

“Satisfy the urge to work at something besides books and sports” and “dig more deeply into living.”

—Carmelita Hinton

We all know that Putney has endured many trials, perhaps so many that we believe it has become a bit invincible. But imagine that first year. Mrs. H hired Hutch to run the farm, despite her initial disappointment that “Hutch” was not a man. And what a farm it was—the previous year it had lost an amount equal to Hutch’s first salary. Ed Gray and Hugh McDougall readied the farm’s buildings for students’ arrival, yet on the day the first students arrived, rain poured outside, and puddles lay inside to welcome the students and their families.

Whether visionary, stubborn, or a fortunate combination of the two, Carmelita persevered. She believed fully that her school would “satisfy the urge to work at something besides books and sports” and would “dig more deeply into living.” The barn burned down, faculty turnover was high in the early years, and many New England families continued sending their best students to schools with *names*. And yet, from these humble beginnings, the dream took shape, and The Putney School rose with growing confidence above the mist of the Vermont hills.

At that point, progressive educators in America actively questioned how best to accomplish their goals, while often disagreeing on what those goals actually were. How important were tests? Should co-education be encouraged? How to gain the respect of the country’s best universities? Out of this confusion, one basic understanding remained in place—the absolute necessity of manual labor, the arts, and project-based learning in education.

At Putney, Mrs. H and college counselors Warren Leonard and James Angell understood that getting students into the best colleges would rapidly make Putney’s name known, and give the school weight in college admissions. Fortunately, Putney’s early graduates attended Ivy League schools and well-regarded colleges and universities throughout the country, a tradition that continues to this day.

Progressive education at Putney moved forward in Carmelita’s vision. In the words of Harriet Stupp Rogers ’49, coming to Putney was like being “let out of jail.” Education included farming, singing, music, painting, writing,

Progressive Education

IN THE EARLY DAYS

1988

Pentagon unveils B-2 “Stealth” Bomber that is virtually invisible to radar.

Vice President and decorated World War II hero George Bush defeats Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in presidential race.

Condoms quietly made available to Putney students in dorms and infirmary.

Putney Post goes back to magazine format, after many years as a tabloid.

Fifteen Putney students and two faculty members take two-week trip to the Soviet Union.

Longtime teachers George Carow ’46 (math), Johnny Caldwell (math) and Bob Mills (biology) retire.

Brian Cohen initiates Putney Summer Art Workshop which enrolls 21 7–ninth graders and is enthusiastically received.

David Arnstein unveils chemistry program in a new lab in Reynolds Building equipped by Bob and Betta Ehrenfeld, parents of Betsy ’77.

George Emlen, accomplished choral conductor, begins seven years as Putney’s music director. Wife Jan sets new standards for *Putney Post*.

Putney is given a fax machine by Dave Reynolds ’45 though nobody quite knows what to do at first with this “way of moving written documents quickly.”

1989

Vermont’s per capita income is \$16,371.

The 75-acre Garland Pond parcel is formally designated for permanent research, limiting human use.

Board votes to incorporate concept of “social responsibility” into Putney’s investment policies “within context of prudent investment and optimal gain.”

Erroll Morris ’65, film maker (*The Thin Blue Line*), graduation speaker.

Gunther Brandt succeeds Barbara Barnes as sixth director. Milt Allen elected board chair.

Deficit projected at \$273,000 with 125 students; budget unanimously approved by board.

Gunther Brandt announces anonymous gift of \$130,000 to improve selected faculty living space, create a new faculty room off KDU, and buy theater equipment.

asking questions, harvesting, hiking, dancing, and thinking about—and discussing earnestly—important things. These pieces of the experience that seem so commonplace at Putney were, at the time, revolutionary.

Inevitably, the academic curriculum evolved, did somersaults, and responded to the curiosities and intellectual passions of the ever-changing faculty. But the students kept up; it sunk in. The concept seems simple: educate the whole person. But in seeing how the philosophy was lived—that students learned biology in the woods, physics in the trees, economics at the farm, and history from European émigrés during a time when the world was between, or engaged in, wars—the true magnitude of this goal becomes apparent, and the breadth of Carmelita’s vision hits home. Seventy-five years later, we’re still striving to define progressive education because, as we look back, we’ve come to learn that the goal is simple, but the methods of getting there are ever-changing.

—Alison Frye, *Alumni Relations Manager*

A STUDENT’S THOUGHTS ON PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

Emily Jones once said to me, over our empty plates and glasses, long after the usual hordes of people in the KDU had left, that throughout history the world has kept relearning the value of progressive education, but has also kept forgetting it.

But is Putney the progressive school that we believe it is? In general, we actually come across as a bit of a paradox. Putney students are deeply attached to tradition, even when those traditions are progressive. Take Sing, for example. Many Putney alumni visit Sing on a Thursday and subsequently roar in protest over the songbook. They ask “where are the classical songs?” James Wallace, Putney’s current music director, answers that there are classical songs in the book, they’re just different. This, to some alumni, is blasphemous.

As a whole, the education of living at Putney is in itself a progressive one. Conversely, I can call the education at Putney *traditional* when I focus on the classes separately (although classes are still more discussion-based than lectures), where there is little to no integration among departments. This in and of itself is not progressive and is in need of reform. Yes, there is discussion among teachers within and throughout departments, but hardly any pedagogical *interaction*. There are obvious connections that we are missing entirely.

Science and math classes should be essentially tied at the hip. They should have syllabi that complement each other. Projects and labs should take place over a number of days in both the science classroom and the math classroom. American Literature and U.S. History could be one class. Language and art classes can be integrated into almost any other subject and should be.



CLAIRE KING '10

1990

President Saddam Hussein initiates Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Seven months after arriving, Gunther Brandt tells school in assembly that he will depart at the end of the year.

Board concurs with faculty recommendation to prohibit hitchhiking and public nudity, effective immediately.

Ski Jump at Page Farm is torn down under Mabel Gray’s direction; insurance fears have eliminated interscholastic jumping competitions.



Hester Goodenough Caldwell '46 retires after 37 years as a Putney history teacher.

Sven Huseby appointed seventh director by the board of trustees.

Brian Cohen initiates new Summer Programs with six-week horse camp, one-week arts workshops.

Libby Mills retires, having held many positions at Putney since 1958.

Macintosh Plus computer lab is installed in library building, established in memory of F. Stuart Todd '89.

New Land Use Program Director Phil Gerard '73 outlines ideas for integrating farm into student life to develop knowledge and responsibility.

Renovated Assembly Hall is named in honor of Barbara Barnes and dedicated at Harvest Festival.

1991

Vermont has eight sites on the Superfund list of hazardous waste.

U.S. led Operation Desert Storm begins destroying Iraqi air defenses, communications networks, government buildings, bridges, and roads.

Environmental initiatives underway include solar-powered cabin, solar-powered maintenance cart, insulation.

Sugaring comes back to Putney, when old horse barn is converted to sugar house.

Math teacher and veteran rower Joe Holland teams up with George Heller '42 to start crew program on Connecticut River with two shells donated by Ted Todd, father of the later F. Stuart Todd '88.



THE DIRECTOR ON PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

In spite of this traditional approach, what is it that makes Putney's classroom education progressive? Put simply, it is the relationship between student and teacher. An interesting sort of friendship must be formed, an incredibly unclear mixture of an authority figure and a friend. Respect must be maintained, as must familiarity, affection, and a bit of entertainment. I feel comfortable and in control of my education because of the ease with which I can speak to my teachers.

At Putney, our teachers understand that scholars, truly brilliant men and women, are not retainers or sponges, but complex machines capable of connecting and reflecting and fully comprehending concepts and ideas, and that they are certainly not limited to academic brilliance. In a word, they are whole.

I would call The Putney School a progressive school. The community as whole is a beautiful experiential learning tool. And though there are many examples of the conventional mind-set that Putney claims to reject, the school need not aim to correct all of them. There will always be room for improvement, but progress is a changing, breathing thing that takes no single shape, and can even be steeped in tradition.

—*Claire King '10*

It is fascinating, heady, and humbling to be leading a school that has both the freedom and obligation to define its future in the way that Putney does. When Mrs. Hinton founded the school, she was part of a movement of many founding heads across the country starting progressive schools—Chicago Lab, Francis Parker, Shady Hill, Midland, City and Country, Bank Street, Little Red Schoolhouse . . . there is a long list. The schools were similar in philosophy and intent; although they developed quite different characters, they all believed that students must be an active part of their own learning, and that students must learn to do, as well as to know. In the intervening years some of these schools have become less progressive, and some shied away from the term when it came to be associated in the '60s and '70s with permissiveness and low standards. Each school has chosen pieces of the 'progressive tradition' to emphasize, and there has been relatively little communication between them in recent years. The American educational world turned toward data and testing and top-down measurements, first as a result of fear of the cold war, and later in response to fear of college admissions. Although there were many working hard in both the theory and practice of progressive education, progressive schools became "counterculture" for a time. Now the pace of change in the world at large has forced people to realize that students need to be educated to think and to learn, rather than to know,

1992

Peter Yarrow, of Peter Paul & Mary, performs concert in the KDU to benefit environmental studies, organized by Abby Lifton-Zoline '93.

Tom Perry '92, first Putney rower to compete in the "Interschols," finishes second in 40-year-old boat against seasoned competition in space-age watercraft.

Putney board conveys life interest in "Little Pembroly" house to retired faculty members, Marisa and Felix Lederer.

Alumni House is extensively renovated and formally renamed Gray House.

1993

World Trade Center in New York City is bombed.

Four Tibetan 10th graders arrive at Putney on scholarships supported by Trustee Michael Currier '79.

Nancy West, teacher, alumni director, assistant to Mrs. Hinton, dies; sister Edith soon helps initiate first Putney pooled income fund to provide scholarship support in Nancy's memory.

Mabel Gray, housekeeper, dietitian, surrogate mother to hundreds of Putneyites since 1935, dies.

1994

FBI and ATF lay siege to Texas compound of Branch Davidians cult. Leader David Koresh and many others die in fire.

Putney rowers Wells Wilson '95 and Kate Strully '94 finish first in New England Singles Championships.

With gift from Jim Rosen '72 and Lotus Development Corp., Putney introduces e-mail through Lotus Notes.

1995

United Nations tribunal in The Hague indicts 24 alleged war criminals including Bosnian Serb leaders in connection with "ethnic cleansing" of Muslims and Croats.

Board reduces draw on endowment to 4% to "repay" the endowment and makes a firm commitment "not to borrow from endowment ever again."

With gift from David Kaplan '71 and Microsoft, Putney installs Word, Excel and other software on most school computers.

Board identifies attrition as major concern, committee appointed to study issues, especially in context of learning disabilities.

Brian Morgan becomes Putney's eighth director. Sarah Kerlin Gray '60 elected board chair.

New Computer Room is unveiled in Reynolds building, school is almost completely wired with fiber optic cable.

and there is a surprisingly sudden resurgence of interest in progressive education, both with a capital P and without.

Although Putney has had its ups and downs, it has done a good job of avoiding educational fads and of sticking to the fundamentals of what Mrs. Hinton knew to be sound education. Nevertheless, we must respond to the fact that we are taking in students with quite different educations and brains than we used to, and sending them into a world with quite different demands. Along with other “traditionally progressive” schools, we are looking to define the next generation of progressive educational philosophy. This summer progressive teachers, school heads and professors from across the country will gather at Putney for a “meeting of the minds” to talk about curriculum, share ideas and propose solutions to some of the most pressing questions. (Any alumni who are interested are of course welcome—more information can be found at www.putneyschool.org/symposium/).

One of the most striking changes in American culture is how we use time—we’ve become a multi-tasking, twittering, distractible people, losing the capacity for extended concentration and solitude. On campus we’ve spent a year and a half studying our use of time, and have created a new schedule to go into effect in the fall. Instead of a typical academic day having eight scheduled segments, as it currently does, it will have only six, and these will be longer. One of them will be a conference period, in

which students and teachers can work together as needed, and new academic combinations can form. I think of it as our “anti-twitter” schedule, because it will enable deeper periods of concentration and effort, but it is also progressive, enabling more and better project-based learning and interdisciplinary work.

We are starting an analysis of assessment—how will we define success, and how will we recognize and label it? This is perhaps the central issue of education today, and a key one for progressive schools that eschew high stakes testing. Putney uses, as it has for years, a traditional A–E grading system, and does not show the students grades until they embark on the college application process. I don’t hear many people defending this system right now (although doubtless when change looms, they will emerge). Whatever we decide, the process of thinking about assessment practices will touch on the very core of our intent and practice, and will be hugely fascinating and useful.

Certainly the most important way we influence education here is in the hiring of teachers, and one of the collateral advantages of having open discussion about ideas and plans, and having faculty control over curriculum, is that we attract top-notch candidates when we have teaching positions open. People want to be here because they want to be a part of these important conversations and want to help shape the future not just of Putney, but of how progressive education is defined.

—Emily Jones



EMILY JONES

1996

Josh Goldberg '75 offers lead gift to barn theater, providing school agrees to rename it the Jeffrey Campbell Theatre. Board accepts.

School re-enters the commercial dairy farm business, with a herd of 26 mixed cows.

Board overwhelmingly approves motion to return Putney to school of 200 students, investigate feasibility of new dorm, music, dance, athletic facilities.

1997

Trustees vote to build new dorm, music, dance and athletic space, financed by endowment expansion.

Putney’s farm begins selling milk again.

Seventeen magazine visits Putney.

Putney School students and staff provide recycling services for Boston’s Earth Day concert on the Charles River.

Class of 1997 unveils their senior gift, a swing set that sits astride the mound of the Putney School elm tree.

1998

Michael Currier '79 dies and leaves Putney School \$3 million.

Ground broken for Huseby House.

Mavis the cow makes her first appearance at Tunbridge Fair.

1999

Huseby House completed. “Cluster Reunions” initiated, in which three classes are clustered for reunions. The 50th reunion remains singular.

2000

June 26, Norwood Hinkle, music director 1939-1972, dies. Memorial service held at Harvest Festival.

Other deaths in 2000: Ed Gray, Bill Hunt, Felix Lederer.

Class of '55 gives 17 disease-resistant elm saplings in honor of their 45th reunion.

Little green “busettes” replace 14-passenger vans.