity cannot be overstated. From Putney, to Sarah Lawrence, to New York City's Bank Street College of Education and beyond, Sarah served, and with her husband, Geoffrey, supported the cause they most believed in: education.

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) sits at the hub of campus and hums with activity. "Everyone learns differently. That's the beauty of Putney," says Mary Doherty, director of the CTL. The students "develop real skills, and often become effective peer tutors when they go to college," says tutor Matt Dall. Established in 2009, the then-called "learning center" hired Doherty as its director in 2013. At that time, she had only two tutors, both independent contractors. In January of 2014, Sarah and Geoffrey Gund committed to endowing the chair of the newly named Center for Teaching and Learning. The Gunds' experiences as learners and educators inspired them to ensure that all students have access to the resources to fulfill their promise. They believed that every student benefits from exploring and understanding *how* they learn. Now, the CTL employs six tutors who work with students throughout the day, in the evenings, and on weekends. Mary also works with faculty to help them understand "who the 15 different learners are in their classrooms." The Gund gift has allowed Putney to attract high-caliber tutors, who leave every day feeling they've helped

someone. "The Gunds transformed the student learning experience at Putney," says Mary.

In the last few years, Sarah and Geoffrey also took leadership roles in funding Putney's two new dorms. Nostalgic as the Old Boys and Old Girls dorms are to many, the need for improved—and warmer—living spaces has been clear for years. Next fall, students will move into Hepper House, named by Sarah and Geoffrey in honor of Hepper Caldwell '46, mentor, teacher, and friend to decades of Putney students. And just this March, our first new dorm opened, named by Geoffrey after Sarah's death—The Sarah and Geoffrey Gund House. Two dorms. Forty-four students. Four faculty families. A cat. It's home for these people, and Sarah and Geoffrey opened the door for this project.

And finally, and perhaps most importantly, Sarah was an Educator with a capital E. She brought experience—in all levels of education, including early education and special education—to her board service at Putney. "She was one of the early educators instrumental in helping people understand that intelligence cannot be measured in a linear way, and that therefore teaching needed to broaden its methods and systems of evaluation. She was one of the great educators in New York and elsewhere, much admired and revered," says former Head of School Emily Jones. Long after her tenure on Putney's board officially ended, Sarah's impact has continued. There's an adage that an ideal board member should be able to offer either wisdom or financial support. Sarah Gund showed us more, she gave us both, and the school will be forever better because of her.



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS



David Amram '48
milking his cow
Emily at his family's
farm in Feasterville,
Pennsylvania. Fall 1937.
"My first paid job!"

ALUMNI BOOKS



Sundry Abductions

Maria Dylan Himmelman '79

Hanging Loose Press, 2023

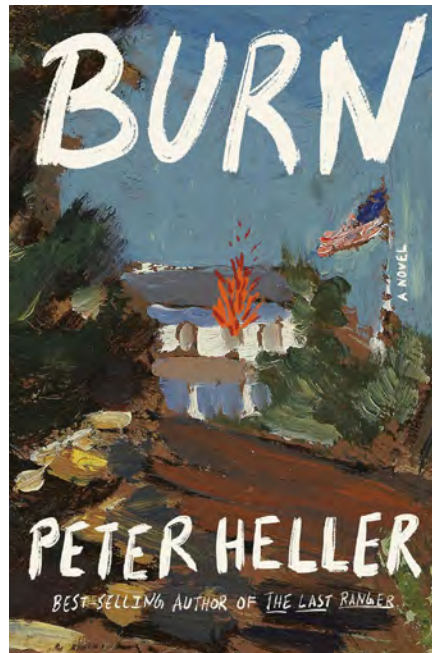
Winner of the inaugural Hanging Loose Press Founders Award, *Sundry Abductions* is Maria Himmelman's first full poetry collection. The poems are funny, sophisticated, exacting while sometimes surreal, and an astonishing joy to read. *Sundry Abductions* is a book full of surprises that reveal truths one couldn't have guessed, matching intelligence with beauty that is not easily achieved. Readers will find both narrative and lyric poems here, poems both spare and theological, dangerous and witty.

Burn

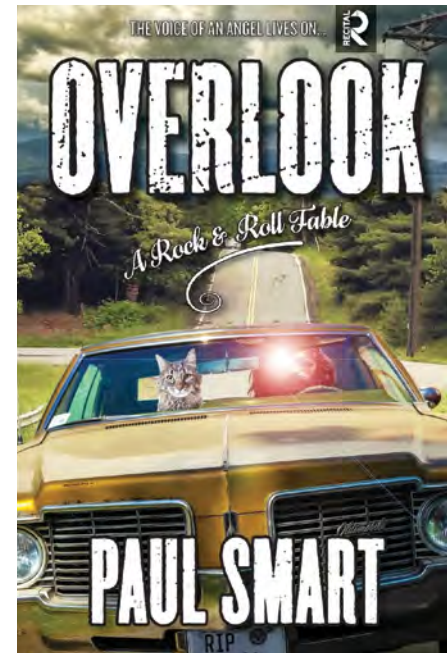
Peter Heller '77

Knopf, 2024

Every year Jess and Storey have made an annual pilgrimage to northern Maine, where they camp, hunt, and hike, leaving much from their long friendship unspoken. Although the state has convulsed all summer with secession mania—a mania that had simultaneously spread across



other states—Jess and Storey figure it's a fight reserved for legislators or, worst-case scenario, folks in the capitol. But after two weeks hunting moose off the grid, the men reach a small town and are shocked to find a bridge blown apart, buildings burned to the ground, and bombed-out cars abandoned on the road. Trying to make sense of the sudden destruction all around them, the men set their sights on finding their way home, dragging a wagon across bumpy dirt roads, ransacking boats left in the lakes, and dodging men who are armed—secessionists or military, they cannot tell—as they seek a path to safety. And then, a startling discovery, a child in the cabin of a boat drastically alters their path and the stakes of their escape. Drenched with the beauty of the natural world, and attuned to the specific cadences of male friendship, even here at the edge of doom, Heller's magisterial new novel is both a blistering warning of a divided country's political strife and an ode to the salvation of our chosen families. Available for preorder now. Released August 2024.



Overlook: A Rock and Roll Fable

Paul Smart '74

Recital Publishing, 2023

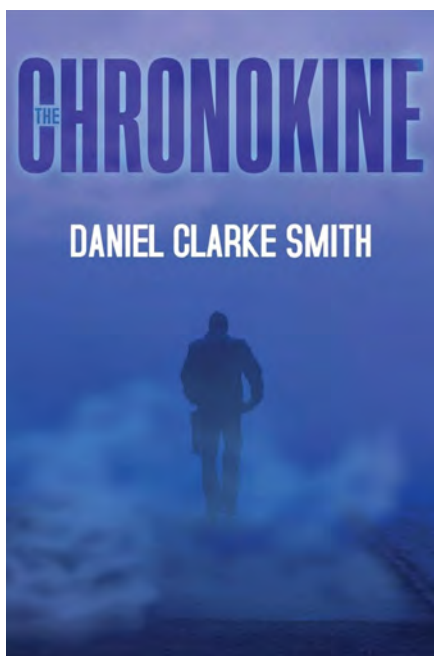
An exploration of musical legacy, *Overlook: A Rock and Roll Fable* delves into the mysteries of intuitive talent and creation. It is a dance between art and appreciation, between star and fan. It is a chronicle of the last journey of a fictionalized incarnation of the great singer Richard Manuel, of The Band, as he travels back to his adopted home of Woodstock. There he encounters Klokko, a lone mountain man, who is himself searching for meaning beyond the music that he has always turned to. The novel moves through landscapes redolent of mid-1980s America, and deep into the effect of rock and roll on our collective soul. It's about coming to terms with ourselves

The Chronokine

Dan Smith '68

Olympia Publishers, 2023

Paxton Knox begins college in '67, a standard-league athlete looking to kiss a girl and run some laps. But big



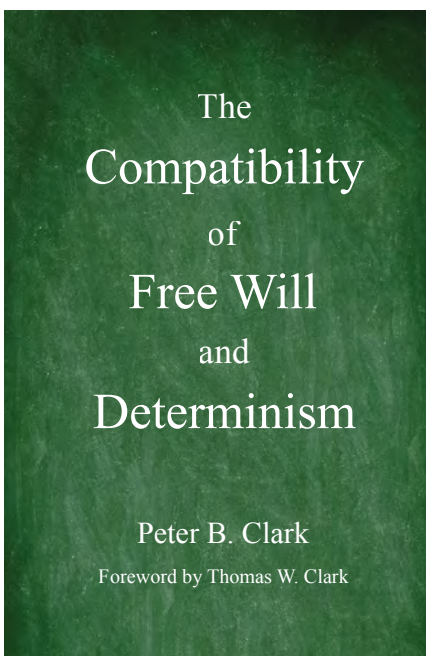
things are approaching. Radicalized students are challenging the status quo, and Knox begins to believe he can travel back through time. A man out of time, Knox's ability puts him at odds with the world, as he experiences college protests, the Vietnam War, and the cold bureaucracy of the government. A high-concept thriller that keeps you on your toes, *The Chronokine* is an explosive novel of romance, the dangers of radicalism, and a meditative study of time and second chances.

The Compatibility of Free Will and Determinism

Peter Clark '59

Independently published, 2023

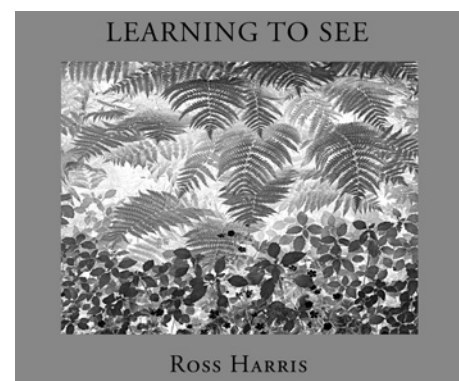
A perennial topic in philosophy is whether we are morally responsible for our actions if we and our behavior are fully determined by environmental, genetic, and situational factors. Should determinism be true, it would appear that there is no role for a person's free will in deciding what course of action to pursue. This raises the basic question of



whether a person deserves praise or blame for their behavior if they could not have avoided doing what they did. Thus, there appears to be a fundamental conflict between determinism and free choice that undermines holding people responsible for their behavior. In a senior thesis completed in May 1963 at Reed College ("The Compatibility of Free Will and Determinism"), the author carefully examines the conditions under which a person could have acted otherwise, demonstrating that determinism does not rule out responsibility for one's actions. Key among these conditions are that the person had the ability and the opportunity to perform the action they in fact did not do, and that they were not subject to duress in making the decision they did. As a cogent analysis of major positions on the possible conflict of free will and determinism, the thesis merits attention sixty years after it was written.



Have you written a book?
Let us know by contacting
alumni@putneyschool.org.



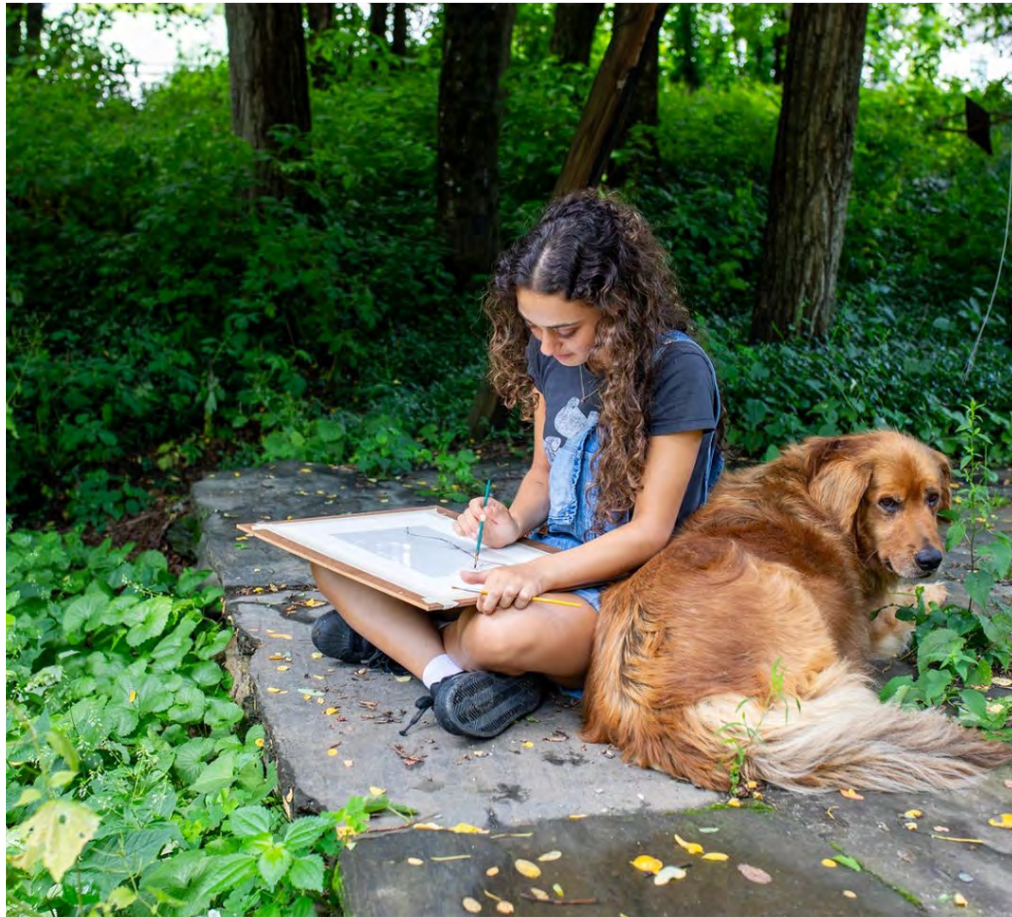
Learning to See

Ross Harris '56

Silver Street Media, 2023

Ross Harris '56 says about this book, "After graduating from college in 1960, I began to take photographs, excited by the ability the camera gave me to see and explore the world with fresh eyes. Inspired by photographers such as Edward Weston, Paul Strand, Ansel Adams, and Paul Caponigro, I worked hard at the craft, using large-format cameras to achieve the nuance of light, texture, and substance that I wanted. I learned Ansel's Zone System and mixed my darkroom chemicals from scratch. Drawn to the mystery and magic of the natural world, I sought to capture and express those qualities in my pictures. Recently I started using a digital camera. Although I loved darkroom work, working on the computer brings me new freedom and possibilities, including the opportunity to try color after years as a black and white photographer. With each picture I hope to create an increased sense of wonder at the world we live in."

P.S.



Every summer we welcome a diverse community of teen artists and educators to our beautiful hilltop campus.

FROM @PUTNEYSCHOOLSUMMERARTS ON INSTAGRAM

Come Laugh With Us!



Putney Reunion

JUNE 7-9, 2024

[*putneyschool.org/reunion*](https://putneyschool.org/reunion)

Registration is Open!

CLASSES OF
50-54, 67-69, 74, 84-85, 03-07, 14-16

Harvest Festival

OCTOBER 6, 2024

[*putneyschool.org/harvest*](https://putneyschool.org/harvest)

(ONE WEEK EARLIER THAN USUAL)



The Putney School

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

Artwork by Maya '25,
who is pictured running
with a cow on the left on
the inside back cover

