

SCHOOLBOOK

a JOURNAL of EDUCATION

**Paideia School
Atlanta, Georgia**

I N T H I S I S S U E

**Summer 2010
Vol. 19 No. 1**

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Paideia School, located in northeast Atlanta, has some 960 students ages three to eighteen. Founded in 1971 by a group of parents, the school actively strives for a heterogeneous population and attracts students from throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area. The ancient Greek word *Paideia* reflects the conscious pursuit of a series of educational goals by a community. It conveys the concept of a child's total education: intellectual, artistic, and social.

A Community of Learners— Teachers and Students

*By learning you will teach;
by teaching you will understand.*

—LATIN PROVERB

When Paideia teachers think about “Why they teach,” the joy and richness of interacting with their students ranks high among their reasons. The lessons are imparted on both sides of the equation.

With the graduation of their youngest child, one family's twenty-two years at Paideia came to a satisfying end. The only remaining question was what to do with the closet full of wrapping paper.

Jennifer Hill
Editor

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ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES of school actually took place on the playground behind the 1509 building. In the early days, Paideia did not have state-of-the-art recreation equipment. We didn't even have soccer balls for the playground, so I used to bring my own. As you can imagine, ownership of the soccer ball gave me great power on the playground. If the game ever turned against me, I would simply announce that I was taking my soccer ball home. But at some point during that school year, an important announcement was made. Not only had the school purchased soccer balls for the playground, but students were no longer allowed to bring their own. In my memory of that moment, it felt like the teacher and most of my classmates turned to smile at me, almost triumphantly. Lesson taught, lesson learned. I learned that although sharing is hard, it's fair. And although life isn't always fair, kids really like fairness.

Like you all, I teach for many reasons, one of them being that, as a teacher, we get to pass along life lessons. Things learned the hard way, like the value of sharing. So tonight, after 33 years, I plan to share this new soccer ball with our elementary PE program.

Considering that one of my first school memories is an unpleasant one, some might wonder why I would ever become a teacher. I have been an educator for 17 years and still struggle with answering what seems like a simple question: *Why do you do what you do?*

Like many of you, my desire to teach was strongly influenced by some of my own teachers. A couple of them are here tonight, while one just recently retired. Judy Schwarz, whose gentle way and kindness as a teacher still remind me of how much I enjoyed my elementary years here, soccer incident excluded. Robert Falk, who not only taught me multiplication tables in a somewhat militant fashion, but who also taught me about teamwork by removing me from the kickball team because I would yell at anyone who made a mistake. Finally, Thrower Starr, who was an important role model for me during a tough year of transition, as I prepared to leave Paideia and move to Cleveland with my mother for her new job. I still remember our lit groups in the Red Brick building and how much fun it was to discuss a book we were all reading. Being a part of those lit groups was very important to me, and that inclusion is a lesson I have carried forth into my own teaching.

In Cleveland, one high school teacher in particular greatly impacted me. Of course it was my U.S. history teacher, Mr. Pollack. I loved Mr. Pollack because he was crazy. He was obsessed with the Populists, and to this day, I have not met anyone who cared about them quite as much. Mr. Pollack had a unique style in the room. In one minute, we would be furiously reviewing our notes just in case he called on us, and in the next, we would be laughing at his attempts to sing random songs from the sixties and seventies. He had a strange affinity for Kansas' *Dust in the Wind*, which was particularly disconcerting to a room full of invincible teenagers. Quirkiness aside, the bottom line was that Mr. Pollack loved what he did, and it made everyone want to be in his classroom.

Brett Hardin has been teaching for 17 years. Prior to Paideia, he taught at Campbell High School in Cobb County, North Atlanta High School in Atlanta Public Schools and at the Close-up Foundation in Washington, D.C. At the Georgia Council on Economic Education, Brett provided training and resources to economics teachers state-wide. He attended Paideia in the 1970s and currently teaches U.S. history and economics. Brett's wife, Lianne, teaches Spanish in the junior high, and his daughter is in the elementary.

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When I went to college, I knew that teaching was my calling. I had always known. I had a passion for history and economics, so I majored in European Imperialism in the Third World—a slightly biased major. While in college, I looked for any opportunity to teach, from speaking at new student orientations to working as a resident hall advisor and co-teaching a student-run course. Upon graduation, I applied to loads of schools. No one hired me. ... No, I did not apply to Paideia. Fortunately, I have rectified that mistake.

Not to be derailed, rather than teach in a school, I moved to Washington, D.C. to work for the Close Up Foundation. Year round, Close Up runs one-week, government education programs for high school students from across the country. I spent the next five years steeped in experiential education. My time at Close Up confirmed that my place in teaching was with high school students.

I eventually went on to get my masters in education and student taught in Philadelphia. It was then that I committed to teaching in a large, public high school and convinced myself that I could save students. This decision was not a light-hearted one, as my time in Philadelphia was difficult. I would often come home crying, questioning my decision to teach. Looking back, I wonder if the real problem was that I usually listened to music by Sarah McLachlan and Jim Croce to cheer up after a challenging day. It never worked.

When I left Philadelphia to find a permanent teaching position, I was determined to become the next Jaime Escalante. I too would *Stand & Deliver*. For the next 10 years, I taught in two public high schools in Atlanta, never wavering from my commitment to make a difference. If anyone asked me why I taught, my pat answer was some variance of “I teach to help students, to fix schools and to rebuild communities that have been underserved.” Although idealistic, it sounded impressive to me, and when I started teaching, I was naïve enough to believe I could do all of that by myself.

A good friend of mine who began his teaching career with similar goals described teaching as a drug. It was an apt metaphor. I would go to school everyday looking for that big teaching moment— “the hit.” That moment when the whole world seemed to revolve around my classroom and I knew something significant had happened. All I needed was one of those hits every now and again to keep teaching. We’ve all had such moments. They become a part of our identity as teachers, but for years, I thought that it was those moments that defined me. Fortunately, I’d enjoyed a few, such as the time a food riot broke out in the cafeteria and the students realized what many teachers fear they will realize: that there were more of them than there were of us. They funneled out of the cafeteria and marched through the halls chanting ... well, let’s just say chanting. As a first year teacher, I knew I could solve this problem. Another first year teacher, equally confident, stepped into the hallway with me to herd the students back to their classrooms. Motioning with our hands, we chanted, “Go to class. Go to class!. But after a few minutes, the mob turned toward us and began chanting, “No—you go to class. you go to class.” We went to class. When I left school that day I knew two things: First, I was in a place that clearly needed help, and second, teaching would never be boring.

Another influential moment occurred in the spring of my second year during my U.S. history class. We were having a debate on DuBois and Washington when an African-American male student spoke up for the first time that year. He prefaced his comment by noting that his mother had instructed him not to trust me, but that he had something important to say. Over the next couple of days, he proceeded to lead a powerful discussion about race in the U.S. and specifically at our high school. I have incorporated that lesson and conversation into every U.S. history course I teach.

One of my favorite moments occurred just before I left Campbell High School. Earlier in the year, I had responded flippantly to an off hand comment about senior pranks, “No one’s ever managed to pull one off on me.”

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I know. One would think that after 15 years of teaching, I would have known better than to taunt seniors. So the night before the last day of finals, five students climbed onto the roof of the school and broke into my room through a window they had unlocked during class. Over the next three hours, the students filled my room with balloons.

Dangling from a string in the doorway was a laminated picture of Alan Greenspan attached to a note declaring victory, that someone had finally “gotten” me. The note also explained that I could use the attached stickpin to clean my room. So thoughtful of them. Their labor-intensive joke let me know that we had a bond.

I now find great joy in the countless small moments of teaching... I teach to be part of a profession that embraces the imperfections of people—especially of students.

Moments like those kept me coming back, but over the years, the frustrations with bureaucracy, failed public policy and the pressures of testing eroded the lasting impact of those great teaching moments. After a while, I began to wonder if I should keep teaching.

My short stint at Paideia two years ago and subsequent return last year can be explained by a change in how I now answer the question of why I teach. When I first arrived at Paideia, I was exhausted from searching for the big moments. They were becoming more elusive. I thought it might be time to leave teaching all together. I thought I wanted a job that was less demanding of my emotions—one in which I could work without 30 pairs of teenaged eyes judging me.

What happened during those years of transition is that I discovered a deeper reason to teach—one that defines so much of what I have always done, but did not recognize until I left teaching for a year. I now find great joy in the countless small moments of teaching. The moments when a good question gets the entire class going. The moments when a face in my class lights up and a smile broadens with understanding. Even the moments when what I thought was a good idea dies a quick death. I teach to be part of a profession that embraces the imperfections of

people—especially of students. I love seeing my students everyday, and the ebb and flow of a school year brings me great comfort.

Each year a masterful, all-knowing deity creates new classes for teachers—in my case, that deity is Juan Jewell. Every August, Juan assigns a fresh set of students to my classroom. These students’ expectations, strengths and weaknesses run the gamut. For the next 10 months, I am privileged to be part of a special, small community that will establish its own identity by the end of the year. Our time together is an experience that will never exist again. It is our own, distinct story. I have grown to realize that all of those big moments I was seeking were actually the result of innumerable, smaller, yet, spectacular, moments. My best teaching stories are reflections of those everyday moments. The ones in which we push through a complicated concept, survive a tough test, or simply stay focused when, in late spring, no one really wants to work. I now savor each step in the building process, the daily greetings, genuine concern for each other and inside jokes, which brings me to one last reason I teach. Humor.

I still remember when my methods professor warned my class about using sarcasm in the classroom. When I first heard that, I thought I was in *real* trouble. Some believe sarcasm is the lowest form of wit. Others feel it is the highest form of humor. Whatever I’m supposed to call it, I thrive on quips and banter in the classroom. One of the many wonderful things I have discovered about students is that if you are true to yourself in the classroom, they will respond. Lucky for me, teenagers are naturals when it comes to quips and banter.

Having withstood the ups and downs of a career in teaching, I stand here tonight with a renewed level of confidence in why I teach. In my core, I am a teacher. I teach because I am surrounded by people who share my passion for school, *this school*. I teach because every morning begins with the very smallest of moments. Every morning begins with, “Hey Brett. What are we doing today?”

Pai-Deiary: Appreciating the Importance of the Present

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January 1986

Ronald Reagan is president; there is no Internet or e-mail, *Back to the Future* is the hit movie of the year, Joe Frank Harris is governor of Georgia, and I can't believe I'm moving to a state where the governor has two first names. Ron (that's Calabrese, not Reagan) and I are house hunting in Atlanta. In spite of my northern friends' dire warnings about the South (none of them has ever been to the South), I like this woodsy town, and my kids will go to its public schools no matter what.

On our way cruising around town to learn the neighborhoods, we pass that "hippie school" on Ponce de Leon Avenue in Dekalb (pronounced as someone who grew up in Illinois would say it—with the "L"] County that some people at Emory have told us about. We really don't approve of private schools, but we make an appointment to visit, and the next morning we find ourselves in Peter Richard's class looking at a timeline spanning all history that consists only of great moments in art and architecture: the Pyramids, the Sistine Chapel, Monet's *Water Lilies*, the Great Wall of China. "Most timelines start with kings and wars," says the tall, intense man with the unsettling stare. "I thought ours should begin with art."

Across the hall in Missy Aue's class, kids are counting kernels of popcorn into a giant fish tank. "I want them to really understand the concept of one million," she says. "When we get to a million, we're going to pop it all."

All the classrooms we visit are noisy, messy, seemingly chaotic. This is a school! Within just a few minutes, my lifetime of speeches about sending my kids to public schools is rationalized away. I will always support public schools, but my kids have to go to Paideia.

April 1987

I'm sitting by the window pretending to read, but really I'm watching the street. The mail truck pulls up out front, pauses, and pulls away. After waiting a respectable ten seconds so as not to seem too eager, I walk out to the mailbox with sweaty palms and a thumping heart. Everything is a blur as I open the letter. We're going to Paideia! We're going to Paideia! Er. . . our son Nickie is going to Paideia! As happy as I am at that moment, I still have no idea what an important moment this is for our family.

September 1987

Who is this Sally Foster everyone keeps talking about? A teacher I haven't met? An assistant to the headmaster? I finally figure it out and outline an ambitious plan to sell dozens of rolls of wrapping paper and ribbon to neighbors, friends, and family. The night before the deadline, I tick a lot of boxes and write a huge check—an action I will repeat many, many times in the future—starting what will soon become the Christine Cozzens All Occasion Wrapping Paper Collection.

November 1988

It takes Nickie a while to get this reading thing, and we wonder about Paideia's methods and our parenting skills, but Dorothy and Jerry keep him moving forward, and now in second grade with Mary Lynn, he is reading everything in sight and working with another little boy—Tony Carter, future Paideia teacher—who will claim ever afterwards that Nick taught him to read.

Paideia alumni parent and board member **Christine Cozzens** spoke at the Senior Dinner for the Class of 2009. Christine shares family snapshots from a monthly diary to recall 22 years at Paideia for her, her husband, Ron Calabrese, and children Nick '99, Evan '04, and Emma '09.

October 1989

I've failed at parenting! My child has been suspended from school. Charlotte and Donna have sent Evan home from Morning Half Day because after weeks of warnings, he refuses to stop filling his mouth with the little plastic bears from one of the toy bins. Unfortunately, the suspension has the opposite effect from what was intended, as we have lots better toys to suck on at home.

December 1990

Nick is in Peter's class and we attend our first *Revels*; 19 years later, we begin every holiday season with *The Revels* and know the play by heart, but somehow the actors keep getting younger! Nick is two heads taller than all the other kids, so he is perfect for the role of Blunderbor the giant, which he plays with gusto. Like Nick, and later Evan (who plays

Not for the first or last time, I'm grateful we chose a school with a sense of humor.

Father Christmas) and Emma (who plays the doctor), we are utterly caught up in the medieval world Peter creates. His challenging homework assignments get us thinking and talking together. On our travels, we break British and American laws by transporting dirt from places like Stonehenge and the site of the Battle of Hastings to add to Peter's collection.

March 1992

Now that Emma is born, we have to live closer to school. We move to a new house on Fairview Road. No more carpool lines! No more searching for parking at school events. I get daily reports from Paideia parents who see from their cars what my kids are up to on their walk to and from school. Best of all, the new house has a few extra rooms to house our ever growing wrapping paper collection.

May 1992

Continuing in the life of crime that started with sucking plastic bears, Evan has been called to the headmaster's office with his accomplice, Bradley Cocci. The two first-graders were caught red-handed hammering a hole in the outside wall of the old Multipurpose building. The building won't be officially demolished until several years later. Mary Lynn recounts the disciplinary process to us, including the rueful confessions and offers to pay for the damage, during which apparently both she and Paul are shaking with barely contained laughter. Not for the first or last time, I'm grateful we chose a school with a sense of humor.

March 1993

The Great Blizzard of '93, also called the Superstorm, the White Hurricane, and the Storm of the Century, hits Atlanta today. Though I've lived here seven years, I still have my northern brain, and in the middle of the storm, I take Evan by the hand and Emma in the backpack and go for a walk on the icy pavements in swirling snow to Paideia. The school is blanketed in snow, but the kids don't get my romantic need to walk in it, and when a tree falls on the campus as we watch, I know it's time to go home. Twelve inches fall on the city. Good thing it falls on a Saturday, though, because you know Paul won't declare a snow day!

August 1994

Emma starts in the Morning Half-Day program, and the room can hardly contain her energy and spirit. Upon Charlotte and Donna's recommendation, Paul starts planning for a drama department and a black box theater to be in place for Emma's high school years.

May 1995

Peter recruits Ron to bring his leeches to school during the medieval medicine unit and let them suck blood from students, but only those who have permission from their parents. Yes, Ron is "that guy with the leeches." This annual ritual continues to the present—in fact, today was Leech Day in Peter's class. By the way, Ron has a few spares in his pocket, if you'd like to try getting leeches after dinner.

December 1995

We buy an unusually high number of Christmas presents this year, just so we can use up some of the stacks of wrapping paper that have spread to the halls and under the beds.

March 1997

I'm teaching Emma and the students in Mary Lynn and Linda's class about the Irish Potato Famine, so I've brought in cold, stale boiled potatoes—no butter, no salt—to show just how unappealing the one-food diet was. I offer the kids a taste. "Can you imagine how bored you would be eating these every day, for every meal?" I say. "No!" says one little boy who gobbles his potato and reaches for more. "They're good!" he says, looking me in the eye with steely resolve. "The Irish didn't have it so bad!" He is definitely a Paideia kid.

Luckily, Paideia has taught me to listen to my kids, because [Thrower Starr's] course helps Evan through a troubled time, and I am forever grateful to be proved wrong.

October 1999

Nick is at Oberlin College, which he will eventually come to love, but during the first few months he calls me several times to tell me that college professors in general just don't know what they're doing in the classroom compared to Paideia teachers, like Donna Ellwood and Paul Bianchi, whose courses and spirited teaching launched him in his career as an academic political scientist with a respect for the way history shapes political identity, thought, and action.

October 2002

In spite of my skepticism, Evan decides to take Thrower Starr's boys-only course called "The Male Voice." Luckily, Paideia has taught me to listen to my kids, because the course helps Evan through a troubled time, and I am forever grateful to be proved wrong. "Thrower is my hero," Evan will tell me more than once in the coming year. Mine, too.

September 2003

Now that Emma is in junior high, at the parent meeting we are awarded a special medal for having had three kids go through Bernie's class, God help them. As Evan told me when he had Bernie, "There's something exciting happening every day!" Bernie loves our kids, loves all his kids, especially when they are at their most difficult. He really gets to know Nick, Evan, and Emma; he meets them and challenges them where they are, emotionally and psychologically, and he sticks by them as they work their way through the ambush of growing up.

May 2004

Evan is graduating. He looks grown-up, if rather gaudy, in the outfit he picked out for himself: a three-piece orange plaid wool suit with orange faux-lizard wingtips. Grandma doesn't quite understand, but we tell her you've got to love a school that encourages individuality. In exciting classes with Steve Sigur, Sharon Radford, and Ruth Dinkins, Evan has discovered his passions for biology and for Spanish language and culture, both of which will shape his undergraduate career at Emory and his future in medicine.

September 2005

"The last of the Calabreses," all the teachers say to us at High School Parents' Night as Emma starts ninth grade. "And with this one, they broke the mold." All through high school Catherine Tipton, Clark Cloyd, Marianne Schaum, and others will figure out how to get this girl to pour her energy into writing. The mechanics don't come easily to her, and in another school, her writing career might have ended there. With encouragement from her teachers, she keeps at it, turning out papers and poems year after year that show a deep-thinking, literary, creative mind at work.

November 2008

The fall play is *Pass The Stuffing*, in which Emma plays a controlling, abusive, violent mother so realistically that I have to go around the lobby during intermission claiming that Emma did not practice method acting for this role. With plays like *You Can't Take It With You*, *The Crucible*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, and *The Laramie Project*, Jesse has pushed Emma to stretch herself as an actor. The new drama program has given her an imaginative world in which to hone her skills and grow into adulthood; her passion for the theater is noted in every college interview.

March 2009

A tree falls on our house, but the wrapping paper collection is undamaged. Moving things around to make way for the repairs, I discover a role of wrapping paper from my first ever encounter with Sally Foster in 1987, now officially an antique. I consider donating it to the auction but don't want to compete with Jane Fonda or Bruce Springsteen. Besides, I know Paul will want it for the school archives.

May 2009

Days before graduation, Emma gets a big envelope in the mail from Cecelia Caines. Inside are stories, drawings, and letters she wrote 10 years ago when she was in Cecelia's class, a fourth grade time capsule that even includes a letter from 10-year-old Emma to graduating Emma. "Are you a good actress now?" she writes to her grown-up self. Yes! We remember Emma dressed up as FDR for her president's report, with glasses and a cigarette holder, and feel again the warmth and fun that was Cecelia's class. What a thoughtful graduation gift, something that shows that the school remembers you, too; a bit of your own past just at the moment when you are reflecting on your long Paideia history.

In a list of admirable and important qualities that have defined Paideia School from the beginning, the Framework of Values includes one especially remarkable phrase that I think about often: "an appreciation of the importance of the present." Amazingly, not many schools so blatantly promote as a core value the idea that school should be fun and exciting and important now.

Nick, Evan, Emma, Ron, and I have lived and appreciated many important present moments at Paideia during our 22 years here. I've only mentioned a few of these moments today. There's no time to tell you more, and anyway according to my kids, many of the best moments won't be declassified for another 20 years.

You—the members of the graduating class of 2009, parents, and friends—all have your own collection of important Paideia present moments—the funny, the touching, the silly, the difficult, the life-changing moments the school has given you. You will take them with you, wherever you go, whatever you become. You will aspire to great things, and you will achieve them. I charge you also to remember to appreciate the importance of the present.

Emma is graduating, but May 16 won't be our last day of school. Even though we already have enough wrapping paper to wrap gifts for decades to come, our family will continue to belong to Paideia, creating and appreciating important present moments-to-come in new ways, from now on, but always recognizing the values and qualities that pulled us off the street back in 1986, that got us up every day ready and eager to go to school (or almost every day), values and qualities that have defined and guided our lives ever since our first day of school, so many years ago.

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I'M A MATH TEACHER, so you might expect me to talk about numbers.

Well I will.

The numbers I'm going to talk about in this speech are 30 and 65.

This is my 30th year at Paideia and I had my 65th birthday this summer.

Some of you are probably thinking the title for my speech should be "Why I *Still* Teach."

Thirty years is a long time.

I've been here so long that I've taught many of you teachers.

I've been here so long that I've taught some of my children's teachers!

I've been here so long that I believe that not only am I the shortest high school teacher, I'm also the oldest.

Let me give you a little outline of my speech. First, I'm going to talk about what motivated me when I started to teach math at Paideia and then about what motivates me now. If you are outlining this—Part One is "Feminism" and Part Two is "Outrage At Ignorance."

It is always good to know a little background, which might help to explain how I got my motivation.

I grew up in Orange County, California and went to Catholic schools for 12 years. In high school I drove a Chevy El Camino pickup (think fins), which was the transportation of choice for surfboards and I often gave rides to kids at my school who surfed at Doheny Beach. Though I was definitely a goodie-goodie and a nerd, I did have that El Camino and by senior year I had a boyfriend, John. When I go back to California I often visit John and his partner Steve.

We were a large school and a school that emphasized athletics. My high school has produced two Heisman trophy winners. We had four different orders of nuns, two kinds of priests and the Brothers of St. Patrick from Ireland. Our school was co-instructional. Some subjects (like math and English) were segregated where girls were taught by nuns while boys were taught by priests or brothers. Other subjects like social studies and science were integrated.

The Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM) order of nuns taught math to the girls. The BVMS were very old, very strict, and very incompetent nuns from the Midwest. They ran the math classes for girls. The boys got the Irish brothers for math. In English the luck of the draw was reversed. The boys got the rather bland diocesan priests but we got the wonderful Sisters of St. Louis from Monaghan, Ireland.

Unfortunately, the math curriculum for girls did not go as far as trigonometry and the brothers were not allowed to teach girls. So as of my 11th grade year it looked as though no girls were going to be able to take trig.

It so happened that in my year there were a lot of girls who were very, very good in math so we convinced the school to try for a dispensation from the powers in Ireland. It worked and the brothers were allowed to teach trig to both boys and girls for the first time when I took it senior year. Of course, the girls had to sit in the back so as not to distract the boys or the teacher!

During high school I found out I had a gift. I didn't have a lot of gifts; I was unathletic and unartistic. However, I was really good at taking standardized tests. My junior year I got higher SAT [scores] than anyone had ever gotten at the school. This earned me a lecture by the principal about the sin of pride.

Rosalinda Ratajczak has taught math at Paideia since 1980 and her children graduated in 1996 and 2005. Before coming to Paideia, she was an econometrician at Georgia Tech and at SunTrust. Active in her college alumni affairs, she ran for Overseer of Harvard but lost to Elizabeth Dole. Her spreadsheet shows she has visited 50 states and 24 countries on 144 trips since 1968. Rosalinda taught statistics at Paideia long before the AP course was developed and wishes all students could become statistically literate.

We were supposed to go to private Catholic colleges if we could afford them or get a scholarship to them. If we couldn't, we had to "settle" for the UC system, you know, schools like UCLA or Berkeley.

I babysat for a woman who was a counselor at a local public school. When she found out what my SAT scores were, she gave me guides to schools I'd never heard of—like the Seven Sisters including Wellesley, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Barnard, and Radcliffe. Most of these schools were for women only—which I wanted no part of.

However, when I read the fine print about Radcliffe I found out it had no professors and no classes. In fact, all the classes were with Harvard students at Harvard. So I applied and got in and went. I'm sure I got in due to my college essay which boiled down to "I want to go to Harvard so that I can meet boys who are as smart as I am." Obviously we had no John Stubbs or Lenore Carroll at my school to give me advice about the essay, but it didn't seem to hurt.

So off I went to Harvard by cross-country train, a mere four days. I had never been east of the Mississippi, didn't know many non-Catholics, and had a wardrobe of various colored tennies but no coat. One of my letters home said there were a lot of Italians at the school but they had odd names like Goldberg and Cohen.

At Harvard I was a math major and took the super-duper hard calculus sequence called Math 11/55. I was one of about five girls in a class of 100. I worked my butt off and did well in that class and other math classes.

However, it was not fun being a female math major. For one thing the math offices and classrooms for math were in a large building called Sever Hall. This three-story building had no ladies' room. If you were a woman taking math classes you had to run down the stairs and out of the building and then trudge through the snow to get to the closest ladies' room, which was in the basement of Memorial Church. For another thing, the professors did not really want women to be math majors and they did not hesitate to say so.

Being a woman at Harvard when Harvard did not want to *admit* that there were women at Harvard was enough to turn the meekest lady into a raging feminist. Some of the indignities are gothic horror stories. If there were only a few girls in a class, the professors would not bother to put the books and articles on reserve at Radcliffe library but only at Lamont Library—which did not admit women. Female students in these classes had to stand outside in the snow and try to persuade someone with a penis to go in and check out the book for us.

When I graduated and looked for a job, the career office had three sets of binders to look at—for men only, for women only, and for either. *Time* magazine listed reporter jobs for men and researcher jobs for women. Even though Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1963 banned discrimination against women, it didn't translate into the "real world" for a long, long time. Some would say it still hasn't.

I did become a feminist and was a charter member of the National Organization for Women. Girls today *simply do not believe* some of the things I tell them and I think these are important stories for them to hear. When my mother was born in 1918, women did not have the right to vote. When I went to Harvard as a freshman in 1962, women had a quota of one-to four for undergraduates, i.e. they could not represent more than 20 percent of the class. At the Harvard Medical School at that time the quota was 10 percent. At Harvard Law School it was 4 percent, (25 spots reserved out of 625). That quota was still more generous than the Harvard Business School, to which *no* women were admitted.

These obstacles to women seeking education were justified by the theory that the education would be *wasted* on women who would just marry and have children. Women didn't have much choice about having children even in the early 1960s. Some states had laws forbidding the sale of contraceptives, even to married couples, and abortion was dangerous and illegal everywhere. I remember a woman in my dorm hemorrhaging in her room after a botched abortion and resisting our efforts to get her to the health center.

After college I went to graduate school for a masters in economics at Boston College. When Don and I moved to California, I got in the doctoral program at UCLA and concentrated in mathematical economics and econometrics (that's statistics applied to economics). When we moved to Atlanta, I decided to branch out and become a practical economist since nepotism rules and prejudice made things so difficult in academia. Out of the frying pan into the fire. I worked at one of the most conservative institutions in a very conservative industry for four years and became an assistant vice-president. But I worked under a boss who didn't know how to work with women. When the discrimina-

Times really have changed.....at least at Paideia. The girls in my classes now are at least as successful as the boys. Progress isn't universal, however.

tion and unfairness finally got to me I left to work as an econometrician at Georgia Tech in their economic development division. While I was treated fairly and had interesting work as a senior research scientist it seemed I wasn't really making much of a difference to anyone so I looked into becoming a math teacher.

I went to the Georgia Department of Education to see what I would need to become a certified teacher. It should be a comedy skit. The highlight was telling me I had to take a course, which I had taught to 130 undergrads at UCLA, using the same text!

I knew Paul Bianchi from the Harvard club so I set up an appointment to see if he could help me get the teaching certificate. He really wasn't much help about getting the certificate. Instead, he offered me a teaching job right then.

I worked part-time for the first stage of my Paideia life. I had children who were nine years apart so I had many years with a child not in school full day. Being part-time gave me the opportunity to become active in community affairs and my college alumnae association. My favorite activity has been interviewing applicants to Harvard and Radcliffe for almost 40 years now. I interviewed my orthopedic surgeon, a couple of Paideia parents and a very sweet girl from Druid Hills High School—who was a Girl Scout and had spent the summer on an archaeology project—Caroline Quillian Stubbs.

I became a trustee of Radcliffe College and was on the board of the Harvard Alumni Association after I was actually nominated to be an Overseer of Harvard but lost to Elizabeth Dole. I was also active in Atlanta theater and was vice president of the board of the Alliance Theatre.

In the 1970s there really was a problem with math for girls. I could see that math acted like a gatekeeper to many fields and professions but girls were quitting math courses too early. It was very important for me to be a role model, to assume that girls could do as well as boys and to show all the students it's a good idea to take as much math as you can—even if you're not a "mathie" and don't *love* it.

Times really have changed.....at least at Paideia. The girls in my classes now are at least as successful as the boys. Progress isn't universal, however. Not too long ago Larry Summers lost his job as the president of Harvard (he was already in trouble) when he speculated that men may be more successful than women in the fields of math and science due to genetic advantages.

Over the decades, as my worry about girls and math diminished, I became more active in getting statistics into the curriculum. I taught a short term stat course almost immediately after I got here and statistics was actually a graduation requirement for about 10 years until we incorporated it into our regular curriculum. I also taught a Statistics seminar (which junior high teacher Tilly Hatcher '96 took)—about 10 years before the College Board folks came out with AP Stat. I now teach an AP Stat course at Paideia, and I'd like to point out that we were really ahead of the curve.

Some mathematicians love exotic math topics and math puzzles and read math articles at home. I don't. I see math in everyday life and I want all our students to be math literate.

My goal now is for our mathematics curriculum to serve all our students. Life is so much easier if people can allow numbers comfortably into their lives. I don't want any graduate of Paideia to shy away from information presented in a table of numbers or in a graph. Even if a student never gets to the point of working with exponential functions in calculus, they need to have a gut understanding of exponential growth. Otherwise they'll be sadly surprised by the consequences of changes in interest rates or mortgage length.

I can't stand fuzzy thinking. By the end of my statistics course, my students *know* that comparing averages isn't enough to draw a conclusion about differences. You have to know how close to the average the numbers are. They *know* that correlation is not causation. Yes, there may be a huge correlation between taking French or piano lessons and having a high SAT verbal score, there is no causation. If you aren't doing well on the SAT verbal, it probably won't help to start piano lessons. The relationship comes from other variables such as income, quality of schooling and motivation.

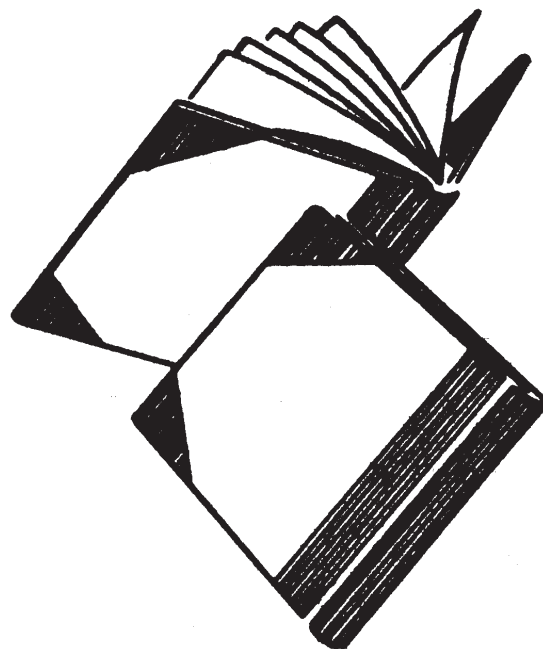
My students *know* that a predictive model is only as good as your ability to predict the predictor. For example, rabbi salaries in Los Angeles and gambling receipts in Las Vegas are highly correlated but you can't predict salaries unless you can accurately forecast gambling receipts. They *know* that it is dangerous to forecast past your data set. (Too bad that the quants on Wall Street didn't know that!)

To sum up, I've seen phenomenal changes in our society. Just last year, for the first time, girls outnumbered boys in the freshman class at Harvard.

I've seen some negative trends for high school students. They live so much of their lives tethered to electronic devices. They rarely engage in indepth live conversations or read books. And, they don't know how to be alone with their thoughts. I hope these negative trends are understood and confronted.

But I hope trends such as environmental concern and social activism will continue to strengthen.

I've talked about the number 30, but not much about the number 65. There aren't many high school teachers who are 65 or at my stage in life. For many of them, I'm the same era as their mothers. But these younger colleagues are wonderful. They are energetic and professional and *when* I leave, I know Paideia will be in good hands.



14

“When I die, I know I’ll see Lucky again.”

“Is this your job?”

**“Books can make you feel such big feelings!
It’s amazing!”**

Sarah Domby ’99 teaches 8, 9, and 10 year olds. Prior to teaching at Paideia, she taught at Westtown School, Abington Friends School, and Amana Academy.

LAST YEAR, I ran a literature group about *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech. In preparation for sharing the book with the group, I read about the narrator Sal and her journey to find out why her mother left, and I found my eyes welling up with tears. I looked forward to sharing the story with my students.

The reading interests of the students in the group were diverse; favorites ranged from *Where the Red Fern Grows* to *Harry Potter* to *Captain Underpants*. All of the students in the group engaged with the book. It was very close to the end of the year, but they were hanging in there. They asked questions about the book that led into discussions about the characters, their motivations, and their feelings. My students could empathize with the characters. One of the questions they kept asking was, “Why did Sal’s mom leave?” This was a question the character herself was trying to figure out over the course of the book.

Then we read a chapter that talks about how Sal’s mom had been pregnant and after carrying an injured Sal, she gave birth to a stillborn baby and had to have surgery to remove her uterus. The students were really affected by this part of the story. They shared how they could understand Sal’s feelings of guilt. They connected with this child-character. But they also understood her mother’s loss, not only of the baby, but also of the family and life that she wanted. Then they shared how sad they felt when they read the chapter. I told them when I had read that chapter, I had cried a little, and asked if any of them

had. Several shook their heads no, but one boy said, “I didn’t cry, but my eyes got watery,” and some of the other students nodded their heads in agreement.

Then the student said, “It’s just so amazing that books can make you feel so much. Books can make you feel such big feelings. It’s amazing.”

The other kids nodded in agreement.

Another said, “It’s kind of like when you read *Fig Pudding* to us and we felt so sad when Josh died.”

“Yeah,” they chorused.

And with those words, I had just had another “Why I Teach” moment. These students had just experienced how powerful books and writing can be, and they had recognized this power. They connected with the characters, and they connected with the story in an intense way. And then they connected it back to another book that they had read and the feelings they had then.

Now, I don’t think that I taught them how books can share and make you feel powerful emotions quite the same way that I taught my pre-k students how to blow their noses. That went something like: “First you get a tissue. Hold it up to your nose. Now, take a deep breath in, close your mouth. Keep it closed and blow out quick and hard!” It’s satisfying too, in its own way.

My literature group kids had learned something important for themselves, through their own experience of the book. I felt excited, happy, and amazed that I got to witness this learning. I also felt proud that Cecelia [Caines] and I, as a part of Paideia, had engineered an experience where this kind of learning could occur. I had been lucky enough to introduce the right book to these students at a time when they were ready to learn. We had spent a year helping kids connect to books and stories by reading with them and to them. We asked questions to poke and prod them toward thinking more about what they read. And it worked!

Of course, their previous teachers and Natalie [Bernstein, the elementary librarian] had been working on this. But it worked! They were internalizing these lessons and forming relationships with books and characters.

Introducing students to new experiences, material, and ideas is really exciting for me. It's kind of like playing matchmaker. In addition to working at summer camp and going to some professional development workshops, I also spent some time this summer watching really crappy television. (I know that most of you probably don't watch television at all. You're teachers and you read books and do highbrow things.) But I watch television, really crappy television, and one of the shows I saw this summer was *Millionaire Matchmaker* on Bravo. It's about this lady, Patti, who helps millionaires find love. Now, I sort of identify with Patti. I am trying to help students develop a lifelong relationship with learning. She's helping her clients find a lifelong relationship with a

Introducing students to new experiences, material, and ideas is really exciting for me. It's kind of like playing matchmaker.

person. Patti has rules that the clients have to follow. She coaches them on how to interact with their potential match. Cecelia and I give our students guidelines for work, projects, and how to behave at school. As teachers, we coach specific students on how to approach their work or their classmates. When you make a match, when you see a spark between a student and something he or she is learning about, it's fabulous.

In thinking about why I teach, another moment keeps entering my mind. During my first year teaching, I worked in a pre-k class in the morning and a kindergarten class in the afternoon. The kindergarten class had incubated four chicken eggs. It was very exciting when one morning we came in and there was a little baby chick where one of the eggs had been, and two more chicks were making their way into the world before our very eyes. By the afternoon, there were three chicks, getting fluffier, but the last egg looked just the same as it had before. The last egg had finally pipped by the next morning. By the afternoon, there were four

baby chicks. The kids brainstormed names ranging from Chicky and Chicken Little to Snuggles (the name of Howard's beloved teddy bear) and several names of the students themselves. Howard, guardian of Snuggles, was quite a character. When he spoke his voice was a combination of computer and clown—low, gravelly, and slightly goofy. He was very serious most of the time and seemed like a little old man in the body of a 5-year-old, except that Snuggles still occasionally came to school with him.

With some guidance, the class came to an agreement about the names of the chickens: Fluffy, Chick-chick, and Snuggles were the first three chickens. The easiest name for everyone to agree on was Lucky—the last chicken to hatch. The kids felt that they were lucky that he had hatched, and he was lucky to have made it. The chickens were marked with different colored Sharpies, so we could tell them apart.

The next day, it was pouring rain. The kindergarten lead teacher called in sick. When my friend Amanda went into the classroom, three fluffy chicks hopped around their cardboard box. One, Lucky, lay still in a corner. Lucky was dead.

Amanda scooped his body into a small cardboard box of a coffin, set him on a desk, and came across the hall to tell me the news. A false start at a funeral that morning was thwarted by rain and a sudden urgent need for a band-aid. That afternoon, we tried again. Amanda, the students, and I put on our raincoats and carried our umbrellas in the drizzle to bury the chick. We went to a little wooded area near the playground. The daffodils that we had planted in the fall were starting to bloom. With a shovel from the sandbox, we dug a very shallow hole. Plastic shovels are fine for sand, but not so great for dirt and roots. After placing the cardboard box into the hole, Amanda and I attempted to cover the box with dirt. We smooshed it down. The corners of the box peeked out a little. I was sure that as soon as we left, Lucky would be some animal's lunch.

Then, we held a memorial Meeting for Worship. The students stood quietly around the makeshift grave, getting slightly damp.

One student started, “I’m going to miss Lucky.”

Annie, a quiet little girl who hardly ever spoke, said, “I think Lucky is in heaven with my grandma.”

“I’m sad that Lucky died and went to heaven, but when I die, I know I’ll see Lucky again,” Howard said. And when Howard said that, I imagined him as an old man, (which wasn’t too hard since he was kind of old-mannish to begin with) getting to heaven

As a teacher, I get to work with people who are a lot of fun. You guys are fun.

and immediately looking around for a chicken. One by one, students shared how they felt about the day-old chicken. It was sweet, sad, and funny all at the same time.

This story is a perfect example of why I like working with kids. These students had known Lucky for a day, but they really loved the chicken. Kids are much more open to loving new things than adults. They were honest and open and heartfelt in their eulogies for the bird. Kids are pretty great, and I really enjoy being around them.

When I was in high school, I babysat a lot and I spent an hour a day in Kelly and Roger’s class with second and third graders. When I went to college, I realized pretty quickly that being around 18- to 22-year-olds all the time wasn’t going to cut it for me. I really missed being around kids and quickly sought out different volunteer and internship opportunities. I spent time at schools that felt a lot like Paideia and schools that were incredibly different than Paideia. As I went to these schools, I saw teachers that I wanted to be like. I enjoyed interacting with students, witnessing their growth, and learning more about schools.

Most of all, during these experiences, I got to be around kids. Unjaded, honest kids, who weren’t afraid to play and have fun. In college, it became pretty clear to me that I wanted to work with children, even though I wasn’t 100 percent sure I wanted to be a teacher. Many of the career choices I thought about (physical therapist, chaplain at a children’s hospital, teacher) involved more schooling after college, so I thought that I would be an assistant teacher for a year or two to see if that was for me, or if I wanted to go back to school. After a year and a half, I was sure that I wanted to go back to school, to get a masters degree—in education. I really liked teaching.

Another part of the story of why I teach is Amanda. Not just Amanda, but other teachers, my colleagues, you. As a teacher, I get to work with people who are a lot of fun. You guys are fun. In addition, I also get to work with passionate people who work hard and care. Teachers, at least most of the teachers I’ve gotten to work with, really like learning. Learning about students, learning about teaching, learning about subject matter. We’re a little bit nerdy. It’s good to be in a place, a school that values learning with people who share that value. Teaching is a profession where you can collaborate with colleagues and learn from each other.

I am not afraid to admit that my first year teaching I loved faculty meeting. Really loved faculty meeting. I looked forward to staying late on Wednesdays. I am pretty sure that there were days I would skip into faculty meeting. I loved learning about how the school worked or about some aspect of teaching, and I loved learning from a colleague or guest speaker. I liked having time to get to sit with my colleagues and talk about important issues, kids, and how they learn. Now I’ve had enough playground rules discussions to be a little less enthusiastic about faculty meeting, but I still really enjoy the learning, discussion, and camaraderie that can happen at these meeting. (Also, I really enjoy snack.)

One of the reasons I have really liked teaching at Paideia and the other independent schools where I've taught is that I've gotten to teach with partners and as a part of teams. Getting to work with Cecelia, José, Jonathan, Kristi, Martha, Elisa, Andrea, Sarah, Felix, Amanda, Debbie, and Jen as my partners in crime over the years has made me a better teacher and a happier human being. I can't imagine what life is like for people who telecommute or freelance from home. I am able to give and receive advice, support, humor, and friendship from these partners every day. Being a part of a community of learners, both students and teachers, helps me to learn, helps me to teach, and helps me to grow as a person.

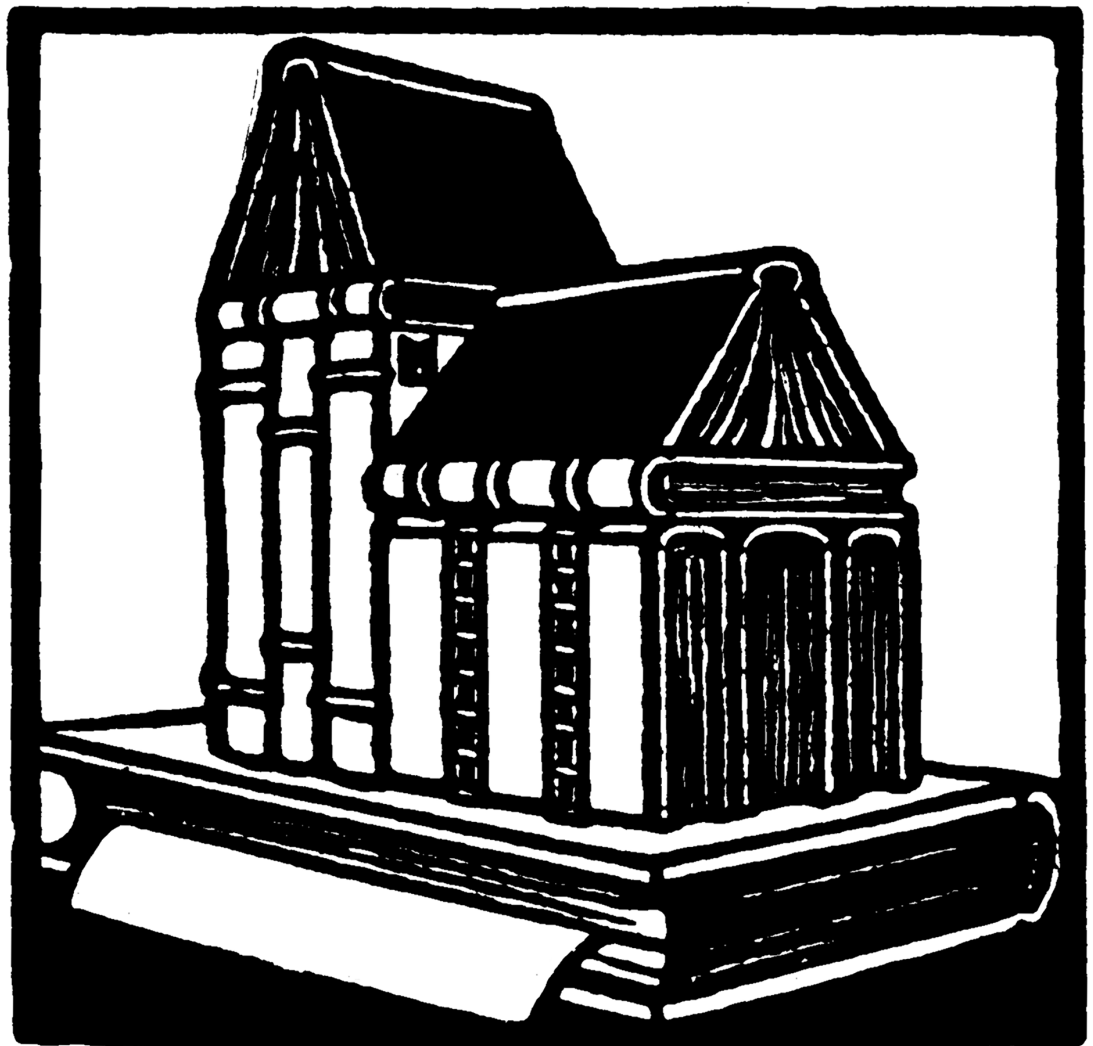
I'll leave you with one last vignette. I was standing at the sand table with Louis, River, and Benjamin. We had emptied the table of sand and filled it with water, large chunks of ice, and plastic penguins and seals.

"Graaaargghh!" the seal growled as River moved it towards the penguins.

"Oh no, what should we do?" my penguin hopped up and down.

"Swim!" Our penguins dove into the chilly water of the sand table sea. We splashed around, our fingers getting cold in the water. Unfortunately, River and his seal were too fast for us and the seal ate the penguins again. As we regrouped and decided who was going to be the seal for the next go-round of the pre- κ version of *Animal Planet*, Louis turned to me. He had a quizzical look on his face for a moment and then he said, "Teacher Sarah, is this your job?"

It is!



Teaching Poverty and the American Dream

18

Paul Bianchi is headmaster of Paideia School, a job he has held since the school's founding in 1971. He also teaches an honors history course in the high school for juniors and seniors called Modern History. One of the four topics that course delves into is poverty and wealth in America.

FOR THE PAST DOZEN YEARS I have dedicated ten weeks of my year-long high school course, Modern America, to the study of poverty and wealth in the United States since World War II. Modern America is one of many upper level elective social studies courses available to juniors and seniors who have previously taken the required U.S. history survey course as tenth graders and world civilization as ninth graders. As an honors course, Modern America involves a steady diet of reading, essays, and tests as well as an expectation of class participation.

Instead of a chronological survey of the past 60 years, I organize the course to focus on four topics; "post-holing" is what I believe this approach is called in curriculum circles. The topics are the emergence of the United States as the pre-eminent world power in the decade following the war, with special attention to the Cold War; the changes in the roles and expectations for women since 1945; this unit on the American Dream; and a brief consideration of the decline of trust in American society. Post-holing inevitably means that some major developments, such as the Civil Rights Movement or Vietnam, are left out. A syllabus involves trade-offs.

My goal for each of these units is that we learn first the history of the topic, and then let that history cast light on our world and our lives today. Until taught, even good students have little idea of the when and where of history. I do not say this as yet one more curmudgeonly lament about the historical ignorance of the current generation. They are about as ignorant of, say, the assumptions and implications of the Social Security program as certainly I was at their age. As adults we forget when we came to know what we now know and take for granted.

The idea of the American Dream is, of course, a motivating belief existing since Europeans first explored and colonized the continent. In this unit we consider how it has been expressed and thrived since the war. Students know the definition of the American Dream as

the rags-to-riches story of upward mobility. It is sometimes called the Horatio Alger myth after the popular 19th-century author who achieved fame and fortune writing the same dime novel again and again. In these books a young person, more precisely a male, white, young person, through hard work and good character emerges from poverty to a life of wealth and prestige.

The story is not, however, a myth in the sense of being fiction; it is a true story in the lives of millions of American families. To underscore the point, I ask students in the class to research their own families. The assignment is to call up grandparents, if they are available, and ask how they grew up, or how their parents grew up. Most Paideia students are upper-middle class; my informal count over the years is that most of their grandparents were not when they were young. The money came from somewhere, and with the money came a variation on the story of the American Dream.

We love to tell our own stories, and our class anthology reinforces the point more compellingly than ten books on the life of Andrew Carnegie. I slip in the story of my immigrant grandparents arriving poor, but who work hard for years so that two generations later all the grandchildren go to college and most end up in the professions. Two years ago there were six students in the class whose grandfathers all seemed to travel the same road from a working class immigrant Brooklyn neighborhood through a good New York City high school and City College to success in business. It was hard for us to believe they did not know each other except that the road was crowded in New York in those years.

It always surprises me how few students know more than the sketchy details of their families' socio-economic story. As parents we provide our children with many of the things that we think money can buy, such as a private school education, but worry perhaps that if we explicitly discuss our relative affluence with them that we will make them overly concerned with money. I would prefer more information and candor, for the same reason I want them to know as much as they can about all aspects of their lives.

But our stories of social mobility are not universal. Before we lull ourselves into believing that there is a pot of gold at the end of everyone's rainbow, I introduce the story of Derrick, a young high school graduate featured as one of the children of poverty in a *New York*

Times series in the mid-1990s. Derrick's tale is unsettling; he grew up in a Memphis housing project as one of many children in a single-parent family. By every American standard, Derrick is poor; for example, he stopped going to church for a few months because he was embarrassed that he only had old basketball shoes to wear. But Derrick also has all the personal qualities and determination to be the young protagonist in one of Horatio Alger's books. He does very well in a high school that is oblivious to academic achievement; he

The corollary of being born on third base and believing you hit a triple is the notion that those who strike out did not practice as hard as we do.

avoids drugs and gangs; he works at McDonald's and gives his salary to his mother to help the family. He even wins a partial scholarship to one of the state universities in Tennessee. When adversity in the family and a relatively small tuition shortfall reel him back home, he picks himself up and makes plans to enroll in a local community college. Inspired by the life of Dr. Ben Carson, Derrick intends to be a doctor.

In every respect, Derrick is an admirable young man who should have a bright future. No doubt about it, the class agrees, he's going to "make it." He will overcome the obstacles before him. But then, alas, I tell them of the call I made a few years back to the reporter for the *New York Times* to ask if he knew what became of Derrick. I did not hear the answer we wanted. Derrick was not able to stay in the community college. His family continued to pull him back into their vortex of need, and despite his avowed intentions to avoid being tied down by parenthood, he fathers a child, and then a few years later, another child with a different woman. When the reporter caught up with him, Derrick was stacking shelves at a superstore in Memphis, a low hourly wage job, and he had little education to make him eligible for more.

Derrick breaks our heart and bursts our bubble because he defies our expectations and our unspoken stereotypes. Paideia students work hard not to be prejudiced, but the uncomfortable truth we admit is that when we see someone working a low-wage job, "flipping burgers" is the insulting term, we generally assume that they didn't do their homework and therefore don't deserve more. The corollary of being born on third base and believing you hit

a triple is the notion that those who strike out did not practice as hard as we do.

As a society, of course, we mostly ignore the poor. From our own stories and Derrick's story we move on to Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962). Harrington describes all the ways the poor are invisible. It is said that Harrington's book helped the country re-discover the poor, who, despite years of post-war affluence, had not escaped poverty and still constituted a large segment of American society. *The Other America* changed the conversation about poverty among opinion leaders in government, the universities, and influential foundations. Harrington's analysis of the invisibility of the poor seems to my students to describe the society they are entering as insightfully as did the one I was growing up in when the book was published.

Harrington's analysis surfaced in the final months of the Kennedy administration and was seized on by Lyndon Johnson as a rationale for his War on Poverty and Great Society initiatives. Central to Harrington's thesis is the argument that the poor cannot help themselves. Their poverty is not their fault, but rather systemic, the fault of the system. They live and exist in a cycle of poverty, and in a culture that precludes hope—"aspiration" is his word. We study how Johnson's War on Poverty and Great Society programs are based on these assumptions, the exaggerated expectations around these programs, and why and how most of them failed, or disappeared before we ever knew whether they might work.

We debate Michael Harrington's thesis for much of the term. Horatio Alger teaches us that we can pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and that everything is possible in America. Not true, says Harrington, whom we know to be a socialist, never a good thing to be in this country. He maintains that we need massive government intervention to break the cycle. Lyndon Johnson is willing to offer education and job training, temporary support and housing—a hand up, but not a hand out. Critics of the Great Society disagree. For example, Charles Murray writes engagingly in the 1980s that government help is counter-productive; President Ronald Reagan uses his immense popularity to persuade Americans that government is the problem, and he then tries to dismantle as much of the Great Society as Congress will allow. Later on, Newt Gingrich's Contract with America will continue the

conservative reaction activist policies.

The argument over poverty is fueled, almost explosively, in the 1980s by the mounting frustration over the welfare system, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, culminating with welfare reform at the end of President Clinton's first term. AFDC began as a minor part of the Social Security Act in 1935 to enable widows to remain home with their young children. What began as a small program intended in the racist construction of the time for white widows expanded through the years to include more and more women with greater levels of support. But as everyone from historians to talk show hosts make clear, by the 1980s almost everybody hated the welfare system. Conservatives argued that it promoted and perpetuated dependency, often for generations; liberals contended that welfare payments were so woefully inadequate that it was impossible for recipients to have the tools to escape poverty. Most working Americans resented supporting those who did not work, and those who received welfare resented being resented by the rest of the country and being societal scapegoats.

The welfare dilemma, resolved at least for a while when President Clinton signed a welfare reform bill in 1996, is such a fruitful and compelling case study because it entails history, politics, social policy, psychology, and ethical considerations. We study how Clinton's welfare reform was successful in that welfare rolls shrunk dramatically and many former recipients did go to work. But poverty rates since the late 1990's have remained basically unchanged, even before the current serious recession. The poor remain poor in America, but since their poverty is now based on low-wage work as opposed to welfare benefits, the anger surrounding public support has subsided.

The transition to a consideration of the working poor is a natural one at this point. The working poor constitute a much larger percentage in our society than the numbers on welfare ever did. The existence of low-wage workers living at subsistence levels is even more unsettling than the conundrums entailed in the old welfare system. These Americans are following the rules: they are working. But they are still poor. We read Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, a powerful indictment of the conditions of millions of working Americans. We struggle with questions of the relationship between their economic situation and our lifestyle.

Studying poverty can be a window into

understanding the distribution of wealth in America. The distribution of wealth and why income disparities have grown, however, are massive topics, too complex to do justice to in a short period of time, even with bright high school students. It is more than enough to try to gain insight into how we have viewed and now view poverty in this affluent society and different remedies that have been tried, or almost tried, to deal with it.

My goals in this class are to raise the myriad of questions involved in this topic and also to help students become more self-aware. Some of that self-awareness is historical, the history of how different people have understood poverty and what, if anything, they have attempted to do about it. I emphasize that the understanding of past leaders was influenced by the context of the time, and that their proposed remedies involved choice, values, trade-offs and sometimes conflict. Too often we view history as a series of events that had to have happened the way we now know they happened. It is important, and I also believe empowering for young people, to underscore the complexity of factors and the role of human decision-making.

In this class I also want my students to become more aware of their own relative position in time, culture, and society. Unless we work hard to transcend it, we are all prisoners of our own experience. We might fail to realize how the lives of our grandparents, or great-grandparents, were different, and the connections between their lives and our own. We assume that Derrick's abilities and character will result in the same outcomes that those abilities and character would yield in our lives, ignoring, maybe ignorant of, the networks that sustain us and the nets there to catch us if we fall. I don't want students to feel guilty about being born on second or third base; I just don't want them to forget those who batted before them, or to use their good fortune to inflate themselves or deflate others.

The students in my class over the years believe in the American Dream, and generally have faith that it will be available to them. Given the families they come from, that we come from, and the world we live in, that belief is not surprising. We come to a better understanding, however, of how and why the dream is not and has not been available or achieved by everyone. Being less oblivious to our own privilege, we know more and, I hope, are able to act more wisely.