

Class Act

By Clennon L. King '78 P'08,'11

Ask The Putney School's new director how she chose to be an educator, and **Emily Jones** will tell you it wasn't on her career flight plan. Not even close. Fact is, the Harvard, and later Yale, grad was working at a Boston law firm, poised to go to Harvard Law School, when she got a tip. There was a teaching gig at a racially-integrated boarding school in Botswana, a stone's throw from South Africa where a man named Mandela was still behind bars. That was the end of Jones' law school plans, and the beginning of a career in education, the highlights of which speak for themselves. In Botswana, she took a stand, teaching in apartheid-free classrooms. In Thailand, she and her husband, Gordon, co-founded a boarding school. And back in the states, she held top administrative posts at premier secondary schools on both coasts. Yet none of this was in the cards for this daughter of a Wall Street lawyer-turned-dairy-farmer—a woman who, at age 14, wanted to go to Putney, but whose parents wouldn't indulge that urge. That is, until now.

And while it's true Jones' revised career trajectory has now brought her to Putney, it's also true that an impressive roster of her peers made their ascent from Putney.

From preschool to high school, undergrad to post grad, Putneyites have flexed their intellectual muscle to show the power of "learning for learning sake." They're elementary school teachers, leading scholars, and university presidents both in public and private education. They research, publish and profess at places like Harvard, Columbia, Chicago, Stanford, Brown, in Eastern and Western Europe and well beyond. They teach at top medical and law schools, toil in the trenches in troubled public schools, and help shape educational policy from state houses to Capitol Hill. They've followed in the school founder's footsteps, exported her progressive education brand, and opened schools from the Colorado Rockies, to Philly's inner city to Manhattan's mean streets.

Gus Trowbridge '52 was one Putneyite who succeeded in spades, effectively creating his own brand. Trowbridge and his wife, **Marty Dwight Trowbridge '53**, planted and grew their own "Putney in the City" on the edge of East Harlem. They called it the Manhattan Country School, founded in 1965 at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Today, more than 40 years later, the school serves a body of 180 students, with no racial majority, who "learn by doing" and spend three weeks a year in the Catskills working on the school's farm. "Inspired by the Civil Rights Movement, we have extended Putney's radical mission to bring together children of different races and economic backgrounds," said Trowbridge. "And with the farm and the progressive educational practices, it's clearly a junior version of Putney."

If imitation is the best form of flattery, the Trowbridges aren't alone in paying homage to Mrs. H. Former Putney faculty members **John and Anne Holden** founded the Colorado Rocky Mountain School in 1953, still very much in operation. Seven years later, **Dick Richardson '40** opened the nearby Grammar School, one of the biggest feeder schools to

Putney to this day. And former Putney admissions receptionist **Robert M. Hughes** and his wife, former Putney French teacher **Amy Hughes** were the inspiration and driving force behind the Robert M. Hughes Academy Charter School in Springfield, MA largely serving gifted African American students.

Putneyites also have had an impact on some of the biggest public school systems in the country. Take Philadelphia. When its school board sought someone to open a school that not only would teach pre-, elementary and middle-schoolers, but also meet the needs of infants, pregnant teens, and teachers in training, they tapped **Peter Buttenwieser '53**. His reputation as a problem-solver, with political savvy and administrative know-how, was the reason. Never mind that he'd watched his mother, Helen, a civil rights attorney, settle the infamous Putney teachers' strike. Or that he'd helped the Trowbridges with the seed money to get Manhattan Country School off the ground. What mattered was that Buttenwieser had experience. He had taught at a Ugandan boarding school during Idi Amin's reign. He had directed an integrated "state-funded" boarding school for 8th graders in rural and segregated North Carolina. And he had replicated this success in Philly to serve hard-to-reach junior high schoolers. In the end, he was so successful in executing the Philly School Board's vision that Mrs. H herself paid a visit to the school and tried, in vain, to lure him back to West Hill as director. "Vermont is a wonderful setting of course, but I chose to go into public education," said Buttenwieser, recalling his resolve to stay in the community and in public schools.

For some Putneyites, their teachers were enough to inspire them to enter the field. **Damaris South '75** is one of them. The former George School trustee and dean of students pointed to Marisa and Felix Lederer, who taught her German and Latin respectively. She said their belief in her made all the difference. "It's a gift to have a teacher at your side," said South, who is Jamican American and currently is head of the middle school at The Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, PA. "When you are nurtured so well, it has an impact."

<opposite page> **GLENN LITLEDALE '76**. <below> **GUS TROWBRIDGE '52 WITH WIFE MARTY DWIGHT '53**. <bottom> **MATTHEW MINELLA '10 STUDIES IN THE PUTNEY SCHOOL LIBRARY**.





<top> **JENNIFER ARLEN '77.**
 <above> **DAIN BORGES '72,**
PAULA RODERICK '74 AND
JULIA SCOTT '72.

Similarly, **Jonah Maidoff '80** credits history teacher Tony Bucelli, as well as Spanish teacher Emilia Bruce, with leading him to the field and instilling in him a sense of social justice. He said learning that Bruce's brother had been killed in the Spanish Civil War served as a catalyst to become a teacher. "I expect my students to be politically active, and to make the world a better place," said the co-founding history teacher at Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School. "History is not dead, but a collaborative living truth where students grow to uncover and interpret it as their own."

While teaching has been a second career for **Alex Angell '77**, it was always his first love. The person Angell holds responsible is long-time history teacher Sven Huseby. So provocative was Huseby's teaching in this Putneyite's eyes that after college, a stint as a teaching assistant in Vienna and Munich and a lucrative near-20-year career as bond broker in Eastern Europe, Angell cashed in his earnings to return stateside to teach high school history, just like his mentor.

"Sven had this gift of creating a structure for students to discover the knowledge, rather than spoon-feeding it to us," said the Berkeley High School history teacher who lives in California. "He was the one who showed me a process of self discovery, rather than rote learning."

Putney has standouts in the world of academia at some of the most prestigious schools in this country. A snapshot of graduates from '72 to '82 speaks for itself. **Dain Borges '72** is an award-winning professor of Latin American Studies and History at the University of Chicago.

Jennifer Arlen '77 is a chaired professor at NYU Law School, and has been a visiting professor at both Harvard and Yale law schools. **Lisbeth "Kim" Brandt '79**, who taught Japanese History at Amherst for many years, is now on the faculty at Columbia University. And **Beth Brainerd '81**, who spent a decade teaching biology at the University of

Massachusetts at Amherst, is now a professor of medicine at Brown University Medical School.

For **Brainerd**, who is conducting cutting-edge research on how bones and muscles generate motion, Putney gave her confidence and permission to explore. "I learned to drive a tractor," said Brainerd who, among other things, teaches gross anatomy to first-year medical students. "I also did a senior work term in the Dominican Republic where I studied humpback whales," having learned about the program at a school assembly.

Arlen holds both a law degree and Ph.D. in economics, and said "Putney gives students the opportunity to genuinely get good at something, and learn how much work is involved in doing a first-rate job." Putney does this both through academics and through the arts, Arlen said, noting that when she took jewelry making, pottery and weaving she learned how to cut her own stones, mix her own glazes and spin her own wool. "I was able to translate that into my academics later on."

Dain Borges '72 shares Arlen's sentiments. "At Putney, we had a chance to try everything," said the published scholar, who is Puerto Rican, and, coincidentally, earned his Ph.D. at Stanford under the late professor and Putney Trustee **John Wirth '54**. "Where else would I have

learned how to roast a potato with a welding torch, play the oboe, and fix a chain saw?!" As for the caliber of Borges' teaching, his wife, **Julia Scott '72** said it was so award-winning that students at the University of Pennsylvania protested when he wasn't granted tenure.

Columbia University professor **Kim Brandt '79** credits

Putney with exposing her to cooperative ways of teaching and learning. The Korean-American and former day student pointed to the classroom approach of long-time drama teacher Joyce Devlin Brown. Brandt said Brown's workshop approach in the classroom created a sense of

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<left> **FORMER DIRECTOR AND HISTORY TEACHER SVEN HUSEBY WITH CURRENT DIRECTOR EMILY JONES.**

<below> **DEREK BOK '46.**

<bottom> **KATHERINE LEE '75.**

community that allowed students to study, learn and bond over the span of a semester.

“It’s something I try to reproduce in my smaller, discussion-based classes,” said Brandt, author of the recently published, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (2007).

While examples of Putneyites inside the university classroom abound, they have occupied university president’s offices as well.

John Toll '41 has been president at Washington College, State University of New York-Stony Brook and the University of Maryland. The Colorado native and Princeton-trained physicist said he was fond of Putney’s farm, singing and “marvelous” teachers, and shared the secret to his career success: “Attract good people, then get out of the way and let them do their job.”

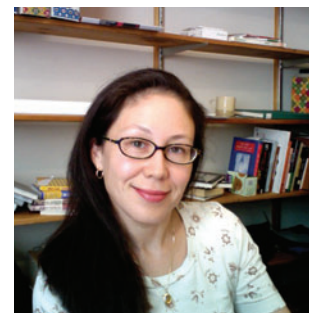
Toll isn’t the only Putney alum to become a university president. Two-time Harvard University president **Derek Bok '46**, came to Putney, along with his sister Welmoet '43 and brother Ben '44, as a ten-year-old. Only staying one year, Bok said there were things that made his time tough at Putney. He missed his home in California, didn’t like the idea of paying to go to a school where you had to work, and said he wasn’t in regular classes because he was too young. Still, the former Harvard Law dean admits that, five years ago, he pulled off the highway to drive through campus to see what he remembered of Putney.

For as much as Bok and Toll made a name for themselves as administrators rather than professors, Mrs. H was more of an institution-builder than teacher. She didn’t just start Putney School, but founded The Putney Graduate School of Education as well. Located two miles due west of the Main Building at the base of Putney Mountain, the school trained and graduated teachers for 14 years before Antioch bought and absorbed it outright.

Like Mrs. H, there are Putney alumni who have founded schools to teach teachers, others to teach students, and still others to conduct research.

Laura “Termite” Raynolds '76 created a research institute. As co-founder and co-director of The Center for Fair and Alternative Trade Studies at Colorado State University, the sociology professor says the center explores some of the same ideas Putney has done for years, but on a global scale. “I spend a lot of time in rural settings, mucking around in the field, looking at the environment, studying trade issues, and why there’s an interest in buying one food over another,” said the mother of two, and wife of schoolmate **Alex Blackmer '75**. “If you think about it, the little school on the hilltop had the same discussions about protecting the environment, and helping sustain it for skiing, milk production and maple sugaring.”

Susan Lloyd '52, meanwhile, built a community-based exchange program inside of a wealthy prep school. The result was the Lawrenceville High School/Andover Urban Institute housed at Phillips Andover Academy. For 17 years, the program not only afforded private education to





<top> **ART DEPARTMENT**
CHAIR JOSEPH FICHTER '71
TEACHING A PUTNEY
SCULPTURE CLASS.
 <above> **PHIL FOX '55.**

many local students, especially of Southeast Asian and Hispanic descent, but also promoted greater community interchange, service outreach and field research opportunities. “I brought a lot of Putney ideals to the institute where we combined bookwork with service work and research skills,” said Lloyd, author of *The Putney School: A Progressive Experiment*. Her senior work project at Putney was working as a teacher’s aide at the Putney Central School.

Barbara Barnes '41 co-founded the Lebanon, NH-based Upper Valley Teacher Institute, a nonprofit whose mission is to help educators become better teachers. While Barnes believes learning is up to the learner, teachers have the responsibility of finding a way to facilitate that process, a process that is different for every person. “Great teachers are passionately committed, know their subject, and intrigue their students with good questions,” said Barnes who, as a former Putney School director, is credited with saving Putney from the threat of possible closure. “Teachers reflect and keep learning themselves about the unknowns of their subjects and the intriguing process of learning itself.”

Many Putney educators voice concerns about a broken public school system. Veteran educator **Kathy Lee '75** is one of them. She agrees that America’s public schools are in dire need of help. But the Indianapolis native, who has taught public school students for more than 20 years, says the culprit is a federal policy that tells teachers what, when and how to teach. “The negative is that everyone is running after test

scores, which is just a blink of what kids know, and what kids don’t know,” said Lee referring to the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind education policy. “Consequently, the test is the focus, instead of kids learning being the focus.”

The apparent failure of America’s public schools is one reason **Ethan Gray '00** entered the field of education. Earning a master’s in educational policy and management from Harvard and now working for a non-profit think-tank, Gray said he has no regrets about his career. “I don’t think of education as a backwater of career fields, but as a way of addressing social justice issues,” says the director of educational policy for Boston-based Be The Change, Inc. He notes a regrettable disparity in how people view their schooling. “I saw how transformative school was for me, and yet how non-transformative it was for most people.”

Transforming educational policy in this country is partly why **Peter Buttenwieser '53** is now focusing full-time on who’s sent to Capitol Hill and the White House. Over the last 10 years, Buttenwieser has made Philly a “must stop” for Democratic U.S. senatorial candidates either in trouble or in need of cash. The veteran educator hosts four U.S. senatorial fund raisers a year, has raised nearly \$2 million in the last decade, and is currently quarterbacking the Philadelphia-based fundraising drive for White House hopeful Barack Obama. “He is the new transcendent political figure of our time,” says Buttenwieser, who has already hosted three Obama events in Philly, and raised nearly half a million dollars for his bid. “He’s a different kind of politician, who sees the world a different kind of way.”

Seeing a different level of literacy among politicians is, in part, why scientist-turned-educator **Betsy Ehrenfeld '77** entered public service. Eight years ago, this Ph.D.-level microbiologist got out of the bio-tech industry and into public education after seeing then-President Clinton confuse virus with bacteria on TV. “It’s really scary that our country is falling so far behind in science literacy,” said the South Maine Community College professor. She said the Clinton gaffe and the fact that less than 25%

of Americans believe in evolution is why last year she accepted an environmental protection board appointment by Maine's governor.

An ocean away, **Jethro Pettit '77** is grappling with a style of teaching rather than the substance of it. Teaching English students the progressive education brand of "learning by doing" is proving a tall order for Pettit, who is director of international programs at Sussex University's Institute of Developmental Studies in the UK. "It's a struggle to take that holistic approach to education," said Pettit, who continues to try and make experiential learners of his students through journal writing, visual arts, drama and role-playing. "That's what I got from Putney."

What **Phil Fox '55** got from Putney was self-confidence. The shy and solitary student who performed Shakespeare at Putney eventually became a theater professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. As for why he found teaching so gratifying, Fox said it was seeing students experience a breakthrough moment, something he called "watching the nickel drop." "Every time that a struggling student 'got it' that was exciting for me," said Fox, who believed his acting informed his teaching.

Closer to home, retired Putney history teacher **Hepper Caldwell '46** reflects on why she always wanted to teach. "I like people and like learning things, and so teaching was a natural," said Caldwell, whose husband, **John Caldwell '46**, was a longtime math teacher at Putney. In addition, their son **Sverre Caldwell '73** is the head Nordic coach at the Stratton Mountain School, while another son, **Peter Caldwell '74**, is an assistant headmaster of the St. Andrews School in Delaware.

Like Hep and John, many Putney alumni have returned to their alma mater to teach. In all, at least ten alumni are in the classroom, including math teacher **Abijah Reed '53**, sculpture teacher and art department chair **Joe Fichter '71**, Spanish teacher **Elizabeth St. John '74**,

weaving teacher **Melissa Johnson '77**, digital photography teacher **Pete Guenther '80**, photography teacher **Jason Whiton '83**, African drumming teacher **John Hughes '84**, and science teacher **Hans Estrin '85**.

Physics teacher **Glenn Littledale '76** is also among the alumni faculty. He said, looking

back, he was no model student. "As a high school student, I was a train wreck," admits Littledale. Glenn's journey into teaching, like so many before him, was circuitous. After being a poor student at Putney and flunking

out of the University of Maine four times, he dropped out for good. Then, after more than a decade of odd jobs that included welding, art restoration and farming, Littledale headed to Philly with his wife and started taking night classes at Temple. At age 36, he finally graduated with a degree in physics and math.

Littledale is convinced his weakness as a Putney student then is his strength as a teacher today. "I understand the experience of having things not come easily," said the New York City native, who went on to earn a master's degree in education and teach college level courses. "The experience of having an awful time in school has definitely informed my teaching." These days, it's unclear whether Littledale and Putney's other alumni teachers can look forward to passing on the teaching torch to any current students. But **Matthew M. '10**, says he has plans to teach. "I want to get into teaching because I love kids," said the sophomore from Greenwich, CT.

While Minella may not return to West Hill to ply his trade, his career trajectory may take him to turf familiar to other Putneyites—be it a college president's office in Maryland, a university classroom in England or a boarding school in Botswana.

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< below > **LISBETH "KIM" BRANDT '79.**
< bottom > **ELIZABETH ST. JOHN '74 STANDS IN FRONT OF THE OLD PUTNEY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION WHERE SHE LIVES.**

