PUTNEY POST

05 10 25 50

YEARS OUT

ISSUE NO. 149 / SPRING 2025

ON FOOT I HAD TO CROSS THE SOLAR SYSTEM

BY EDITH SÖDERGRAN

On foot
I had to cross the solar system
before I found the first thread of my red dress.
I sense myself already.
Somewhere in space hangs my heart,
shaking in the void, from it stream sparks
into other intemperate hearts.

5/10/25/50

IN THIS ISSUE

TOC photo: Calem '27, "Balance," sheet metal. Made fall 2025 in Advanced Sculpture academic class and Metal Sculpture Evening Art

1974

50 YEARS OUT

2000

25 YEARS OUT

DEAR READER,

We structured this issue to tell the stories of alumni in their careers 5, 10, 25, and 50 years out from their graduation from Putney. But one story that didn't make it into the theme on the cover (but is here in these pages) is about a student graduating this year—zero years away from Putney but—and this is my point—already a fascinating example of how a Putney alumna's life and career is already different at the start.

Augusta '25 is now two years into her phone-free life. She has spent the majority of her time at Putney engaged in the program as fully as I've seen a student in my time here. Her path to this experience starts, in her telling, as a little kid with an iPad. She arrived here with a screen addiction that only she could recognize and decide what to do with.

This kind of self-awareness, self-determination, and agency even in us (so-called) adults is rare. Exceedingly rare. And hopeful. Exceedingly hopeful.

I hate to come down on the quotidian. There is work to be done and not all of it is going to be a fireworks show of innovation and transformation. That said, that's not what I see here, in these stories, from Putney's students and alumni. I see both a recognition of and appreciation for the everyday and a beautiful ability to find one's own unique agency in that same day, career, life.

The rest of the stories in this issue are, yes, people doing fascinating and impactful work in their fields—learning how our brains work (and why they sometimes don't), finding heretofore unknown aspects about our neighboring planets, building business models that solve serious societal problems, and helping make visual art something the blind can experience. But they are also, in some ways, quotidian Putney stories.

Here is the great flex of this tiny school: every year, at that barnyard costume ball of a spring green graduation, we issue out a few dozen hardworking, sleeves-up, let's-build-it young people who have some practice at imagination and vision. It is like blowing on a dandelion plucked straight from the wide open pasture out front.

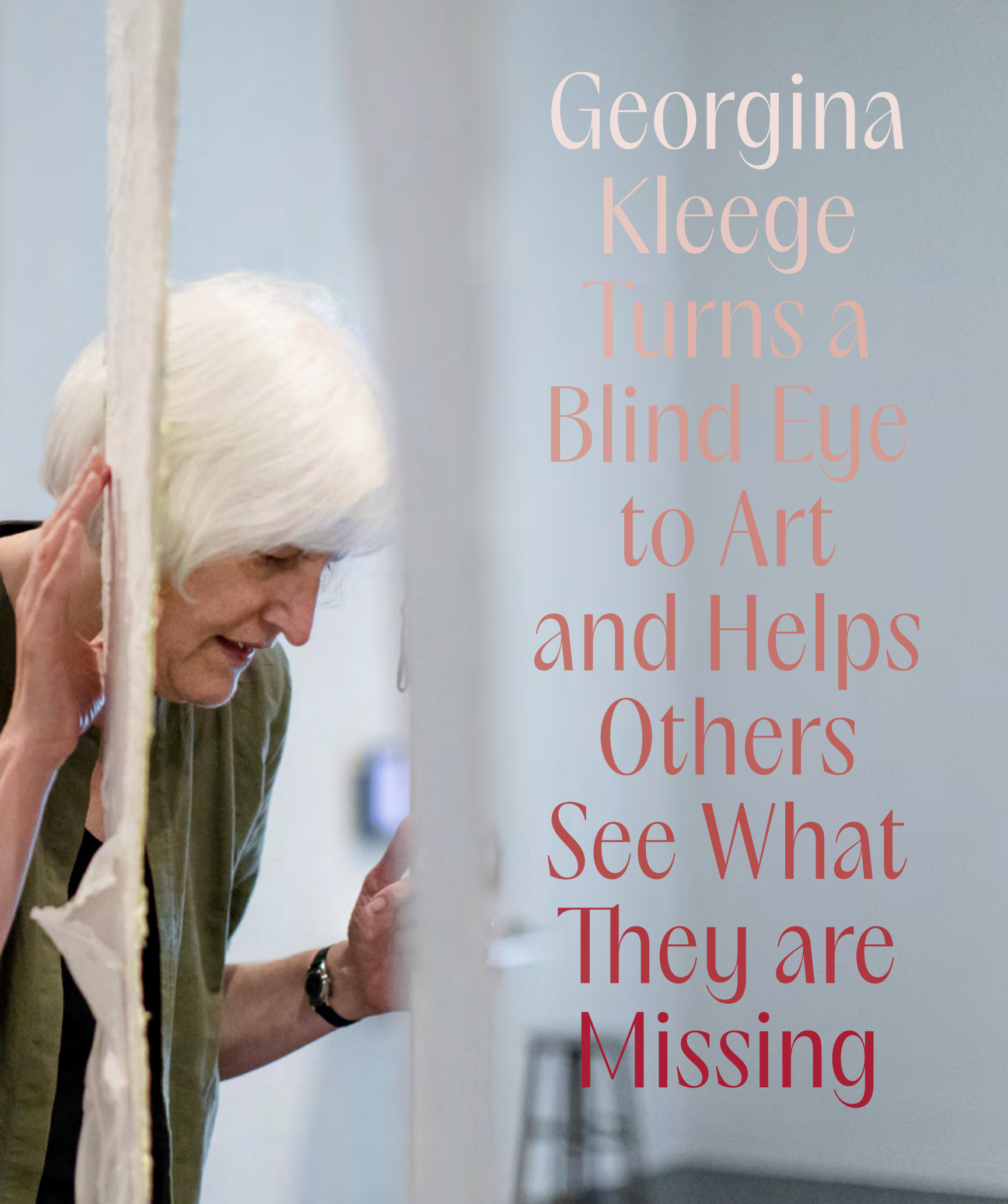
—DARRY MADDEN

P.S. Are you receiving the quarterly Alumni & Friends eNewsletter? If you are not and would like to, please let us know at alumni@putneyschool.org.

50 YEARS OUT

STORY BY **PRUDENCE BAIRD P'11**

PHOTO BY **GARY SEXTON, COURTESY THE CONTEMPORARY JEWISH MUSEUM**



Georgina Kleege Turns a Blind Eye to Art and Helps Others See What They are Missing

GEORGINA KLEEGE ’74 says she is not interested in being a “nice, quiet blind person.” Georgina is on a mission: to explore and share life’s “visual feast” with both the visually impaired and the sighted.

While the latter may seem paradoxical, Georgina believes that “vision involves more than merely aiming the eyes at a particular object.” Most seeing, she says, takes place in the mind where we interpret the images our eyes take in. To make sense of these images, we run them through lenses of expectation, desire, and circumstance; we engage our other senses that lend context and texture. Yet, we ascribe all of these actions that scaffold our visual experience as “seeing.”

If you’ve never thought about vision in this way, join the club.

Georgina explores the Haptic Encounters exhibition at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco. From the CJS website, “Haptic Encounters … investigates how tactile and kinesthetic explorations of works of art can engage all visitors with the possibilities for appreciating art through a non-visual sense.”

A writer, an author, an advocate, a professor and teacher, Georgina’s résumé is impressive: a degree in English literature from Yale, and professorships at the University of Oklahoma, Ohio State, and UC Berkeley.

Now a Professor Emerita of English at the University of California, where she taught courses in creative writing and disability studies, Georgina returned to New York in 2022, still on a mission.

As a 2022–23 New York University Steinhardt Scholar-in-Residence, Georgina collaborated with the university across multiple disciplines, raising awareness of and access to culture and education for all.

Today, Georgina works at the intersection of arts and disability, helping organizations, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC, the Tate Modern in London, and others better accommodate their visually impaired staff and museumgoers. With detailed audio descriptions and intuitive displays that welcome further exploration, all museum-goers benefit. She also works with artists and museums to create hands-on and walk-through experiences for the visually impaired, inviting them to explore sculptures with their hands or walk inside exhibits hearing the sounds that echo off the materials as the patrons move through them.

Her strong affection for the arts has roots in Georgina’s early years. Born to two artists living in a loft in Greenwich Village, her childhood was set in the bohemian East Village of the 1960s.

Her father, a sculptor and painter, allowed young Georgina to create her own art with scraps of metal in his studio. She was the subject of paintings and drawings by her parents, who were curious about her experience with their art, especially as she began to lose her sight while still in the single digits.

I spoke with Georgina in early January, and again a month later. Here is what this remarkable woman had to say.

You were diagnosed as legally blind at age 11, while still attending elementary school in New York City. Why did you choose The Putney School? Were you offered accommodations?

(Laughs) The fact I was blind never came up before or after I came to Putney. I chose The Putney School because my mother went to Bennington College. I was familiar with Vermont and felt comfortable with the school’s dedication to the arts and its progressive outlook.

Did anyone along the way suggest you learn Braille?

The ophthalmologist who diagnosed me at 11 didn’t suggest it, so it was years before

I learned Braille as an adult. Based on the reaction of the adults in my life at the time, I had the impression that accessing both the world and schoolwork was on my own shoulders. I would have to figure it out. And I did.

How did that work at Putney?
It was a struggle, but I managed with magnifying glasses and getting very close to instructions on the page or blackboard. Classmates walked with me around campus, and my years at the Martha Graham School for Contemporary Dance taught me to be aware of my surroundings: what's in front of me, what's in back, and where I should aim my gaze.

One old-school Putney teacher stands out to me: Felix Lederer, who taught French and Latin. Before he pulled down the map to cover the quiz questions on the blackboard, he would gesture for me to come close and copy the quiz. He taught me a lot about teaching. I asked him what his secret was and he said, "Say everything three times using a different vocabulary. The best students will get it the first time, but by the third time, all students will understand." I still use this method.

I've used Felix's methods to help me teach my classes over the years. One of my sighted students told me, "I've never thought about being sighted before your class." That's the whole point.

The federal Rehabilitation Act passed in 1973, making you eligible for disability support at Yale, although it did not apply to your high school years. Did this change the academic experience for you?
The Department of Rehabilitation in downtown New Haven provided me with recorded books from two libraries for the blind: very handy for an English Lit major! When there was not a recorded book available, I had a small fund from the Department of Rehab to hire students to read to me. And when that ran out, I would type and edit my classmates' papers in exchange for them reading to me. I sharpened my writing and teaching skills from this experience.

Also, for the first time, I joined an advocacy group for blind students. We lobbied for oral testing: and got it.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) passed in 1993. By this time, you were a working adult. Where were you and how did your life change?
Before the ADA, when I applied for work at a company or organization, I felt like I was asking for a favor, a handout. To support myself, I had had a patchwork of jobs: teaching, freelance writing, translating other writers (including Lebanese author Etal Adnan), authoring three books, including one that was published in 1989 (*Home for the Summer*).

With the ADA, however, I was able for the first time to get a real job, with benefits, teaching creative writing at Ohio State in Columbus, where I moved with my husband.

In 2003, we moved to Berkeley, California, the birthplace of disability rights. I had excellent support during my two decades there.

In *Sight Unseen*, you describe yourself as "intensely visual." Please explain.
For decades, I studied and taught about sight, vision, and seeing. Besides writing and

literature, I now work with museums, opening up art spaces to the visually impaired, places that have catered primarily to the sighted. By making art more accessible, we can reflect back to the sighted patrons the world in which they live and may take for granted. It's such an unexamined norm. The average blind person knows infinitely more about what it's like to be sighted than the average sighted person knows about how it is to be blind.

Why is that?
The world is created for sighted people by the sighted. We visually impaired have to do the same things sighted people do, but a different way. So, we need to know how things work, public transportation for example. We need to know how many steps to take in which direction, where to stand, how to find what we need, when to get off the bus without visual clues, and where to go from there.

If a museum had an ideal set-up for patrons to experience art, what would that be—if all of the patrons' inclusion and access needs were met?
You approach artworks through time and space, and if we change these, we change everything. For instance, moving artwork in from the walls to the center of the room allows for access from multiple sides. Audio delivery of information describing the art teaches us how the art was made, who the artist is or was. We can learn about the context and time in which the art was created, and even hear archival recordings or music. The sighted appreciate this additional material, as it bolsters their overall experience.

Many of these organizations receive government grants. Does the work you do fall under the rubric of DEI?
Fortunately, most of my recent work is to augment access. Therefore, it falls into the education department.

I've always felt there's a letter missing from the spirit of DEI, the letter A for "access." I'd like to believe access through the ADA is safe; it is the law. That doesn't seem to stop this administration, however.

Five, ten, and 20 years out from Putney, you were on a trajectory marked by many successes, long hours, and dedicated work. How did technology assist you during these years?
1979: At Yale, I had recorded books on both tape and vinyl records from two sources: the National Library Service, run by the Library of Congress, as well as from Recordings for the Blind. The latter organization, now

The average blind person knows infinitely more about what it's like to be sighted than the average sighted person knows about how it is to be blind.

Georgina explores art built for accessibility, moved in from the walls, and with audio descriptions.

Reading Allies, was founded by blind WWII veterans and serves both the visually impaired and those with dyslexia.

Through the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, I had a small fund to hire aides to read my schoolwork to me, and two caseworkers who helped gather resources, such as my schoolbook recordings and the giant, brightly colored plastic tape players and record players that they played on. Those were bulky and looked like they belonged in a pre-school, not on a university co-ed's desk.

1984: I had an early Macintosh computer, which was really a glori ed typewriter, but it was accessible in that it could enlarge type for me. I still used the two libraries for cassette tapes. Vinyl was on its way out by then.

1994: I started using a very fundamental assist at this time one that was available my whole life, but I'd never used the white cane. It's not only a useful with making my way through the world, but it gives me license to ask for help. And conversely, it welcomes others to approach me if they want to help.

Computers evolved; my Macintosh performed text-to-speech, but not [the natural voice] as it is today. Books on cassettes from my two libraries were still in use. By then, books on tape were for everyone. People could follow along with a book while they drove or jogged. I also got my rst closed circuit magnifying device, which is a screen mounted above the table at eye level. Underneath it is a camera that you can aim at a book to enlarge text.

Today, a lot of what I once used is obsolete. My desk is no longer covered with microphones, speakers, screens, cables, non-interchangeable chargers, and devices that all do different things.

Now, I have almost everything I need on my smartphone. I get around easily with the phone's GPS and all my reading material can be accessed in the palm of my hand. I am a writer; I compose on my phone, and I also receive and send correspondence. During the initial Covid pandemic, I even could get my test results via an app!

Lately, I've been working with various institutions to create indoor navigation systems that patrons can use on their smartphones.

Finally, you wrote an epistolary memoir, *Blind Rage,* in which you send Helen Keller letters demanding that she "explain herself." Would you share with us the reason you took on this icon?

When I was a child, Helen Keller was held up to me as someone for me to aspire to be; she was always cheerful, she was very accomplished. I took this as an affront to me and my less-than-perfect life.

As an adult, I read the letters Helen penned to others, but they were her letters. I never saw the other half the letters to which she was responding. is le an opening for interpretation, an area I felt I needed to explore.

One of my reviewers called my book "speculative non- ction and it is written in second person through a series of letters sent to Helen from me. I was, in a way, trying to answer that question you hear so frequently about Helen but could very well apply to me, "I can't imagine what it was like to be Helen Keller

e point of *Blind Rage* is that you can imagine what it is to be like to be Helen Keller. e book starts out perhaps a little testy but ends up a somewhere else. Trying to understand Helen Keller her life and motivations was a really a way to understand myself. ■

10 YEARS OUT

INGENUITY & ACCESS

CALEB ERSKINE ’15 IS BUILDING A DREAM

STORY BY **ALISON FRYE**

Caleb Erskine '15, center, puts together the roof ring of a yurt kit, shown above after installation.

LIVING INTENT

> I've always wanted to build a really nice, tightly insulated yurt that could pop up in an event of a natural disaster, which would give a person an interim living situation. The yurt's shipping box turns into the platform, its contents turn into the house. And a yurt lends itself to quick assembly because of its self-supporting roof." Caleb Erskine '15 imagines it. He imagines a lot.

Living Intent Yurt Co. CEO Makita, on the floor, with Caleb Erskine, owner, seated. Right, a finished yurt and a lovely view.

Caleb is the founder of Living Intent Yurt Co., based in Grass Valley, CA. By his senior Putney spring, Caleb had completed a Project Week studying Genghis Kahn and the rich history of the Mongolian people, and their nomadic culture intrigued him. With independent woodwork also under his Putney toolbelt, he launched a senior exhibition to build a Mongolian yurt. And as a Mainer, Caleb also came honestly and naturally to a practical, minimalist ethos. The yurt idea suited 18-year-old Caleb. Ten years later, at age 28, it continues to.

Caleb lived in the yurt he built at Putney. He traveled the music festival scene and realized a market: without knowing whether he could fulfill the orders he might receive, he offered to sell yurts to music festival organizers. The idea worked. He eventually gave college a try, and attended University of Maine briefly. While he didn't spend much time in class, he took full advantage of its state-of-the-art woodshop, where he could use tools he'd never seen before. He built more yurt frames, and eventually loaded the frames, his second-hand DIY wood-working books, and his bought-at-a-pawn-shop tools into a van and headed west, to the farming and off-grid communities and cash economies of wild northern California. Caleb got a spot at a makerspace for $50, and started to build yurts for the local community. That was in 2016, just over a year after he finished high school.

How Would You Build a Door?

Despite having built a skiff, a dulcimer, and several yurt frames, Caleb had a lot to learn.

"When I first moved here, I wasn't very good at woodworking. And I didn't know anything about business," he confessed. "I went to the local hardwood supplier and asked for a list of the area's best woodworkers." For a year, he sought out wisdom from people who knew more than he did. He visited their shops. He humbly asked questions: How would you build a door? And so on. "The best thing I did was to be open. Now I have a broader scope of the 'right way' and 'wrong way' to do something. But at that time I wanted to hear all of the different things. It was great."

Talking to Caleb now, his lens has expanded. His company's mission is to empower affordable living. Another dream he's pursuing? Taking people through the process of building a house, soup to nuts: "I'm in school to get my general contractor's license. I'm hoping to create a situation where somebody could find a piece of affordable raw land and, using my license, get a construction loan from a bank. We could help facilitate the whole process of ground-up roundhouse structure building. It would be an affordable way to get a mortgage."

Moreover, Caleb has achieved for others the goal he set for himself: you can buy a yurt, put it together yourself, and live in it comfortably. "The vision was to sell a home" built to code" that's comfortable, energy efficient, and can be assembled out of a box with minimal building experience. For someone who has the gumption to do it, they can do it all. We use CNC (Computer Numerical Control) robot manufacturing to make all the components, all the studs are pre-drilled. Everywhere you put a screw is labeled. It tells you right where to put everything."

Additionally, and rare in these times, the company fabricates everything in-house. Born out of supply-chain complications during Covid, during which they also saw an uptick in demand for their yurts, Caleb brought everything under the same roof. "I think we're the only yurt company in the U.S. that does all manufacturing in-house" the 3-D CAD design, all of the woodworking, all of the fabric work. Nobody does that anymore."

Make Something

"The future is now. AI can do better than humans in accounting, in reading x-rays, in manufacturing. But robot technology only reaches so far. Caleb believes deeply in the importance of making something, and in managing people. "Somebody who's professional, shows up on time, and can run a crew can earn a good living. I wish we were pushing more young people to say, 'There's an opportunity here to be creative. The creative avenues are probably a good hedge for your future." Caleb also emphasizes the importance of knowing how to operate tools. "People who can operate a CNC router, a CNC laser, do 3-D CAD. If somebody graduated from Putney and understood 3D modeling and CAD, and could produce, I would hire that person right out of school to do it. Not many people know those skills."

Living Intent Yurt Co. occupies an 11,000-square-foot production facility. Caleb is the owner, and he employs ten people, including a general manager who handles the organization. "I'm good at ideas and can work my tail off. But when it comes to actually creating systems and being more organized, our GM, Sara, is excellent at that" The office dog, Makita, is the unofficial CEO. They have a fabric studio, an assembly room, and a wood shop. It's the stuff of Putney Project Week dreams.

Caleb credits Putney for broadening his teenage years. Scott Schadler empowered the side of Caleb that had been singularly focused on being a carpenter since Caleb was a child. George Haggerty helped Caleb build a dulcimer. Caleb built a skiff with Rob Guerrina. And advisor Noah Hoskins? "I'll forever love Noah. I was such trouble-maker-ish person, and Noah was the person who told me I was screwing up. It was exactly what I needed, to have a male role model that was not hard on me, but strict and stern."

The Seed and Pursuit of a Dream

Did you, reader, also find yourself captivated by the PBS show that featured a man in Alaska, who built his own cabin, lived off the land, and narrated the experience? Officially called *Alone in the Wilderness*, and featuring Richard Proenneke, it hooked Caleb at an early age. "I saw it as a kid and thought, 'I want to do that.' And in a modern way, I'm building everything myself, making it. And that's always been the dream. I loved yurts. I built one and was living in it, dreamed up a product we could manufacture, and now that's what we sell. So I'm able to play. That's the funnest part of the whole thing. I love it."

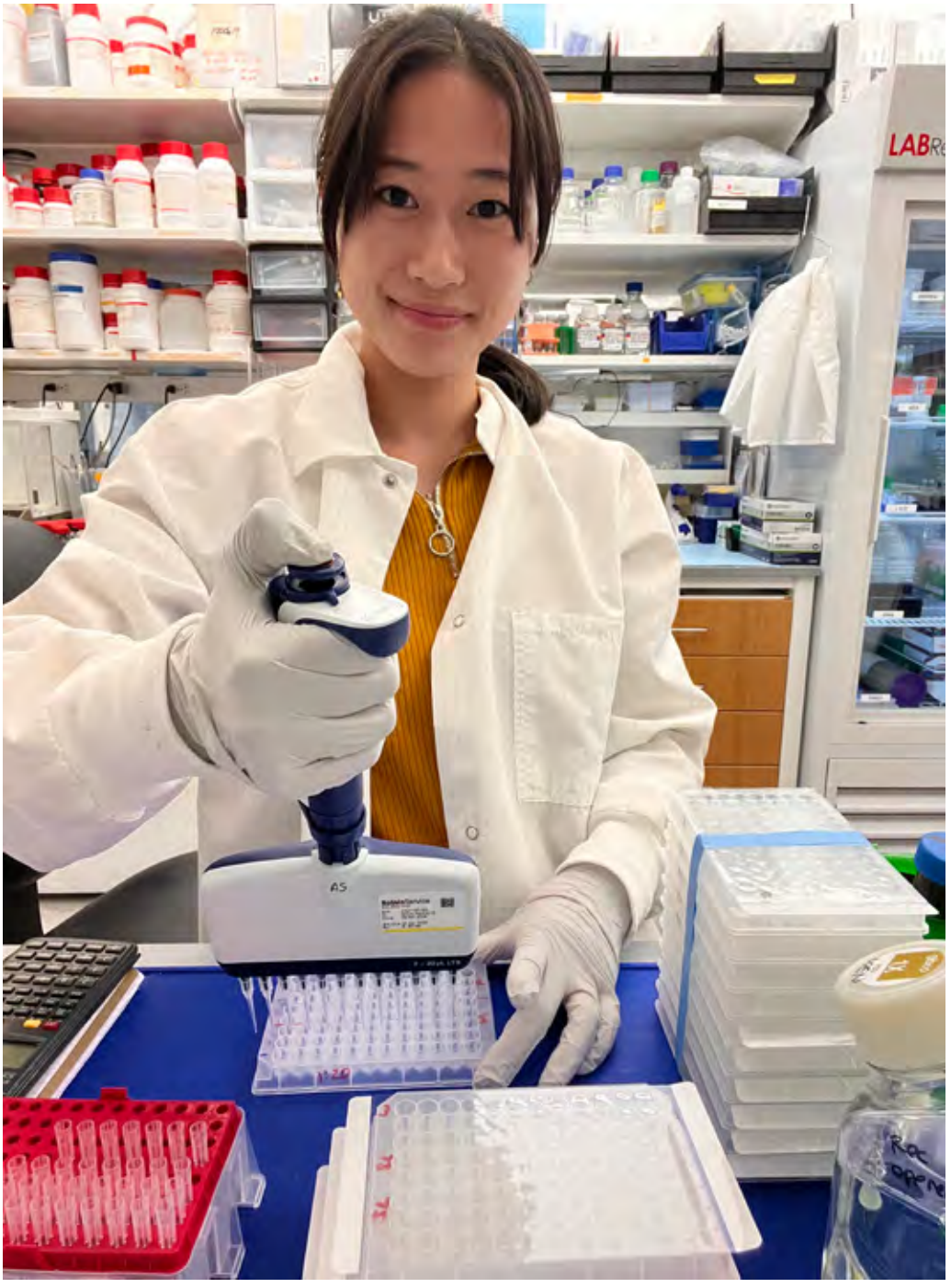
As he looks around his office (the first he's ever had), Caleb marvels at the bravado of his younger self. "I don't think I could do it again, because I had such blind faith in myself. I thought, 'Obviously, this is going to work.' I was working seven days a week for years, traveling all over Oregon, Maine, living in a yurt with a tarp for a floor." He threw all of his money into it. Problems arose left and right. He held his course, and he kept the faith: "It is is all going to work out."

"I do think about that sometimes. I wonder if I would have the resolve that I had as a naive 23-year-old to do whatever it takes. Whatever it takes."■

5 YEARS OUT

Mind Over Matter

ANNA FRANCIS '19 AND THE ALZHEIMER'S PUZZLE



Above: Anna Francis '19 doing the detail work of Alzheimer's research. Right: Anna at work in Putney's Wender Arts Building, 2019

STORY BY
ALISON FRYE

NOT LONG AFTER DEATH, the human brain begins to liquefy. Anna Francis '19 and her colleagues work quicky to preserve it, retrieving the right hemisphere from the morgue, slicing it themselves, and keeping it in a laboratory freezer from which they can retrieve the millimeter-size samples that fuel their research into one of the most confounding of human diseases: Alzheimer's.

> “Putney helped me tap into my artistic, creative side, because I came from public high school where everything was very regimented, and the curriculum was built toward a certain type of student.”

Driven by her own curiosity about diseases, and an ever-deepening commitment to helping solve the Alzheimer’s puzzle, Anna, a biology major at Oberlin and two years into her work on one of the world’s leading Alzheimer’s teams, explained to me the team’s ambitious purpose. “We’re studying Alzheimer’s disease and the mechanisms behind it. Why do people develop Alzheimer’s disease? Why do people develop early onset versus late onset? Specifically, the Selkoe Laboratory at Brigham and Women’s Hospital team is known for its breakthrough research called the Amyloid Hypothesis, which is one of the theories for what causes Alzheimer’s disease. Anna elaborates, “Why do some people exhibit high levels of the protein that causes Alzheimer’s disease, which is known as amyloid beta? Why do some people show very high levels of amyloid beta, but don’t have any cognitive decline? Whereas other people may express lower levels but may have higher decline?

The body produces amyloid beta naturally. The protein aids in neuroplasticity and normal neural processes. But in Alzheimer’s disease, amyloid beta accumulates abnormally, in the brain’s gray matter and around blood vessels, inhibiting synaptic functions essential to the formation of memories and the retention of long-term memories. Anna has learned all of this information on the job, and she speaks about it with depth, expertise, and admiration for her colleagues.

“People around me have MDs, they have master’s of science degrees, they have bachelor’s degrees, they have PhDs, they have MD/PhDs. I talk to a lot of people, and they all have a non-linear path that brought them to Brigham.

REWIND NINE YEARS. Anna came to Putney from suburban Connecticut. A shy 10th grader, she landed in White Cottage dorm, paired with a roommate who would become a soulmate friend, and she started to explore. “At Putney, you are able to ask questions, explore, get feedback, and get your hands dirty, rather than just read from a textbook, without fear of judgment. I took ballet, did jazz dance, ballroom dance, and Caribbean drumming. The work also offered an intellectual depth that her public high school lacked. Science classes had structure, but also room for creativity. She built a water filtration and harvesting system for Project Week. “Project Weeks made a huge impact on me. It’s only two weeks, but when you think about it, that’s two weeks to do whatever you want. Like Caleb Erksine ’15 (Ingenuity & Access, page 10), she too built a dulcimer with George Haggerty.“Putney helped me tap into my artistic, creative side, because I came from public high school where everything was very regimented, and the curriculum was built toward a certain type of student. Coming to Putney was a breath of fresh air.

At Oberlin, she leaned first toward environmental studies. But after learning that curriculum was humanities-based, and realizing her own love of science and lab work, she made the switch to a biology major. “They exposed us to everything. We learned about anatomy and physiology, plant physiology, rats, crickets, the lymphatic system, lots of random things. That’s where I learned I really like cells and bacteria and diseases.

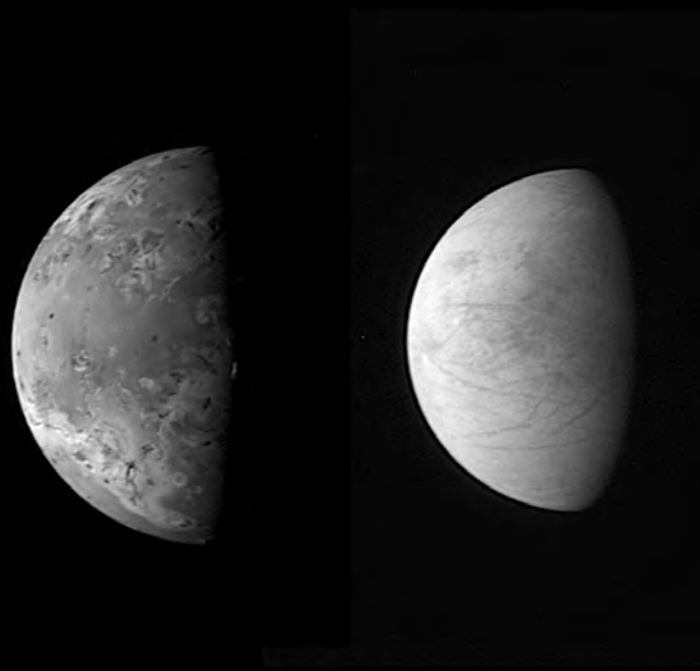
BACK IN the lab, Anna’s quotidian tends toward the repetitive. Her routine centers around immunoprecipitation (a technique that isolates an antigen). “Every day is different. In this specific three-day experiment I’m doing, I spend Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays dedicated to one experiment. And then Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, it’s the same procedure, but a different brain that I’m studying. The team as a whole is focused on an overarching hypothesis. “We’ve been studying ARIA, which stands for amyloid-related imaging abnormalities. In July 2023 the FDA approved a drug that removed amyloid beta from the brain. But people who receive the treatment are showing imaging abnormalities during brain scans and MRIs. “These anti-Alzheimer’s antibodies are causing brain bleeds and subdural effusions, which causes the tissue to get thinner and weaker. The drug is supposed to delay Alzheimer’s progression. Anna is helping to study why it’s causing brain bleeds. She forms a hypothesis, writes a procedure, conducts her research, summarizes her results. “I analyze it, make assumptions, and let my boss take a look and make the final conclusion.

Anna’s work as a research assistant has shown her the inside world of institutional research, from the funding of the work, to the scientific and research processes. Even in the professional world, her passion for learning feeds her, “I don’t feel like I’m coming in to do work. I’m coming in to learn.■

MOONS OF

CARL SCHMIDT '00 STUDIES PLANETARY ATMOSPHERES

STORY BY
DARRY MADDEN



When Carl Schmidt '00 was a graduate student, he found himself somewhere in the vast desert of West Texas, where the sky is as big as the night is dark, pointing tiny telescopes at Mercury and at the moon.

He asked—he says "naively" but perhaps better described as with a "beginner's mind"—why he couldn't use the moon telescope on Mercury. So he tried it and, serendipitously, it was just the right time in the planet's orbit to make a discovery—Mercury had a long, comet-like tail that was approximately a thousand times the size of the planet (previous estimates had the extended atmosphere at 10 to 20 times the size of the planet itself).

Now a research assistant professor at Boston University's Center for Space Physics working primarily on NASA-funded research grants, he ended up completing his PhD thesis on this discovery.

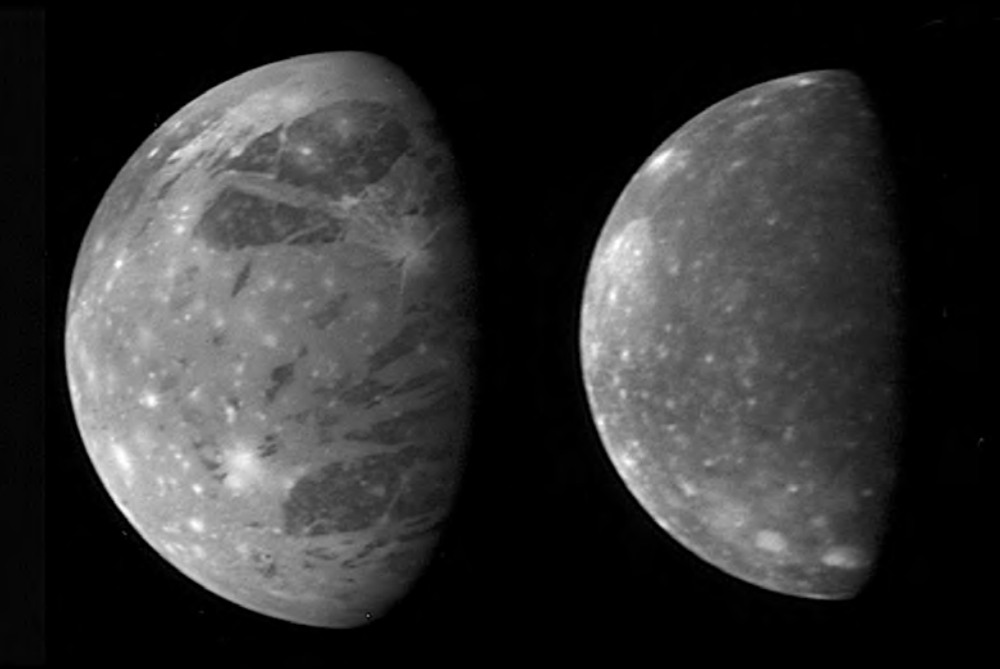
It's apropos that the Mercury discovery was made in the breathtaking quiet. Schmidt credits Putney, and Vermont, with showing him the power of that simple and, now, rarefied silence.

"The more quiet you can make your environment, the more in touch you are with your own ideas, and the more in touch you are with nature. That's a good foundation for astronomy," he said. "My time at Putney solidified that realization for me."

His work focuses on the (silent) tenuous planetary atmospheres—or exospheres—of Mercury, Earth's moon, Jupiter's moons Io and Europa, and of comets. He works exclusively with telescopes, collecting his own data, as opposed to using the data gathered on missions by NASA and its equivalents (which is how about 80-90% of this type of research is conducted). He says he is, scientifically, standing on the shoulders of giants, chipping away at relatively small pieces of the enormous puzzle that is the solar system.

JUPITER

25 YEARS OUT



Mercury's tail is made of sodium atoms. Schmidt, now clear that he could use his telescopes to study sodium, asked where else it could be found in the solar system. This led him to Io and Europa, two of the moons orbiting Jupiter, one of which—Io—is covered with hundreds of active volcanoes that are changing the atmosphere nearly constantly. Schmidt loves to watch it evolve and change—it's losing its atmosphere at about a ton per second, and what is lost is trapped in Jupiter's magnetic field, creating a "big wobbly donut" around Jupiter called the plasma torus.

What are the implications of this type of research? One example has to do with the sodium. The moon Europa is believed to have an ocean under ten kilometers of solid ice—it is two to three times the volume of earth's oceans, but saltwater, like ours. And what exists in these conditions? Life.

Another example has to do with atmospheric change and the long-term climate on earth. The planet Venus is considered to have a "runaway greenhouse effect"—in terms of the total amount of sunlight it gets, it should not be nearly as hot as it is. Some point to it as an example of what could happen to earth in time (Schmidt says the direct connections with earth's climate are "speculative").

Back on earth, Schmidt loves the immense perspective his work provides.

"It's nice to have something that's just so abstract that it stretches what you can conceive of as routine in your life," he said. "Where I go from thinking about these really abstract things back to just hanging out with my daughter, playing Connect Four. Having that broad perspective helps you keep an open mind—it's impactful."

Schmidt was not a model student at Putney. But, like Europa, he did have, somewhere beneath ten kilometers of adolescent troubles, an interest in astronomy. He credits Glenn Littledale '76 with being a tremendously inspiring teacher who did not judge kids prematurely. He was also a fun teacher. Schmidt recalls Littledale timing him riding his skateboard down Intimidation Hill as part of an experiment, and breaking his watch as he threw it across the room to demonstrate general relativity.

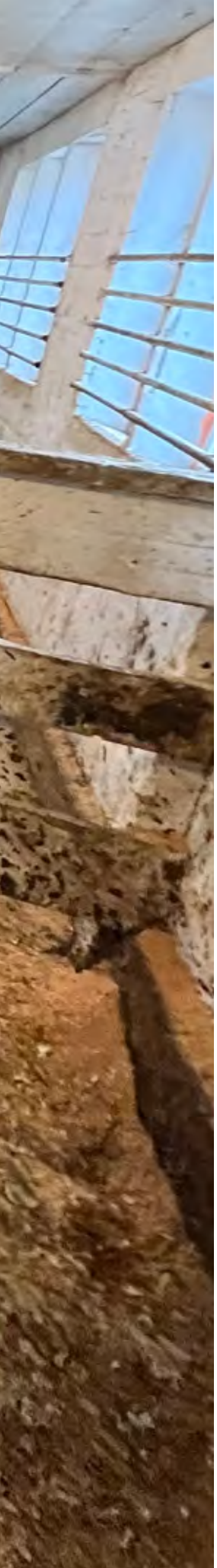
Putney offered him Glenn, and, in general, an ethos (perhaps best articulated by Yoda) of there being no "try"—"Do...or do not. There is no try," said the legendary Jedi master.

"It was the idea that I didn't need to know or be taught how to do something—I could try my hand at it and learn it experientially," said Schmidt.

Schmidt doesn't think that all students are necessarily capable of this kind of self-discipline, self-discovery, and self-determination. However, neither can those that are capable discover it in a vacuum.

"You can create an environment that allows them the freedom to discover it in themselves," he said. "And Putney was pretty good at that." ■


ON THE HILL



LETTER FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

WHO SHAPES CULTURE?

 is question popped up again and again at the annual conference of the National Association of Independent Schools, which I attended in March. Attendees' answers included "traditions "faculty and staff and "the head of school

My answer? *Our students.*

Putney students are the producers, not the consumers, of their education. Evidence of this fact abounds on campus. We see it in student leadership, where students have over 90 authentic leadership positions available to them. For example, students assign campus work jobs to their peers and run those jobs, they help shape educational policy, lead all-school DEIJB programming, recruit the next class of Putney students, and vote on the board of trustees. Our students sense the real responsibility that comes with their leadership roles.

A couple of weeks ago, when I was taking my turn as administrator on duty, my phone rang at 11:00 p.m. I shot up in bed to a call from the two students responsible for the late feed of the animals. A calf had just been born, and the students wanted to know what to do and wanted a rmation of their next steps. is was not something they teach in "head-of-school school is being the twenty-rst century, I immediately opened up YouTube. By the time I searched for "how to care for a newborn calf the students told me what they had done: they made sure the mom was caring for her baby; they brought hay and water to the pair; they ensured mom and calf were warm. Despite the call to me, they knew instinctively what to do. I know these two students will tell the story of how they cared for an infant calf on their own, without an adult directing their work, for the rest of their lives.

When we talk about the "heart and soul of e Putney School, I don't wonder what we are talking about, only how to talk about it. For all of us including the calf and her mother the heart and soul of this remarkable little school are obvious, tangible, and deeply felt.

With warm wishes,
DANNY O'BRIEN
Head of School

By the Stars

Aiden Clark-Derouault ’25 loves sailing (pictured above far le). When the senior was asked to develop an independent project as part of Glenn Littledale’s astronomy class, he married the two subjects and spent the fall studying celestial navigation the ancient technique used by sailors the world over since the beginning of time.

  en, over the November break, Clark-Derouault found a chance to put it all into practice. He sailed from St. Croix to St. John on a recreation cargo schooner with other teens. During their anchored evenings at sea, he could practice nding and calculating their latitude and longitude using his hand, or a sextant (the instrument that determines the angle between the horizon and a celestial body), and Polaris the north star.

Clark-Derouault ended up teaching Littledale some things about celestial navigation, and Littledale taught the student about perspective.

“For all of human history, Polaris has been Polaris said Clark-Derouault. “It’s not changed in that time. at’s how small we are and how signi cant the universe is

CORRECTION: We ran this Scholastic Award–winning photo entitled “The Farmer’s Fury” by Finn ’25 on the back cover of the last *Putney Post* without credit. We apologize for the error.

FALL AND WINTER

ATHLETICS RECAP

There’s a fine line between, as Mrs. Hinton wrote, playing “for recreation and an increased joy in living,” and her caution that one watch out “for the competitive angle.” The middle ground of that balance may be large, but its sweet spot is small. We aim for the sweet spot—great joy, a commitment to the opportunity for learning and participation, and enough skill to make the competition meaningful. In that spirit, we share some highlights of our fall and winter seasons on the fields, courts, trails, and more.

Girls basketball, lovingly called GHoops, won its conference championship. Just two years ago, GHoops could not field a full team. This year, the team drew 18 players of all skill levels, and played their way to the RVAL title.

The Nordic ski team had more members than any year in recent memory, with 22 students signing up for windy winter days of outdoor work. Ably-led by coach Brian Quarrier ’05, the team fielded an impressive mix of accomplished skiers and those fully on board to learn from scratch. Weekend trips to the Craftsbury Marathon and to Mt. Ste. Anne in Quebec were balanced out by drill work on campus, at the Marlboro Nordic Center, and field trips to find snow during the early season.

“1-2-3-Putney!” cheers the girls soccer team before each game. They, too, won their RVAL league title, and they, as well as GHoops, were coached by Pete Stickney, whose chosen retirement path involves staying on campus and doing what he loves best: coaching!

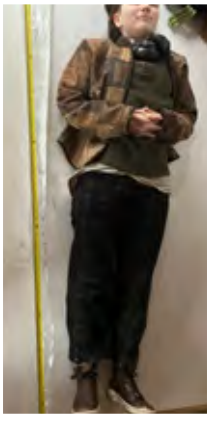
May the Freeze Thaw Be Ever in Your Favor

The longest icicle competition started five, maybe six years ago— no one is sure. It's been evolving ever since then-science-teacher-now-admissions-counselor Todd Dowling sent a photo to the community with a monster of a specimen on Keep dorm.

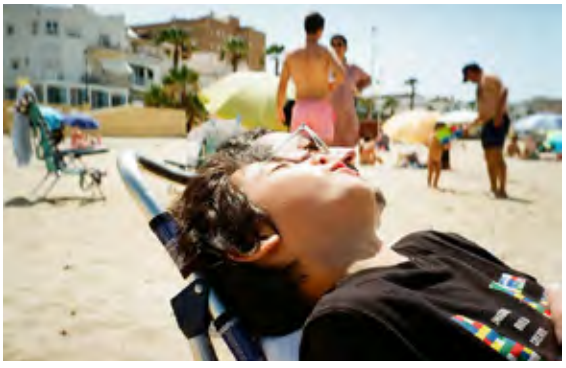
Three years ago, Dowling changed the rules so that entries must be carried to the Reynolds Building to be measured. Students then send their photos to the community, and ordinary winter email-checking becomes delightful.

This is year, Felix '25 and Lewis '25 caught what Dowling thinks is the record so far, a 91-incher off of Keep (Keep and the senior cabins seem to grow the biggest icicles). Dowling says that the winter of '24–'25 was a "phenomenal one for icicles.

We asked Dowling why is this so sweet and fun, and brings people so much happiness. He replied, "Because winter is sweet and fun and brings people happiness.



Above: Lewis '25 and Felix '25 with their winning entry. **Right:** Students measure entries in the Reynolds building. Todd Dowling with a "keeper" icicle



NATIONAL ART AWARDS

Putney students had many successes in this year's Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, a prestigious national program that offers exhibition opportunities and scholarships to young artists and writers. Forty-four Putney students were recognized for their work, from Gold Key winners to Honorable Mentions. Two students (Lucia '27 and Chloe '26) were nominated for American Vision Awards and another (Root '27) for an American Voices award, which means their work will be juried nationally. Sasha '25's Gold Key-winning portfolio will also be juried nationally.

Clockwise:

"Augusta and Phoenix" by Lucia '27

"Trees in the Balcony" by Jax '25

"Untitled" by Miles '25

"Untitled" by Chloe '26

"Sasha Wales Ceramics" by Sasha '25

LEADING THE WHEY

In March, cheesemakers, dairy farmers, and scientists gathered at Putney for a two-day conference on the science and craft of raw milk cheeses.

Hosted in part by the cheesemakers at Parish Hill Creamery in Westminster, whose award-winning cheeses are produced entirely with milk from The Putney School's herd, the conference focused on the needs and challenges faced by small-scale, artisan, and farmstead cheesemakers.

Putney Farm Manager Noah Hoskins, who took the reins at the farm last year, sees the conference as just the beginning of where the farm program is headed.

It was emblematic of our trajectory as we seek to expand the experiential food science components of our program," said Hoskins.

Makerspace Upgrades

With thanks to a senior exhibition last spring, the nascent makerspace received a big upgrade.

 e "makerspace as it were, was born in the hallway of Reynolds as a single 3D printer on a table a decade ago as a trap set by science teacher Glenn Littledale on unsuspecting incoming ninth grader Ollie Rosand '19. ere were 3D printers on campus, but tucked away in classrooms. Littledale, who thought this student would de nitely be interested, knew there was a better chance of engaging him if it was right out there in the hallway.

" e trap worked said Littledale. Rosand later built a CNC router that joined the rst printer in the hall.

Since then, a handful of exuberant students worked with what they had, created and learned, and taught others. Adults have come to learn and build and support the students over the years. But all in all, it was fairly homespun and lacked organization.

Last year, Skyler Rainer '24, who could o en be found in the makerspace, dedicated his senior exhibition to turning the space into something proper. He envisioned a custom environment, and built a French cleat system on which to store the tools, as well as working tables, a table for the laser cutter and 3D printers, and created a wish list of tools, most of which the school acquired.

Science teacher Rosi Olivan is the newly appointed makerspace coordinator. She's been working to diversify the students who use the space, offering group Project Weeks for students who identify as female, for example. She's considering an evening activity next year that combines the technology piece with art making. Ann-Marie White will engage the space with her engineering and design class.

All these incredible tools sit in the hallway, not behind a locked door. Olivan is working to create procedures that would certify students to use the equipment, and those students would, then, have access at any time.

"It's an awesome opportunity for students she said. "It's just what Danny (O'Brien, head of school) keeps talking about agency and accountability

Left to right: Lucia '27, Rosi Olivan, and Ezra '28.

Putney Disconnect

Augusta '25 is on a phone-free journey at Putney

BY DARRY MADDEN

"I stopped using my phone two years ago now," said Augusta '25.

I remember when she did, because she made a presentation to the board of trustees about it. As someone with non-stop guilt and conflict about the time of my life that I've wasted looking at social media, I sat up and paid attention, self-flagellated, grieved, swore to do better, did better, did worse.

Since then, I've observed this soft-spoken student looking like someone picked her up from Putney in 1960 and dropped her here in the post-pandemic. She's often reading under a tree, and she knits a lot. She taught my own three children to knit with the patience of an actual saint.

"It was at the very beginning of my sophomore year. I stopped using it because I felt like I was addicted to it. I was spending way too much time on it. And it felt like when I was in the presence of my phone, I didn't have autonomy over how I was spending my time," she said.

She said it felt so sad to her, that she was here, at Putney, a place full of opportunities to get your hands dirty, to work, and, most of all, to create.

"So I surveyed my life and I realized that there is this huge chunk of time that I'm spending every day on this thing that has no end product that I don't feel proud of," she said. (I found two statistics online. One: the average American spends five hours a day on their phone. Two: the average American checks their phone 205 times a day.)

During our interview, when she said those words ("no end product; don't feel proud of"), the little hairs on my arms stood up. They have been haunting me since.

Of course, this is a national conversation, and one Putney is grappling with every day. An initiative to have students voluntarily turn in their devices before bed (to help them get better sleep) at Putney barely got off the ground: there was little buy-in, and those that did participate quickly came to push back, complain, and not comply. On the other hand, Augusta is not alone in her peer group. A small group of these students call themselves Putney Disconnect, and have a variety of conscious decisions about how they use technology. Many have flip phones (note to self: this is what my kids will get; thank you, Putney students, for the inspiration).

Augusta went absolute cold turkey. She just put her phone in a desk drawer, let the battery die, and has not touched it since. "It has been great," she said.

<< The Sheep Are Mourning This Week, silver gelatin print by Augusta '25

>> The Chickens Are Mourning This Week, silver gelatin print by Augusta '25

<< The Curtains Are Mourning This Week, silver gelatin print by Augusta '25

>> The Shadows Are Mourning This Week, silver gelatin print by Augusta '25

<< The Farm is Mourning This Week, silver gelatin print by Augusta '25

These photographs are from the project *October 16 to 22; Lamb Funeral Walk*. The series was created in response to the death of one of the sheep, Jupiter.

From Augusta's artist statement: The week following Jupiter's death was cold and bright and blustery and heavy. In this heaviness I walked as little as possible and did not go to the barn. My grief was isolating. I found it difficult to make art, and spent most of the time in my studio spinning Jupiter's wool. My grief fed itself ... Walking around the farm I learned that I was not the only one mourning. A distinct sadness permeated the small barn ... And then walking around the cow barn, I learned that mine was not the only mourning. A cow died that week too. The farm's grief that week bled into the surrounding world ... As I walked, I took photos of the mourners I saw. I have one photo for each day that I spent mourning in isolation.

Acknowledgment of an Unpayable Debt

BY JENNIFER RAMSAY JUST '77

They say every journey starts with a single step. If so, I don't know which, or whose, step started this one.

I asked to write this article for the *Putney Post* for a number of reasons. One is that my story is like that of many White people who have lived in this country for more than a few generations. Unlike others, I've uncovered some of the details. And unlike more still, I want to write about it. And finally, when I decided I wanted to do something to in some way atone for or make some restitution, inadequate though it would be, for my ancestors' acts, and to offer some recompense for the fact that my family benefited financially from the labor of enslaved people, I decided Putney was the place to do it.

As many of my Putney friends know, I've long been interested in history, especially family history. For years, I've been writing a book and accompanying Substack about my great-great-grandfather George B. Swift, who was elected mayor of Chicago a couple of times in the 1890s, and who founded the first Republican political machine in Chicago. (Interesting fact: he gave Jane Addams her first government job, as a garbage inspector. Jane Addams later gave Carmelita Hinton her first job out of college, at Hull House, the settlement house Addams had founded in Chicago while George B. was rising through the political ranks there.)

I've uncovered other family stories too. After reading *Slaves in the Family* by Edward Ball, I determined to learn more about my ancestors who had lived in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia before the war.

I didn't just find the "slave schedules" that you see in the federal and some state censuses in the years before the Civil War. You see those, and you see the single marks below a single column, and though you see the stark fact that one of your ancestors owned a woman aged 30 and a girl under 10, it's all too easy to see that as data.

I found three wills. What I'm about to share still fills me with nausea, and I can only imagine how it might make some others feel, but I feel it's important/ essential to this process/ to share.

Elisha Barnett is my great-great-great grandfather. He owned a farm in Woodburn, Kentucky. In his will, dated September 29, 1854, he begins by stating that his executors are to:

"sell such perishable property as they think advisable" to settle his "just debts" and funeral expenses. Should the "money on hand…prove insufficient for the foregoing purposes it is my desire that they sell a certain negro boy named David for the purpose of carrying out the same…"

Richard Tillery is my great-great-great-great granduncle. He lived in Knox County, Tennessee. In his will, dated 1856, he states,

"my daughter Mary being dead, I will and bequeath to her heirs one Childs portion of my negro Slaves, which are to be divided according to value."

I have searched in vain to learn what amount a "Childs portion" would add up to.

And finally, my great-great-great-great-great grandfather Francis Triplett, whose who owned 200 acres of land in Fairfax, Virginia. His 1857 will elaborates in great detail how his human chattel is to be handed down.

"I give to my loving wife Elizabeth Triplett I lend her all of my personable estate and a Negro woman named Bess and Negro girl named Nann."

The will states that after Elizabeth's death, "I give and bequeath to my son Francis a Negro woman called Beth and her increase…" In this context, "increase" means any children she might bear.

I'm hesitant to describe the level of disgust and shame I felt at what I found, and still feel, retyping those words. After all, my discomfort is nothing compared to what was visited upon Bess, Nann, David, and the other unnamed enslaved.

Putney person that I am, I decided I had to do something about this. At first, I tried to do what Edward Ball did and tried to track down descendants. This is incredibly difficult. I did determine that the Tripletts's property lines now bordered Dulles Airport, so any harebrained, half-finished thought I had that I could even afford to repurchase this 200 acres and… and…what? Give it to people who I couldn't find? And even then, which descendants? I put the project aside.

A few years after I learned about the Barnetts, Tillerys, and Tripletts I was asked to join Putney's board of trustees. I was thrilled to learn that the Putney board, year after year, is just like any group of Putney people: thoughtful, intelligent, philosophical, passionate, and purposeful.

One of the first questions I was asked when I joined the board was from Hugh Montgomery, then the director of development. "We always ask our board members to give a stretch gift while they're on the board." "What does 'stretch' mean?" I asked. "It means it has to hurt a little." As it happened, my mother had recently passed and left me a larger inheritance than I expected, so I made what for me at the time was a huge commitment: $5,000 a year to the Annual Fund. (Yes, it hurt! But as Hugh had also suggested, it also felt good to be able to afford that level of support.)

When I decided I wanted to do something to in some way atone for or make some restitution, inadequate though it would be, for my ancestors' acts, and to offer some recompense for the fact that my family benefited financially from the labor of enslaved people, I decided Putney was the place to do it."

Very soon a er, I joined the Campaign Task Force which was just then formulating the comprehensive campaign that is now underway, Sing It *Forward*. I realized that as part of the task force I should probably offer a leadership gi . A er consulting with my nancial advisor I donated $20,000.

When Emily Jones announced she was retiring, the board realized we wanted to get the new dorms built by the time she le , which meant really beating the bushes to raise the money to nish them. I consulted with my nancial advisor again, and pledged $150,000 toward the dorms, to be paid over three years. is time, having had practice in "stretching I felt elated to be able to make a substantive difference in the campaign.

Finally, in October 2023, we were holding part of our board meeting in one of the new dorms. As you know, there are many parts to the Sing It *Forward* campaign. Everyone knows about the new dorms and the plan to improve the theater. But we also have a goal to raise scholarship funds.

A few weeks ago, I was pondering that I was in my last term of board service and what I wanted to accomplish with the time I had le at Putney. I had a sudden realization about what I could do. Both Danny O'Brien (head of school) and Kalya Yannatos (director of development) had said that any bequests made by donors over age 65 could be included as donations to the campaign. Also, bequests tend to go toward the endowment, which is used for nancial aid.

I realized that if I wanted the bequest to have a purpose, I should set a speci c number.

Last December, I announced to the Campaign Leadership Group that I was leaving a bequest to Putney in the amount of $1,000,000 to come closer to fully funding what I was by then calling the Justice and Action Fund, speci cally for families applying to Putney whose ancestors had been enslaved. We had in fact included this stipulation when originally contemplating adding this line item to the campaign.

 is bequest was a huge stretch for me, and, more importantly, to my two sons. But when I spoke to them, they were more than in favor. "I think you have to do it said one. To the three of us, this bequest in some ways answers the three bequests from so long ago. We can't of course give Nann or Bess or David or their colleagues back their freedom, nor can we ever truly recompense them or their descendants for their enslavement, or the wealth that was derived from their enforced labor. But in this small way I can at least acknowledge our shared history publicly, which is of course a piece of American history shared by so many others.

 us, this is not just a family's journey to better understand itself and come to terms with all corners of the past, but my journey in philanthropy. My gi s to Putney over the years have grown not only in size but in meaning. Until I joined the board, I gave to Putney simply because I loved the school. Once I thought of myself as a steward of e Putney School, I began to see with an adult's eyes the true value of a Putney education. So many of students' projects start with a small idea and end up being larger. And they carry this curiosity, courage, and persistence with them out into the world. When big things happen off the hill, conversations happen on the hill, schoolwide and in small groups. Putney people are making a difference in the thought and care they put into their work and play, in communities across the globe.

It's my hope and trust that we are able not only to establish this fund far beyond the $2 million goal in my lifetime, but that the story behind it opens the door to dialogue and conversation about who we are to one another, and how we reconcile a past that can never be altered, but can be opened up for conversation and, yes, action.

I welcome you to join me in this specific action. If you would like to connect, please feel free to be in touch. jramsayjust@gmail.com

RETIREMENTS

A Curtain Call and an Au Revoir

Between them, Karla Baldwin and Libby Holmes have given almost 70 years to the Putney School. As they turn in their keys at the end of this school year, we take a minute to capture a snapshot of our vast appreciation for these strong, fabulous women.

Karla Baldwin, photo by Gabriel Cooney

KARLA BALDWIN

If you want to see Karla Baldwin's face light up, ask her about theater. She tells a story of herself in a 12th grade public high school speech class. Nervous. The inner actor as-yet-undiscovered. "Believe it or not, I was afraid. Our first speech was about the self. I burst into tears at the end[…] The teacher allowed her to re-do the speech. She knew she had to try again. "I dressed up, teased my hair, gaudy makeup and jewelry. I walked into the room, and drawled, 'Hello, my name is Lola, and I'm here to talk about Karla. She's so *shy* that she can't talk about herself.' Afterward, the teacher insisted she study theater, gave her private acting lessons, and arranged for her to attend regional acting competitions. Karla fell in love with theater.

In 1993 she brought that love to Putney. In 25 years, Karla directed 66 plays and oversaw 66 student productions: 132 productions total. She taught the classes you'd expect: theater, acting, directing, playwriting, and developed the "theater intensive" program. A student has to earn theater intensive, learning the craft in first- and second-level theater. The script is then literally flipped, and students are given the agency to create and direct a production. Those "intensive" programs have now spread to all academic departments at Putney. They started with Karla.

Karla accumulated roles the longer she stayed at Putney: dean of faculty, academic dean, college counselor, and more. She also led the senior exhibition program, a trimester-long deep dive into a topic of the student's choice, done by application only. In the mid-'90s, fewer than ten seniors did an exhibition. This year? *Thirty* students. Always, she was known for her love of her work, her clear boundaries, and high expectations. Whether helping a student navigate a college essay redraft, or advising about classes they needed: both tricky endeavors. Karla worked *with* the students, asking honest, sometimes challenging questions, and she *listened* to the responses. Students grew under her guidance, nurtured by her consistent presence.

Ever humble, Karla made special note of her appreciation for her students and colleagues. "I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have grown old with so many gifted and enjoyable people.

Libby Holmes teaching Frances Du '15

"And I loved creating theater at Putney, being in the company of our deeply engaged student actors, stage managers, lighting designers, costume designers, and set designers. I was immensely fortunate to have long collaborations with remarkable adults like Becky Graber, Patricia Wilson, Robert Olson, and Tim Ellis.

Karla is fluent in the language of teenagers and patient with their grumblings. She knows her directness can surprise students, but sometimes they need to hear, "You have to change your behavior." She holds the line with compassion, and the students respond. "I know I can be tough," she says. "But the full picture is, 'I care for you and your well-being...'" She smiles. "... But it is not okay to not do your classwork."

That said, Karla also firmly believes in allowing students to navigate their own Putney experience, which means occasionally allowing them to fail. She also appreciates the student-driven accountability that Putney does so well. "They don't want to let down a peer," says Karla. "Our kids help each other, and they step in. What would the students have learned if the adult had fixed it instead?"

After 32 years, Karla beautifully sums up how happy she was to land here: "I was the 'artist' person in high school, the singer, the dancer, the flute player. I was a Putney kid, not knowing that a place like Putney even existed."

LIBBY HOLMES

August 1990. Fresh out of graduate school, Libby Holmes was a last-minute, part-time hire, brought to Putney to teach English to four Japanese students already enrolled at Putney. By the middle of that year, four more students arrived from Korea, and the size of her ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) class doubled. As is the case in the boarding school world, sometimes the last-minute, part-time hire turns into a decades-long, community-building cornerstone of a school. That, friends, is Libby.

In the late 1990s, the school needed to grow its international recruitment strategies. "Let me try," said Libby to then-Director Brian Morgan. She leaned on her connections with alumni, and it worked. The program grew, at one point employing three ESOL teachers and offering as many as five ESOL classes. But Libby grew more than just enrollment, she built community and culture, and encouraged curiosity and connection. Says Libby, "I am really comfortable with people from a different background. I think what often makes people uneasy is uncertainty about how to communicate when there's a language barrier. For me, it's almost a magnet. I'm pulled towards helping somebody communicate. I love the opportunity to meet someone where they are."

Cross-cultural experiences happen naturally on campus, between roommates, on sports teams, in classes, and work jobs. "The students who are learning English are amazing examples and inspiration for all kids learning a foreign language. Everybody becomes a teacher in that regard."

Libby, reflecting on her work as Director of International Student Program, lands on the phrase "cultural fluency." Added to the Putney lexicon by Emily Jones and adopted as a cornerstone of the Putney Core, it is both an outcome and a motivator of her work. "The phrase expanded my understanding of what I was already doing and believing in beyond language teaching. I consider myself an intercultural educator as much as an English language teacher; Emily's inherent understanding of and devotion to why that matters had a huge impact on me and on the school as a whole."

Putney's international students feel and felt at home here. Libby made that happen. She welcomed them into her home, cooked them meals, met their families, and encouraged them to share their culture and their food with the campus community. Her endless curiosity about their cultures led to the creation of a creative, highly energized International Ambassadors student group, winter fireworks in celebration of Lunar New Year, the gastronomic delights of Harvest Festival's International Café, spring Hanami gatherings under Putney's apple trees, tea tastings from around the world. In some ways, she's just getting started.

Her last thoughts were about her own children, Miles and Carrie, both of whom attended Putney. "I loved having my kids at Putney. I mean, I *loved* it. It was so affirming. My two kids are very different people. Different kids, different adults, different interests. and they both found a place at Putney."

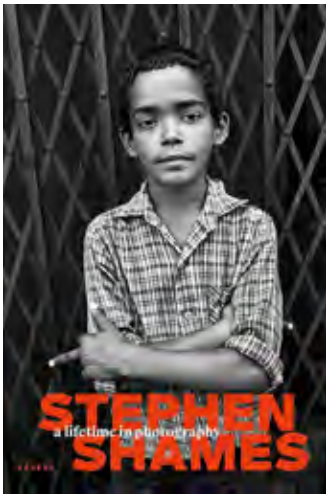
Lately, Libby has been receiving emails from around the world. For the far-flung Putney alumni who came to Putney as international students and have now grown into adulthood, Libby is their Putney throughline and lifeline. the heart of the school they carry with them. And through Libby's teaching, caring, and advocacy, their time on this windy Vermont hilltop enriched the entire campus community. And now, with her retirement announced, she is hearing from them, tearful exchanges that, pieced together, tell the story of a school transformed, one student at a time.

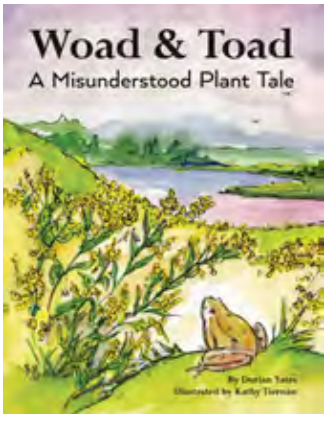
ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Tim Merton '68 in his 1932 Model B Ford truck

ALUMNI BOOKS

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





Stephen Shames, A Life in Photography

Stephen Shames '65
Kehrer Verlag, 2025

Shames has traversed five continents, witnessing tragedy and triumph. "Although I photographed many diverse subjects and pictured people from countless cultures, there is a thread connecting my pictures. Much of my photography is about children in distress with a focus on identity and family: what tears us apart and binds us together: violence and abuse, but also sensuality, love, hope, and transcendence."

Thorn Tree

Max Ludington '85
St. Martin's Press, 2024

Now in his late-sixties, Daniel lives in quiet anonymity in a converted guest cottage in the Hollywood Hills. A legendary artist, he's known for one seminal work: The Thorn Tree: a hulking, welded, scrap metal sculpture that he built in the Mojave desert in the 1970s. The work emerged from tragedy, but building it kept Daniel alive and catapulted him to brief, reluctant fame in the art world. Daniel is neighbors with Celia, a charismatic but fragile actress. She too experienced youthful fame, but saw her life nearly collapse after a series of bad decisions. Now, a new movie with a notorious director might reignite her career. A single mother, Celia leaves her young son Dean for weeks at a time with her father, Jack. Jack and Daniel strike up a tentative friendship: but something about Jack seems off. Discomforting, strangely intimate, with flashes of anger balanced by an almost philosophical bent, Jack is not the harmless grandparent he pretends to be. Weaving the idealism and the darkness of the late 1960s, and thrumming with the sound of the Grateful Dead, the mania of Charles Manson, and the secrets that both Jack and Daniel have harbored for fifty years, *Thorn Tree* by Max Ludington is an utterly compelling novel.

Balancing Strategy: Sea Power, Neutrality, and Prize Law in the Seven Years' War

Anna Brinkman '06
Cambridge University Press, 2024

What is the relationship between seapower, law, and strategy? Anna Brinkman uses in-depth analysis of cases brought before the Court of Prize Appeal during the Seven Years' War to explore how Britain worked to shape maritime international law to its strategic advantage. Within the court, government officials and naval and legal minds came together to shape legal decisions from the perspectives of both legal philosophy and maritime strategic aims. As a result, neutrality and the negotiation of rights became critical to maritime warfare. *Balancing Strategy* unpicks a complex web of competing priorities. Ultimately, influencing and shaping international law of the sea allows a nation to create the norms and rules that constrain or enable the use of seapower during war.

Woad & Toad: A Misunderstood Plant Tale

Dorian Yates '78
Rowan Press, 2024

Language about "invasive" plants sets a dangerous precedent for ourselves, our children, and the planet, blaming the plants and earth for trying to heal and course-correct from our poor decisions. The Misunderstood Plants commonly referred to as "invasives" are misunderstood, underrated, undervalued, and demonized. If the plants could speak our language they would tell us that they identify as: Tenacious, Vigorous, Protective, Determined, Powerful, Persistent, Eager, Generous, Friendly, Helpful, and Big-Hearted. Join Toad, Mrs. Knotweed, the three Artemisias, Kudzu, Dandelion, and Little Barberry on their adventures with their friends as they make their way through adversity with appreciation, understanding, and love.

P.S.

Wib ’25 on the Pemigewasset Loop hike in the White Mountains, Long Fall 2024.

FROM @PUTNEYSCHOOL ON INSTAGRAM

Putney Reunion

JUNE 6-8, 2025

putneyschool.org/reunion

Registration is Open!

CLASSES OF 65-66, 70-71, 75, 90-91, 99-02, 08-10

Harvest Festival

OCTOBER 12, 2025

putneyschool.org/harvest

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

Acrylic painting
by Chloe '26