

## 受身 **The Art of Falling**

*Flow down and down in always widening rings of being.*

Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī - 1207-1273

*I'll tumble 4 ya...*

Boy George - 1982

We bow to each other to start our day. The bow, made while maintaining eye contact, is a slight but intentional self-unbalancing. A gentle inclination toward the other - and then a slow return to our center. Each partner returns to alignment, strengthened from the exchange of dignity with the other. A conventional western handshake is also shared, but with that political pressing of the flesh one's center is never surrendered (and germs are also nicely shared!), and there is no unbalancing toward the other. And with the wrong person you are left with a dead fish, a sweaty palm, or aching knuckles. With a bow, however, the raw planetary force of gravity is elegantly challenged and so, too, is the status quo of our sometimes rigid equilibrium.

The complexity of our choreography, here in Spanish Harlem, brings on its own cultural vertigo. Our demographics, the moral dimensions of our mission, and the delineated rhythms of our curriculum and schedule demand an unbalancing toward the other. And always returning to one's center. The following narrative, while somewhat staccato, is true reportage of the rich unbalancing that happens at the 309 building in less than a fortnight:

A 10 year old Mexican says *vale* to me as he leaves the building. He is learning Latin from a white teenage volunteer, a senior at a Jewish day school, whose mother is acting Mathematics Chair at an elite secular school for girls. An Ecuadorean is trying to get us up to speed on the hottest Korean boy band. An Afro-Latina intones a casually elegant homage before a Rembrandt self-portrait, as it hangs there in the stillness of the Frick Museum, giving breath to the Dutch draughtsman long dead. A Barnard College freshman, EHS '14, tells us of her path. A refugee from Argentina's Dirty War, now a founding partner at a prestigious law firm, fields questions from our students about the prosecution of security fraud cases - and what it was like meeting Bernie Madoff. All in a week at EHS. *Veritas*, yo. All of us, Americans with hyphens, edging on the transcendent, flowing here in El Barrio down into widening rings of humanity and being.

In these troubled days especially, everyone seems to be afraid of falling. Falling for fake news. For the old razzle dazzle. Taking the fall for another's failure or weakness. Yet, in the grand throwing and grappling art of judo, falling, *ukemi*, is necessary and respected. A great contemporary judoka, Oishi Sensei, often refers to training in his beloved Olympic sport as *falling practice*! The edgy urban art of *parkour*, as well, holds falling low in high esteem. So, too, we in El Barrio tumble - joyously into widening rings of being. We trust, so we can allow our selves to fall - fall for the charms of the liberal arts, fall into the shattering beauty of a poem, or fall into a West Virginia mountain reverie. Deep learning is letting go and falling. So daily we fall, down through race, class, gender - and political affiliations - down into the shining heart of human excellence.

And now we are in the season of leaf fall. In this newsletter we look back to a glorious summer and on past a winter of discontent that had brought a brutal chill to the land. I hope you linger on the images and narratives inside - from our children, to our splendid college teaching interns, to our good colleague, Jay Hayes, one of two proud Bowdoin Polar Bears on our team. And I think you will fall for us, once again, as I bow deeply again to you.