



The Promise of a Chance to Work, to Live

Stories of
Putney's
Early
Émigré
Teachers

Story by Brian D. Cohen

To COMBAT prejudice and injustice wherever it appears; to strive for a world outlook, putting oneself in others' places, no matter how far away or how remote...so that one definitely progresses along the long slow road toward achieving a civilization worthy of the name."

— FROM THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

Putney's core identity has often stood in contrast to the larger national zeitgeist, which now shuns a world outlook of any kind. Mrs. Carmelita Hinton's beliefs in founding Putney were nourished by the international progressivism of John Dewey, promoting global peace and understanding after World War I, and by her early association with Nobel Peace Prize recipient Jane

Addams's Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Hull House, which served recently arrived European immigrants (Mrs. Hinton served as Jane Addams's secretary at Hull House after graduating from Bryn Mawr). Mrs. Hinton closely studied Metairie Park Country Day School, a school founded in 1929 by her friend Ralph Edwin Boothby (whose son, Lawrence, taught at Putney from 1949–52 and grandson, also Lawrence, was class of '63), and known for hiring Jewish refugee educators during the 1930s. It was during a road trip through Vermont following an international peace meeting in Woodstock, New York, when Mrs. Hinton discovered the perfect site for the progressive school she envisioned.

TRAVEL TO EUROPE

for immersive language learning would be part of the curriculum of the nascent school, as outlined in her 1935 founding prospectus. In 1933 and again in 1934 Mrs. Hinton led a group of students on an Experiment in International Living (a progressive international youth exchange founded in 1932) tour to Nazi Germany. A perhaps ill-advised Putney trip in 1937 to Scandinavia, Austria, and Germany led by Mrs. Hinton and teachers Ewald Schnitzer and Luke Gwilliam (who painted the mural in the old post office in the KDU) may have reflected her admiration for the German Youth Movement, along with an extra measure of idealism (or denial). The trip, coupled with a student prank of flying a Nazi flag on campus belonging to Joan Hinton ’39, a souvenir of the 1937 trip, led to ill-placed accusations of Nazi sympathies. Mrs. Hinton’s internationalist leanings were hardly one-sided, or even political for that matter, and in 1947 a trip to Prague, Czechoslovakia, to attend the World Federation of Democratic Youth, the 1949 campus conference on Soviet-American relations, as well as the Maoist loyalties of daughter Joan and son Bill ’36, instead seemed to attest to the school’s leftist inclinations. Mrs. Hinton’s internationalist idealism was a pedagogical and personal aspiration, and a reflection of her strong aversion to war, not a political stance.

In the first years of the school, and increasingly in the years following World War II, Mrs. Hinton actively recruited Europeans artists and intellectuals to teach at Putney. She earnestly believed in the innate potential for goodness, spiritual dimension, and creativity of all people, and that as people from every land came to know and appreciate the promise of one another, international cooperation and world peace could be realized. She shaped her intentional learning community of children and adults at Putney to include a diversity of backgrounds, interests, and education in order that students would meet the world on this remote campus and would seek to change the world when they reentered it.

After the Second World War began in Europe, in response to the bombing of London in 1940, Mrs. Hinton brought children from England to enroll at Putney.



Carmelita Hinton, left of the captain, with Putney students in 1937. The students were en route to two European trips: one to Scandinavia, the other to Austria and Germany.

Five European émigré teachers had a particularly deep and enduring impact on Putney students.

All of them (Putney’s émigré teachers) wrapped their teaching in the history and culture of whichever country they represented; their world view touched the entire school and—I like to think—broadened our perspective. — LIBBY MILLS

Stépha and **Fernando Gerassi** led lives, independently and as a couple, that in sheer adventure, daring, creative and intellectual accomplishment, political intrigue, and cultural influence that read like the stuff of an outlandish and implausible international thriller, and whose list of friends and associates is a veritable who’s who of 20th-century philosophy, politics, art, music, literature, and thought. Fernando was born in 1899 in Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey,

figure in 20th-century philosophy. Disappointed in the fruitlessness of philosophy (“I wanted to find out the meaning of life. I didn’t find anything but speculations,” Fernando said), galvanized by leftist thought, and fallen under the tutelage and influence in Munich of the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, the most prominent formalist art historian of the first half of the 20th century, Fernando chose to study art with the painter Stanislas Stueckgold.

The same year, 1927, Fernando met a striking Ukrainian woman, Stéphania (Stépha) Avdykovich (born 1903), daughter of a Lviv candy factory owner and a student at the Sorbonne, whom he would marry in 1929. (At the time Stépha, who had degrees from four different European universities, was the romantic partner of Alban Berg, a leading avant-garde composer of the early 20th century). Together Stépha and Fernando traveled to Spain and relocated to Madrid, where Fernando worked by day as a businessman and by night as a painter. The Gerassis embraced the newly formed (and short-lived) liberal Spanish Republic and welcomed Federico García Lorca and Pablo Neruda into their circle. In the summer of 1931, the couple moved to Paris, where the Gerassis became the centerpiece of Parisian cultural and intellectual life, enjoying *la vie bohème* of Montparnasse with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, who said about their arrival, “In June (1931), Stépha and Fernando descended on Paris, highly elated because, after a long period of agitation, upheaval, and repression, the Republic had finally been established in Spain,” and who would remain lifelong friends of the Gerassis. Stépha tutored Beauvoir on matters of sexuality and the demi-monde, of which Beauvoir was completely naïve (Stépha figures prominently in *The Second Sex*, a groundbreaking landmark of feminist philosophy). Maurice Utrillo, Chaïm Soutine, Fernand Léger, Marc Chagall, Joan Miró, and Alexander Calder were all part of their wide social circle of artists and thinkers. Fernando would later tell Calder about The Putney School, and Calder sent his two daughters to Putney: Sandra Calder Davidson ’53 and Mary Calder Rower ’58. Fernando’s dedication to painting began to pay dividends, and in the early 1930s,

A WORLD OF LEARNING

The following teachers emigrated, mostly from Europe, to teach at Putney around the time of the Second World War:

Jenaro Artilles taught Spanish from 1947-50. He had headed a teachers’ union in Spain until expelled by Franco. His aimed to bridge conflict between the striking Putney Teachers Union and Mrs. Hinton in 1949.

Mme. (Jeanne) Case came to the United States as the French bride of an American soldier in the First World War. She taught French from 1949-66. Graceful, reserved, well-mannered, and somewhat impetuous, Mme. Case may be the only adult in the Putney community apart from Mrs. Hinton who was not addressed on a first-name basis. Mme. Case was described as representing the epitome of French civility, culture, cuisine, and refinement. She was a fierce defender of energy conservation, admonishing her dorm incessantly to “Shut zee lights!” in the hallway.

Jean-Marie Chalufour taught French from 1941-43, left for Phillips Exeter Academy, and returned to Putney from 1948-50.

Hubert Grigaut taught French from 1939-41. He joined the U. S. Army from 1943-46.

Werner (Doc) Heider held degrees from the universities of Berlin and Munich and fled Germany in the 1930s, arriving in New York on New Year’s Eve 1936. He taught history, geography, social studies, and Latin (and chemistry, very reluctantly) at Putney from 1939-44. He later published four volumes of poetry and worked to restore ties between the United States and Germany. He is remembered as having worked very hard to learn idiomatic English from Putney students while teaching Latin in the fictional context of Western cowboy culture. He and Ewald Schnitzer were required to register with the town of Putney as enemy aliens and to report any change in their whereabouts.

Stépha did not wait for Fernando’s permission or live for his encouragement.



Stépha Gerassi, above, and husband Fernando, right, “led lives ... that read like the stuff of an outlandish and implausable international thriller.”

he exhibited throughout Europe and in the United States. In 1931 Fernando and Stépha’s son Juan (Tito) was born. (The story of Tito’s birth, perhaps apocryphal, has Andre Breton, Marc Chagall, Alberto Giacometti, Simone de Beauvoir, Joan Miró, and Fernando all drinking heavily in the café La Closerie des Lilas in Paris. Fernando passed out while Jean-Paul Sartre, also present, remained sober. Sartre peeked in on Stépha, who had just given birth across the street at Clinique Tarnier, and had on her own initiative named the newborn Jean-Paul, in Sartre’s honor. Fernando awoke and objected to the middle name, so Jean-Paul became Jean, John, or Juan in Spanish, Juanito (Little Juan) and then Tito. Sartre, an atheist, became Tito’s “non-god father.” (John Tito Gerassi would grow up to

be a renowned professor, investigative journalist, foreign correspondent, art critic, author, scholar, political activist, revolutionary, and, fittingly, the official biographer of Jean-Paul Sarte). This creative flowering was interrupted by the rise of fascism throughout Europe. When the July 18, 1936, coup attempt against the Spanish Republic signaled the start of the Spanish Civil War, Fernando left a message with Tito, then five years old, who was sitting on Sartre’s lap, for Stépha, who was in class at the Sorbonne, to tell her he was racing to Spain to defend liberal democracy. In a scene from Sartre’s novel *The Road to Freedom* (Les Chemins de la Liberté), the character Gómez (based on Gerassi) tells Mathieu (Sartre) that he’s off to Spain to fight. Mathieu asks him why, if the war will inevitably be lost, and Gómez replies: “*You don’t fight fascism because you can win it; you fight it because it’s fascist.*” Sartre, in a 1971 interview with Tito, said, “He (Fernando) affected me then more than any other man alive. He was an intellectual, like me. He was a painter; I was a writer. He had the same point of view, the same basic vision of life. To him, painting was more important than anything else. And then, just like that,” he said clicking his fingers, “Fernando went off to the fight. This really upset me. We had both always wanted revolution, but then suddenly, here was an intellectual like me, saying in effect, intellectuals must do what they preach.” Tito would later write: “Fernando was intolerant, loud and proud, sure of himself and of his judgments, very angry and very loyal, flamboyant and charismatic. Sartre was cool and collected, equally sure and proud, but careful and calculating.” Brilliant and fluent in multiple languages, and despite having no prior military experience, Fernando distinguished himself as a secret agent in missions to obtain arms (collaborating with André Malraux) and then as head of the military defense of the University of Madrid. Fernando came to the attention of Colonel Zhukov (later commander of Soviet forces during World War II), who appointed Fernando to the XV International Brigade. Fernando assumed the rank of Generalissimo of Republican forces in Barcelona, where he befriended Ernest Hemingway. He had

abruptly left Stépha in Paris with Tito, and so was surprised and not very pleased to run into her on the front lines in Spain as an assistant for Ilya Ehrenberg, the war correspondent for the Soviet newspaper Izvestia, who had hired Stépha to be his translator. Stépha did not wait for Fernando’s permission or live for his encouragement. (Stépha was quoted by a Putney student in her Russian class as saying, “I’m glad Eve ate the apple, I like this knowing the difference between good and evil. But Fernando? Fernando would rather be back in the Garden of Eden eating the banana!”) After Barcelona fell to the fascist rebels supported by Nazi Germany, Fernando managed (barely) to escape to France, accompanied over the border by Pablo Picasso and Dora Maar (one colorful account of Fernando’s life has him parachuting into France to escape the French military police at the border). Ignoring Fernando’s entreaties to defend against the threat of Nazi territorial aggression, the French government demurred until, in desperation, they impressed Fernando into service as a colonel defending the eastern border from the unstoppable German invasion. Fernando retreated with his regiment to Paris, where with the intercession of the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo’s main henchman, he obtained passports for himself, Stépha, Tito, and the Jewish soldiers in his ranks. When all the Dominican representatives fled Europe, Fernando became de facto Ambassador of the Dominican Republic, and with this dubious authority, granted passports to 8,000 Spanish refugees in France. The Gerassis escaped to Lisbon where Fernando, his identity betrayed, was discovered by Franco’s agents, who tried to assassinate him. The Gerassis found no refuge anywhere in Europe, and on September 3, 1941, they arrived in New York as political refugees, where at first and for many years thereafter, they also found no asylum. The Gerassis were arrested for illegal entry with false documents into the United States and released pending trial, but Bill Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services (predecessor to the CIA) learned of Fernando’s military accomplishments and enlisted him to assist the Allied cause by breaking Franco’s secret code. Fernando was ferried by submarine to Spain to set

up an underground sabotage network to destroy roads and bridges if, during the Allied invasion of North Africa, Franco aided the Germans in attacking Gibraltar. Fernando refused the medal offered him for bravery and quit the OSS. In New York he lived off translations and started painting again, on shirt cardboard, the only painting surface he could afford to paint on, while Stépha hawked jewelry on the streets and Tito sold newspapers before and after school. On the back of his first painting begun in America, Fernando wrote: “First pitiful attempt to paint after nine years of war (1936-1945).” The Calders used their connections to help the Gerassis, who were being harassed and threatened with deportation by the Central Intelligence Agency if Fernando did not resume spycraft on their behalf. Finally, in 1964, Attorney General Robert Kennedy learned of their contributions to their adoptive country and of the CIA harassment and immediately declared them U. S. citizens, apologizing on behalf of the United States of America for their mistreatment. In 1949 the art historian and critic Meyer Shapiro, a prominent formalist art historian of the second half of the 20th century who greatly admired Fernando’s work, connected Fernando with Mrs. Hinton. She immediately hired Fernando as a teaching artist and Stépha to teach “anything she wanted” (over the years she taught French, Spanish, Russian, ancient history, astronomy, Latin, European history—Stépha personally remembered the Russian Revolution—and German). Fernando was not yet fifty years of age. The remaining 25 years of his life would be quieter than the first 50. Finding Vermont reminiscent of the Basque country, Fernando and Stépha quickly adapted to small town rural life. Fernando was a familiar and endearing site in Putney, wandering with his beret and dog along Westminster West Road from his home to his studio, a former little red schoolhouse, which the town rented to him for \$45 a year (a little more than \$600 in 2025 dollars). Fernando enjoyed teaching and was beloved by his students. Lowell Rubin ’53 remembers Fernando’s pithy words of advice: “Each time you fail, you learn something. If you have faith in yourself, you go on. The more failures,



the better.” His paintings, now entirely abstract, began again to gather notice. Fernando exhibited alongside Georgia O’Keefe in 1951. The success of his 1955 solo exhibit in New York allowed him to retire from teaching to devote himself to painting full-time. He seemed to lose interest in what was happening in the New York art scene, however, and explored and memorized spiritual texts in the Christian and Hindu mystic traditions, reassessing his political convictions and past military involvements and embracing pacifism: “No political struggle can justify war, blood and violence” he wrote in his diary. “That can only lead to bitterness and despair.” He continued to paint until his death on December 2, 1974, leaving this country only one time, to visit his friend Alexander Calder at his studio in Saché, France. Stépha divided her teaching between Putney and the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Ken Cohen ’71 recalls Stépha’s sharp and wry sense of humor, beautiful elfish smile, refreshing bluntness, and expertise in keeping a 14-year-old’s attention. Christopher Walling ’67 remembers Stépha walking into the first day of Russian class saying, “These are the last words I will speak to you in English,” which she repeated in Russian, French, Latin, German, Spanish and Italian. Pam Huessy ’63 mentioned an outdoor luncheon with Stépha and Fernando during which Stépha observed that, despite remarkable progress in science, medicine, communications, transportation, longevity, and other areas of human endeavor,

Hans Hollstein taught German, Latin, and horsemanship from 1937–40 and from 1949–52. Descended from German aristocracy, he is reputed to have borne dueling scars on his face. An ebullient and likeable personality, he was asked to teach mathematics, which he did not very effectively, due to the wartime teacher shortage. **Charlotte Jossman** taught Latin, German, and athletics from 1943–45 and 1947–54 before joining Putney teachers John and Anne Holden at their newly founded Colorado Rocky Mountain School (“Putney of the West”).

Maurice LeConte taught French during the school year 1950–51. He and his wife Pat were model Parisian intellectuals and set a high literary standard on campus.

Mara Moser was a Swiss émigrée who taught Spanish, French, and German and was head of Language Department from 1943–48. She ran the refugee relief group on campus which raised \$4,000 in its first year (\$75,000 in today’s money). She was a dynamic and popular teacher who resisted constrictive language pedagogy by writing her own amusing exercises.

Toshiko Phipps performed many different duties at Putney, including supervising the KDU, all in her own determined and idiosyncratic way. The only wartime émigrée to Putney from this era not from Europe, Toshiko was descended from Japanese royalty and had prepared for 1940 Olympics as the Japanese national downhill ski champion (among men and women). After the war, she emigrated to the U. S., married an American artist, studied at Dartmouth and Harvard, and opened an internationally famous shiat-su massage school in Putney.

Albert Raffanel taught French from 1946–49. He was known for his French songs and jokes, as well as his yellow tie and yellowed (from cigarettes) fingers.

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humans have not been able to improve their own nature one bit, shaking her head sadly while saying this.

Stépha taught, gardened, and played the piano, despite failing sight and hearing. Simone de Beauvoir, who visited her in Putney in 1982, said, “She [Stépha] can hardly see anymore, but she knows the plants in her garden so well that she can feel the weeds and pull them out. Her hands hurt so much that when she plays, tears fall, but the music consoles her just the same. She is too deaf to hear it, but she says she feels it through her fingers.” Stépha died at age 86 years old on September 3, 1989, 48 years to the day after arriving to this country with Fernando and Tito.

“*Languages! They are most important in building the One World for which we work.*” —MRS. HINTON

Emilia Bruce came to The Putney School in 1959, the last of the post-war émigrés who had endured the Second World War in Europe to arrive at Putney and the last to retire from teaching. Emilia was born Primitiva Emilia Garcia Casado

in 1931, the youngest of six children, to aged parents in a highly literate family of Madrileños (her father was a civil servant who ran a bookstore; her mother was a ceaseless reader, as Emilia would be). Emilia believed her family were descendants of Sephardic Jews who had hidden their faith since the Inquisition, based on the Hebraic songs she learned from her mother, who profoundly influenced her. Emilia’s eldest sibling, her brother Emilio Garcia Casado, 24 years her senior, was murdered in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War by a rival Communist faction. Emilia described how utterly her family and childhood were upended when Emilio’s body was brought into their home and laid across the family table. The war and its aftermath were a time of deprivation and oppression in Madrid, a former Republican stronghold Franco sought to punish; Emilia said, “It was hard to know what was worse; the war or what came after.” Emilia found refuge and consolation in school, where she studied Latin and Greek.

Emilia’s sister, Julia Garcia Casado, with whom Emilia was very close though Julia was 11 years older, and Julia’s husband Luis Gimenez Cachó, a wealthy and successful businessman, emigrated to New York City in 1948, where Luis finished his master’s degree in engineering along with his classmates, the Leon brothers (Fernando, Javier ’40, and Gonzalo ’47). After Julia and Luis moved to Mexico City to start a manufacturing business, Emilia joined them in 1950. Emilia lived in Mexico for three years. There she met and befriended the families of Luis’s American business partners. In 1953, Emilia was invited to join her new American friends in the United States and was introduced to the Leon Family in Yonkers, New York, who were very active helping refugees from the Spanish Civil War and whose son Gonzalo Leon ’47 and daughter-in-law to-be Holly Forbes ’47 were both recent graduates of Putney. (Interestingly Gon’s father had been head of the Republican Army air force in Spain. He was stranded in the U.S. when that war ended. His two children and five grandchildren all attended Putney). Through Fernando Leon’s alumni connection to Black Mountain College, Emilia learned of the newly founded Marlboro College in Vermont, where she enrolled and met a young art student, Linn Bruce.



After exploring interdisciplinary American Studies, completing her thesis on the bible as literature, and receiving her degree, Emilia married Linn and began to teach Spanish at the Northfield School for Girls (now Northfield Mount Hermon). She filled in as a sabbatical replacement for Stépha Gerassi at Putney in 1957–58 and was offered a full-time position teaching Spanish in 1959. At Putney, Linn taught visual art and oversaw the woods crew for some thirty years (and cited Fernando Gerassi as a major influence on his teaching and painting).

Emilia was a demonstrative, animated, compassionate, and beloved teacher. Libby Marcus ’75 states that “Emilia was the only Putney adult to have my full, unguarded trust and respect during my three years at the school. ‘Leeeebby! Leeeebby!’—she would call in her mellifluous, full-throated voice across the back lawn or over the din of the KDU. Then she’d break every code of New England reserve by leaning deep into my personal space (a habit that was so refreshing to me—) to tell me something ‘inchrrreehdeeb!’ about a film she had seen that she thought I might enjoy, a book she sensed would be of interest, or an opportunity that might catch my elusive attention. Her energy, caring, righteousness,

enthusiasm, and dedication to experiential learning have influenced my own teaching practice.” Emilia was affectionate and involved, principled but never self-righteous, nurturing but not overbearing. An alumna from the late 1970s recalled feeling angry and disruptive in Emilia’s class, for reasons entirely her own. Emilia asked the student to leave the classroom and followed her outside to the hall. Rather than reprimand the student, Emilia hugged her. She never condemned or even criticized anyone; she sought to understand, accept, and soothe. Even the most poorly behaved students were just “a bit mischeefous.”

Libby Mills remembered teaching with Emilia on the top floor of the Reynolds Building, Libby in the east end classroom (now called the fiber arts studio), “looms clacking away while Emilia in the opposite classroom was leading a lively Spanish dialogue, usually ending with a song... *de colores se visten los campos en la primavera*... The doors between our rooms were never closed.” Libby learned a fair amount of Spanish by ear, and when they both retired, Libby studied and traveled to Latin America with Emilia.

Emilia had an ardent sense of social justice, perhaps born amid the turmoil of the Spanish Civil War and the repression of Franco’s fascist dictatorship. She worked with Mexican immigrants to Vermont to help them overcome the language barrier and she actively supported those harassed or oppressed anywhere because of their skin color, language, or politics.

In her retirement, Emilia continued to teach adult students in her house, high on West Hill overlooking the rooftops of The Putney School towards Monadnock. Libby Mills recalled that “her teaching space was the living room, alive with the colors of Spain and Mexico, with Linn’s brilliant paintings on the wall. Rich and wonderful smells of Mediterranean cooking sometimes drifted in from a pot simmering on the kitchen stove. Books were everywhere; Emilia’s reading was wide and varied. Her knitting was in the corner, and we cheered each other’s projects. Hers were unique in design and color, often echoing something from her childhood. The place felt both earthy and cosmopolitan; it was our turn to be in a language class couched in Spanish history, art, and culture—with family added to the mix.” Emilia passed

away in Vermont on May 18, 2021.

Felix and **Marisa Lederer** brought a level of erudition, pedagogy, dedication, and kindness to two generations of Putney students, and are remembered with gratitude and profound respect. Felix was born in 1910 to a famous Czech conductor, also Felix Lederer, a student of Antonín Dvořák and Jewish convert to Lutheranism, in a learned family (the three brothers were all named after composers) in the Saarland, a highly industrialized state in the southwest of Germany, long contested by France and Germany, that enjoyed quasi-independence after the First World War. A plebiscite in 1935 voted to reincorporate the Saar region into the Third Reich, and the Saar immediately fell under the antisemitic Nuremberg Laws. Felix, who had by then earned three PhDs (in music, philosophy, and classics), fled Germany for Florence, Italy, where he was briefly imprisoned by Mussolini’s police (he took advantage of the forced solitude of prison to study Ancient Greek). He was released into the service of the affluent, cultivated, aristocratic Florentine Fazzini family to teach their daughter Marisa to speak German and to play piano. Marisa was born in 1920 in Florence. The name Marisa is a shortening of her birth name, Maria-Teresa (if you called her Marisa with a soft “s” you never did it a second time). Marisa reminisced about falling in love with Felix during the war while sitting on the piano bench playing compositions for four-hands.

In 1943, Nazi forces occupied Florence and began rounding up and deporting Jews (only 13 Jews removed from Florence survived the war to return). Marisa’s nephew, Tom Lederer, believes that she was incarcerated during the occupation, but she never spoke about her experiences during the war. The Fazzini family secreted Felix until the war’s conclusion, at which time he was detained by American forces in a displaced persons camp as an undocumented alien. Released, rootless, he reunited with Marisa, whom he married in 1948. The couple emigrated to the United States, arriving on Washington’s birthday, February 22, 1949, after a stormy 13-day crossing on a Polish freighter. Marisa wrote movingly of their arrival, “... to us this day was the beginning of a new life. This was our new adoptive country, the promise (hope) of a chance, to work, to live.” Marisa described

Margrit Rosenstock-Huessy, a Swiss educator who had studied the history of art in Florence, taught German at Putney from 1935–36. She was married to the influential historian and social philosopher Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy.

Friedrich Sandels came to Putney after miraculously escaping a concentration camp with his wife. “He doesn’t talk about it; you can just read it in his face and his eyes,” recalled Dave Schauffler ’46. Sandels taught Spanish and Latin from 1944–46 before joining Dickinson College to teach German and Classics as the first openly Jewish professor.

Ewald Schnitzer taught History, German, Music, skiing, and rock climbing from 1935–43. He was among Mrs. Hinton’s original faculty and Putney’s first history teacher. His combined American-European history class was quite popular, embracing intellectual as well as political and social history. He co-led with Mrs. Hinton the 1937 Putney trip to Germany and Austria on the SS Hamburg. During the trip Ewald was compelled to avoid Germany and to meet the group again in Salzburg, as he would have been drafted into the Wehrmacht had he set foot on his native soil.

Werner Warmbrunn grew up in a German Jewish family who left Frankfurt for Amsterdam in 1936, endured the German occupation of Holland, and managed to escape Europe. He completed his B. A. at Cornell before arriving at Putney to teach chemistry and German from 1944–47. He described the Putney community as infused with a spirit familiar to him and said arriving at Putney was “like coming home.” He later became a founding faculty member and professor of history at Pitzer College in California. Towards the end of his life, he wrote: “I am happy and at peace; hardly a day passes when I do not experience and express how rare and fragile such a state of being is. It is of course the way life is supposed to be, but it hardly ever is. Instead, I experience it as a state of grace that may not last but is still to be cherished.”



Émigré Teachers

From top left, Emilia Bruce in her first year at Putney, Emilia teaching in the early 1990s, Carmelita Hinton with students during the 1937 Scandinavia trip, Putney students en route to Europe in 1937, and Marisa and Felix Lederer with Gottfried Passche '56 (center) holding young Franz Paasche '79



Among Putney's many refugee and émigré teachers were (clockwise) Werner Warmbrunn, Charlotte Rossman, Toshiko Phipps, and Friedrich Sandels. Photos courtesy of the archives of Pitzer College, Colorado Rocky Mountain School, Bennington College, and Dickinson College, respectively.



When asked,
“Do you like
children?”
Marisa replied
succinctly and
honestly, “No.”

Putney as “a kind of rebirth” for her and Felix. The Lederers settled briefly in New York. Felix was joined in the U. S. by his brother Wolfgang, never to return to Europe.

Felix and Marisa were among the 20 new teachers hired for the fall of 1949 to replace faculty attrition from the teacher’s strike. Sue Lloyd ’52 in her history of The Putney School describes Marisa’s initial interview with Mrs. Hinton. When asked, “Do you like children?” Marisa replied succinctly and honestly, “No.” Marni Hinton Rosner ’69 remembers Felix speaking fondly and admiringly of her grandmother, Mrs. Hinton. Felix stressed to Marni that Mrs. Hinton was a great judge of character because when he and Marisa applied to teach at Putney, they had no documentation supporting their resumes that would verify his three PhDs and Marisa’s doctorate in history from the University of Florence. Felix was immediately hired to teach Latin, German, and Italian, while Marisa taught Italian and German and later served as the school’s admissions director and librarian. Together they dedicated 77 years of loving and loyal service to Putney. Mrs. Hinton must indeed have been a great judge of character.

Sven Huseby, former history teacher and director, recalled Felix and Marisa’s unique presence in the Putney School community. The Lederers took young Sven under their wing and would often have him over for tea, discussing education, history, and current events in the 1960s. Sven shared his

deep respect for their intellect, describing their lives as “rooted in scholarship and the arts...highly educated European refugees, seemingly so unsuited to teach teenagers, and yet both contributing mightily to the Putney of the post-war decades.” Sven described Felix’s unorthodox technique for dealing with students when they were “less than fully attentive.” He would throw open a window in freezing weather if anyone dared yawn, and if the yawning continued, he would make them get up, run around the building, and burn off their energy until they could focus on the class (Stephen Flanders ’64 attests this was in the spirit of helping you concentrate, not a form of punishment). Members of the class of ’71 remember Felix ordering students in his Latin class to awaken a missing classmate back in his dorm and to bring him back to the classroom on the ground floor of Reynolds, student, bed, and all. Another memory has Felix in Friday Night Sing deliberately and adamantly singing Latin words with the Medieval pronunciation, rather than Classical Latin, to Norwood Hinkle’s annoyance.

Felix was a thorough, dedicated, and exacting teacher; education was serious business and hard work. Felix’s nephew Tom termed his uncle “a supreme intellectual,” and joked that a family friend always said of Felix: “Good looks were wasted on him!” He delighted in the excellence of his students. Many younger teachers mentioned Felix’s high standards as having a significant influence on their own teaching. Author and educator Georgina Kleege ’74 asked Felix what his approach to teaching 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.”

While Felix was strict, he was also a friendly and compassionate teacher with a fine sense of humor. Pam Huessy ’63 said, “I don’t think he ever actually rapped a student’s knuckles with a ruler, but one always had the feeling that he might. Nonetheless, he was a deeply kind man with real concern for his students. When I told him I had decided to drop calculus in favor of a third year of Latin with him, his eyes widened and he exclaimed, ‘This is like receiving an electric shock of the most pleasant kind!’ Another class member



Above: Felix and Marisa Lederer. Opposite: Letter from Marisa Lederer, written in 1989, reflecting on her (and husband Felix’s) arrival in the United States 40 years earlier

said that following graduation, as she gazed out the back window of the family car rolling out of the parking lot, Felix stood wistfully waving goodbye to her until the car disappeared. Felix delighted in listening to students’ musical compositions and performances, which he did with profound discernment and appreciation, recalled Allan Shawn ’66. A member of the class of 1964 told of a stinging memory of throwing food in the KDU, bringing an angry rebuke from Felix, who had survived nearly a decade of deprivation. (Another KDU memory; a faculty member dropped some food and picked it up off the floor, whereupon Marisa said to him in Italian, “*Quel che non ammazza, ingrassa*,” [What doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger]). Michael Harwood ’52 shared a happy anecdote. The boys’ bathroom in Keep shared a very thin wall with Felix and Marisa’s tiny apartment, and he was introduced to the



audible joys of young conjugal life. When mentioned to Marisa, she blushed and smiled, warmed by the memory.

Felix retired from teaching in 1983 and continued to walk briskly (and riskily) on West Hill Road, birdwatching the while, until his death in 2000. “You could see Felix pacing around campus... always walking very purposely deep in thought with his jacket and his flowing white hair,” Sven Huseby recalls. Marisa worked until her retirement in 1992 after 43 years at Putney. Her retirement diploma depicted a panorama of Florence from the terrace of San Miniato al Monte near her birthplace, the view of the orchard and hills to the north of Little Pemberly, music from her favorite aria by Handel, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace,” and her beloved final canto of Dante’s Paradiso, the poet beholding a vision of “the love which moves the sun and the other stars.” She was reluctant to leave the school she loved and remained in Little Pemberly amid their many books

*Intercultural living : to my colleagues on this
George Washington's birthday (1732)*

On this day, in 1949, Felix and I arrived in this country, after a 13-day crossing on a small Polish boat and a great storm at sea which sent us touching land at Halifax, Canada. Calm steaming southward overnight. At dawn, the 22nd, rosy mists, the Statue of Liberty. The heart still stirs in memory.

Empty piers, holiday, we unload our own luggage. From the hold eventually arrive our two crates, full of books, bedding, small household items stuffed in corners. "Customs" must inspect, slots are pried loose, possessions disgorged; wooden clothespins fall out. Laughter: "Did you think we don't have those here?" mocks the officer. I relive the humiliation (Do rich victorious countries ever know the deprivations of war time?)

We are offered coffee at a stand up "bar" — big mugs filled with pale brown water; I can't down it; steaming aromatic black coffee wafts through my Italian senses and I inwardly balk.

Different people, different places, feelings, expectations... Yet to us this day was the beginning of a new life. This was our new adoptive country, the promise (hope) of a chance to work, to live.

Felix and I, with joy overriding sorrow of loss, celebrate the 40th anniversary of our arrival in America today.

Marisa

and papers until, after Felix’s death, ill health forced her to enter a nursing home. A friend wrote, “I will always remember Marisa as a vibrant, energetic and communicative friend, and it is sad and ironic that she lost the ability to be that person at the end of her life. I hope that those who knew her years ago will keep her memory alive, and will remember her song, her smile and her laughter.”

After Marisa’s death in 2008, the school received word of a \$1M bequest from the

Lederers to provide funding for talented and deserving students from disadvantaged backgrounds and whose home countries had been shaken by geopolitical and social upheaval. It was assumed that the Lederers saved every penny Putney paid them, which may be true, but the primary source of this large sum was Felix’s archive of original letters to his father from his close lifelong friend, Gustav Mahler, which Marisa had auctioned off to leave Putney this extraordinary, generous gift. ■