



# Distinguished Guest Lecturers

THIS PAST FALL AND WINTER THE PUTNEY SCHOOL WAS TREATED TO VISITS FROM POETS, ARTISTS AND VISIONARIES OF ALL SORTS. SOME SPOKE TO US, SOME SHARED THEIR WORK, SOME STUDIED US AND OTHERS BECAME PART OF OUR CURRICULUM FOR A TIME. HERE IS A CLIFF NOTES LOOK AT OUR HONORED GUESTS AND WHAT THEY HAD TO OFFER:

## 1 Ibtisam Barakat Writer

Ibtisam Barakat, who participated in the Brattleboro Literary Festival, extended her tour to read and talk at a Sunday Night Meeting last September. Ibtisam is a Palestinian-American writer, educator and peace activist who has worked with organizations such as the United Nations to facilitate conflict resolution and peace-focused dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. Her first book, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*, is a firsthand account of her youth in Palestine, which was upended with the onset of the Six-Day War in June 1967. A bilingual speaker of Arabic and English, Ibtisam Barakat grew up in Ramallah, West Bank, and now lives in the United States. Her work focuses on healing social injustices and the hurts of wars, especially those involving young people. Ibtisam emphasizes that conflicts

are more likely to be resolved with creativity, kindness and inclusion rather than with force, violence and exclusion. Ibtisam is also the founder of Write Your Life (WYL) seminars and has led WYL seminars in places including Morocco, Washington, DC, Missouri and Ramallah.

## 2 Jon Block Energy Activist

Jon Block of the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) spoke in assembly in mid-January regarding climate change, energy conservation and appropriate technology. Jon has over 12 years of experience as an attorney representing and advising public interest organizations and whistleblowers on occupational and public health and safety issues related to all phases of the nuclear fuel chain.

Jon has appeared before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and Public Utility Commissions in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont. During his talk, Jon outlined the mission of the UCS, which, most simply put, is to encourage close examination of what he calls “a very unlikely potential event with catastrophic consequences,” with regard to nuclear plant safety, before expanding that energy source further. (For more on the UCS, see [www.ucsusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org).) Despite our efforts to date (“Putney can’t get much more efficient than it is,” says Jon, recognizing our 73 years of frugal New England living and land stewardship), Jon encouraged us to keep up efforts to conserve energy—especially unplugging instant-on items such as computers and other gadgets that could reduce energy

demand by 30 percent when not in use. Judging from the positive results of this year’s Green Cup Challenge (page 7), we’re still teachable when it comes to energy conservation.

## 3 Radha Botofasina Vocalist

Radha Botofasina joined us last February to teach us and share her musical talents during our annual celebration of Black History Month. Radha began her vocal studies while a student at Goddard College in Vermont with teacher Joyce Vos-Kadwell. She continued under the tutelage of Martin Lawrence in New York City, with whom she studied for five years. At this time, she also studied jazz piano with the noted player and composer Mary Lou Williams. Over the years, Radha’s love of the indigenous music of many cultures has grown through her extensive travel to Eastern Europe,

India, Spain, North Africa, the Philippines, Cuba and the Caribbean. During her two-decade-long association with Alice Coltrane, her spiritual and musical mentor, Radha has learned how to sing beyond what her “mind” allows and to go vocally where her “heart” takes her. Through her music, Radha seeks to share her personal commitment to humanity through well-crafted joyful music. Our favorite moment was when she was moved to tears during our Thursday morning Sing rendition of “Amazing Grace.” And it wasn’t because we were awful.

## 4 Alice B. Fogel Poet

Alice B. Fogel read from her own works at the end of March in the Michael S. Currier Center. Fogel’s most recent book of poetry is *Be That Empty*. Her previous collections are *Elemental* and *I Love This Dark World*. In addition, her book for



nonpoets, *The Reader's Field Guide to Poetry: 8 Steps Through Strange Terrain*, is currently under consideration at a university press. A recipient of an Individual Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, her work has appeared in the Best American Poetry series, former Poet Laureate Robert Hass's *Poet's Choice*, *Ploughshares*, *Yankee Magazine*, and many other anthologies and journals. *Publishers Weekly* has compared her work to Rilke, and poet Charles Simic has said, "Her poems shine with intelligence. Fogel is a poet alert to every nuance of the inner life, a true phenomenologist of the soul in the New England tradition of Emily Dickinson and Jane Kenyon."

### Howard Frank Mosher Novelist

Howard Frank Mosher authored a trilogy of novels in the '70s about Kingdom County, a fictitious place based on the counties of Orleans, Caledonia and Essex—an area referred to commonly as Vermont's

Northeast Kingdom. They are *Disappearances*, *Where the Rivers Run North* and *A Stranger in the Kingdom*, all of which have made their way to the silver screen. Mosher's work has been compared to Faulkner's. Howard says there's a reason for that. "I read a lot of Faulkner, fell in love with his work and stopped writing five-word Hemingway sentences and started writing 100-word Faulkner sentences. Somewhere along the way of my apprenticeship I found my own voice." Mosher, a resident of the Northeast Kingdom for over four decades, is a straight-shooting, plain-talking salt-of-the-earth. His visual presentation of the places and people that inspire him was a good old-fashioned slide carousel and projector, not the ubiquitous PowerPoint presentation so many of us have grown to know and loathe. He says the best writing instruction came to him in the seventh grade via the whip-cracking teacher who told him to read the classics, revise his work and write about what he knows.

### Sifa Nsengimana, Eugenie Mukanohele and Jean-Pierre Nkuranga Educators

Three representatives from the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda spent several cold days on campus in February. Among them was Sifa Nsengimana, executive director of the project and a friend of Putney's director, Emily Jones. Sifa is originally from Rwanda, and has been in the U.S. since college. Also on the visit were Eugenie Mukanohele, future head of the school, and Jean-Pierre Nkuranga, future head of informal education. The Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village (ASYV) aims to create a safe and structured community for orphaned children in Rwanda—a place where these traumatized youth can "dry their tears" (Agahozo) and "live in peace" (Shalom). The school's website is at [www.agahozo-shalom.org](http://www.agahozo-shalom.org), where you can read about the mission, view a video and see a lot of construction pictures. The group spent three days visiting classes and learning about how Putney operates and sharing their educational knowledge and stories of the genocide with us.

### Pete Shumlin Senator

Pete Shumlin, President Pro Tem of the Vermont State Senate, spoke at a January Sunday Night Meeting about climate change in Vermont. He narrated a slide show that illustrates just where we'll be in 2070 if we don't get a handle on emissions—roughly, South Carolina, circa 2008. No more ski industry. No more maple syrup industry. No more spectacular fall foliage. That opened a few eyes and got the community geared up for our Focus the Nation teach-in (page 7) and Green Cup Challenge (page 7) kickoff. Pete really wanted to participate in our teach-in, but couldn't because of his responsibilities in the Senate, so we're glad he could work us in on a Sunday night. See images of Pete's slide presentation in the January 2008 archives of our news pages at [www.putneyschool.org/news/index.html](http://www.putneyschool.org/news/index.html).

### Jean Valentine Poet

Jean Valentine read from her works on Thursday, September 27 in the Michael S.

Currier Center's Calder Hall. Jean Valentine was born in Chicago, earned her B.A. from Radcliffe College, and has lived most of her life in New York City. She won the Yale Younger Poets Award for her first book, *Dream Barker*, in 1965. Her most recent book is *Little Boat* (Wesleyan University Press, 2007). Her previous collection, *Door in the Mountain: New and Collected Poems 1965–2003*, was the winner of the 2004 National Book Award for Poetry. Author of eight other books, Jean has received a Guggenheim Fellowship and awards from the NEA, The Bunting Institute, The Rockefeller Foundation, The New York Council for the Arts, and The New York Foundation for the Arts, as well as the Maurice English Prize, the Teasdale Poetry Prize, and The Poetry Society of America's Shelley Memorial Prize in 2000. She has taught at Sarah Lawrence College, the Graduate Writing Program of New York University, Columbia University, and the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan.