

# Thank You Galinsoga

By Clara Rowe '07

## Farm Page



<above> CLARA ROWE '07.

<right> IN 1953 DID ALICE COBB IPSEN '55 FORESEE ALIEN BEINGS, SUCH AS RECENT ALUMNI, COMING BACK TO DO MORNING BARN CHORES LONG AFTER THEY WERE REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION? ACCORDING TO HER COUSIN, JOHN STICKLER '55, ALICE HAS SPENT HER LIFE AS AN ARTIST AND IS NOW WIDOWED AND LIVING IN DENMARK. EVERY DAY SHE GOES TO A COMMUNITY ART STUDIO WHERE SHE CONTINUES TO LEARN AND TO TURN OUT HER UNUSUAL ETCHINGS AND PRINTS.

As a boarding student, I spent as much time as I could on the farm while at Putney, but did not spend time there during breaks until this summer, the year after I graduated. During my first year of college it became painfully clear how hard I would have to look in order to find even a small portion of the array of Putney experiences. Even though I loved reading about the differences in perceptions of women and motherhood throughout Latin America, writing about the history of conservation and environmentalism, and studying pollination mechanisms in tropical flowers, I missed creating things with other enthusiastic people. (Why didn't all of my classmates meet once a week to sing together? Why wasn't I required to spend at least two nights a week in the weaving studio, the art building, or the music building?) Eventually, I began to piece together some of the life I had thought was left behind at Putney. I did not, however, find a way to milk cows or pull weeds. And so I came back to Putney and joined the farm crew for three weeks in August.

The Putney School employs current students, Putney alums, and Putney-area residents to help maintain and run the campus and the Summer Programs. Current and previous Putney students are especially useful to the summer Putney community because of their experience doing work jobs while at school. As Putney students, we know where every six-inch half pan sits in the kitchen, which cleaning closets have vacuums, the most famous cows in the barn (Mavis, her daughter Melvina, and granddaughter Marvella are the clear winners), and how to deal with galinsoga.

*Galinsoga ciliata*, or hairy galinsoga, covers more area than any other plant found in The Putney School gardens. Unfortunately for the potatoes, beets, carrots, basil, Swiss chard, tomatoes, and countless other edibles, galinsoga is an unpalatable weed. Assistant Farm Manager Margie Levine jokes that if someone is looking for a Nobel Prize, they should develop a grafting system that connects galinsoga roots to more

desirable, but less hearty, crops. Until that Nobel Prize is won, however, it is primarily thanks to the prolific galinsoga infestation that a farm crew of seven or eight is employed throughout the summers to maintain the Putney gardens and help with other farm chores.

While the kitchen crew and the maintenance crew both have devoted student workers during the summer, the farm seems to have a specific and unique pull. This pull is illustrated on at least two fronts. Firstly, the members of the farm crew are uncommonly long-lasting. A few of the most dedicated day-student crew have worked many summers, Thanksgivings, and winter breaks; returning to milk cows, bottle-feed calves, shovel gutters, and, of course, pull up pound after pound of galinsoga. Secondly, the farm crew not only attracts Putney students living within commuting distance, but Putney boarding students who choose to spend a spring break sugaring or a summer doing farm chores.

The Putney farm does not make money for the school. It is not demonstrative of a typical agricultural business. It does, however, give Putney students (and alums, visitors, parents, faculty, and staff) an idea of what food really is. It gives all those involved a chance to wash chicken eggs and feed the pigs that will be slaughtered in the fall. It gives us a chance to plant seeds, watch as they struggle through the weeds, wince when they don't manage to produce a pepper or a summer squash, and smile when the tomatoes ripen perfectly. So for now, thank you galinsoga.

