

THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL

NEWSLETTER

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Trust the Process

When people think about **Paul Bianchi**, many attributes come to mind: his wicked accent, sense of humor and intelligence. When speaking with faculty, the characteristic mentioned again and again about Paul was trust. Stepping into the role of head of school requires a lot of trust. First, you have to trust yourself — your choices, ability and vision. Second, you must trust the people you hire, having confidence that they support your vision and will work with you in accomplishing those shared goals.

The saying “it takes a village” comes to mind. Paul has always recognized that running the Paideia School was not something he could do alone. From its inception, Paideia has been a community effort. Many leaders struggle with delegation because it requires a release of control; it requires trusting others. As High School English teacher **Joseph Cullen** notes, “Paul has a lot of control over the school, but he’s not a very controlling person.” He has always embraced

trust, in spite of its risks — people making mistakes or discounting that trust — to allow teachers and faculty the freedom to focus on what has always been most important: the students.

As head of school, Paul has worked closely with faculty and built relationships with them, understanding that his support and presence enables them to do their best work.

“He was around a lot. He would just pop up,” recalls High School Assistant Principal **Stacey Winston**. “One time I was teaching and all of my students were so quiet and attentive. I was like, ‘This is great! I’m going to teach more. This is going great.’ And I got halfway through the class and Paul stood up. He had been in the room the whole time and I didn’t know. And then he left, and I asked



the class, ‘Is that why y’all were paying attention?’”

Whether ushering students out of 1509 to carpool at the end of day by playing the piano, pitching the faculty softball game on field day, leading Monday Morning Meeting or cruising around campus in his golf cart, Paul has always found a way to be visible and accessible to the

Paideia community. “I’m always happy and impressed when I see him at things like that because now as an employee I know how busy he is,” comments High School Counselor **Jessica Smith ’99**. “As a kid, you don’t understand how a school works, much less an independent school with three levels. He’s being pulled in a lot of different directions, and I appreciate how he manages that.”

There’s more online! To read the complete versions of these articles, scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/paulandbarbara



Being Present Like Barbara

From my upstairs window in the Pi Building, I have a bird’s-eye view of one of the hearts of Paideia’s campus. Located among Python Hall, 1509, the MAC and the playground, there are always students rushing by. In the mornings, they lug backpacks and instrument cases. At lunch and between class changes, the High School students mosey along while the Elementary students run or skip or play any number of games with one another. And more often than not, amid all of the energy and noise is **Barbara Dunbar** — quietly observing, speaking up when she sees fit, always recognizable with her hair up in a bun, wearing her signature midi-length skirt, stockings and black clogs.

At the Alumni Parent Committee’s

February Speaker Series’ event, “*Celebrating Paul and Barbara Since 1971*,” moderator **Melba Hughes** commented, “Barbara loves public speaking, have you noticed?” She responded, “I haven’t done this. All these years, I’ve never been on this stage.” Despite her disfavor for public speaking, Barbara eloquently shared her perspective, one we don’t often hear, on Paideia’s origin, her career, and the values she finds most important to Paideia’s culture.

Barbara’s passion for working with children stemmed from her own childhood, growing up with a brother with special needs. “I wanted to be helpful to as many



families as possible,” she remarked. While Paul was finishing his master’s in education, Barbara was working with children with developmental disabilities. In Paideia’s second year,

Barbara began her PhD in developmental psychology at Georgia State University. Since Paideia’s founding, she has served as the Half Day coordinator and school psychologist, in addition to running her own private practice and conducting autism research. “I love watching kids unfold, how it happens. The joy of every day. Seeing students as individuals,” she cited as her motivation during the past 50 years.

The Value of Humor*

By David Millians with Paul Hayward (as it turns out)

“After ecstasy, the laundry.”

One of Paul Bianchi’s most important endowments to Paideia and its community culture is a sense of humor, not just wry wit and wordplay but emerging from a compassionate, self-deprecating sense of the humanity of the work we do every day with children and one another. You can see this in his messages to the community, updates in the Weekly Memo with all-school news, the newsletter, parent nights, alumni gatherings, admission presentations, faculty meetings and more. Paul’s self has been on display these five decades and more, and his compassionate, sharp humor has defined him and our community as a school for just as long.

The campus is filled with quirky objects that cause one to smile — the red fire truck in the playground of the 1509 Building, the bright yellow rubber duckies in Paul’s office, the sculpture of a frog playing a violin by the Teacher’s Lounge, the bronze goose on top of the porch of the Mother Goose building.

Paul sometimes notes when faculty are a bit dressed up and inquires if we are heading out for a job interview somewhere else. One member of the staff recalls Paul launching into impersonations of Johnny Carson in their office. When a prospective parent worried about the idea of kids going to the bathroom by themselves, Paul noted that if the bathroom is more interesting than the classroom, there is a big problem. At a local grocery store, Paul quipped from behind a young teacher to the checkout person that it seemed like a lot of beer for a high schooler. She was carded hard!

In a recent faculty memo, this took the form of admitting to the complexities of the annual calendar and his own slightly bemused, slightly aggravated chagrin as the locus of countless temporal pressures and yearnings, few of which he controls at all. In his letter to us all in January 2022, he notes, as he discusses his own retirement as head of school, that “as always,” as he often ends a missive, will no longer be applicable. His time as boss and servant, a man of service, will come to an end, as do all good things.

He notes later in the letter his plans for continued engagement, maybe even “keep my golf cart.”

We variously experience this gift in meetings about students, curriculum and our community. These sometimes seem interminable, but their importance is never doubted. Paul reminds us of our goals and purposes, perhaps with a little light ribbing or by acknowledging his own flagging energy. “Use the eraser end of the pencil as well as the point,” a favorite quip, reminds us to be willing to change and evolve how we teach.

Perhaps the most infamous form of Paul’s institutionalized humor is the annual Fudge-Up Hall of Fame, the leading word redacted slightly here for this family publication. Midyear, Paul and a team of crack thespians regale the faculty and board with some of the disasters of the past year. Some were collective, some were individual and some were both. All were, by the time of the performance, funny in hindsight. Actually painful experiences are not included.

Our flawed humanity very much was, and that was part of the point, to laugh at ourselves and the ridiculous circumstances in which we find ourselves. Not everyone was as comfortable with their moment in the spotlight. Some knew it was coming, and some did not. There were usually dozens of incidents and decisions on display, counted down from the least egregious in theory to the most triumphantly disastrous.

From an unfortunate interaction with Hooters to the many stories of escaped creatures, including stinging insects and slithering serpents, these zings ranged widely. I was nominated (thrown under the bus, as the kids say) more than once, and I would have taken first place one year, a dubious but celebrated title, except for the “darn kid” Peter Richards receiving a lifetime achievement award for fudge-ups at the climax of the ceremony. I can’t recall if it was setting fire to the 1509 fire escape, wearing a theoretically inappropriate Chinese Mandarin T-shirt



or losing a student (temporarily!) in Hangzhou, China, during a school trip, but I was robbed, I tell you, robbed.

Paul claims, truthfully I’m sure, that he and Robert

Falk, my own fifth grade teacher, initially created the Fudge-Up Hall of Fame simply as something funny to share with colleagues, but it has endured for many years due to the message of irreverent humanity that runs through it, humor deployed to remind us all of the realities, possibilities and silliness of the work we do.

Everything that happens at Paideia School and in the lives of those of us fortunate to spend our days there is not all fun or funny. Sometimes it is downright agonizing, for we work with other flawed humans, from newborns to elders, all day long every day. Bad things happen to good people, and good people make mistakes. Sure, the goal is to guide the growth of our young and do no harm along the way, but it’s messy, personal work and it can hurt. Some of it will never, ever be funny.

We know this, and Paul reminds us of it by making room for us to have fun and giggle at our own passing errors of judgment. In making fun of mistakes, Paul says, “My default setting, appropriate or not, has always been laughter.”

What is most true about Paul Bianchi and humor is that he believes that school should be fun — not every moment, with periods of working hard and struggling with learning and life issues — but overall, the experience should be enjoyable. He embodies it with his one-liners, tolerance of mistakes and enjoyment of his job. He has made it fun for all of us.

I’m sure Paul will have something funny to say about how many commas I used in this article!

* With valuable humorous input from many in the community, whose names are redacted for their own protection and to be funny.

The Importance of Play and the Development of the Individual

A Collaborative Reflection by Deven Greene and anonymous Half Day and Elementary Forces

“Let’s strengthen the strengths,” Barbara always begins when we have conversations about kids,” says one teacher. “She’s always said that learning begins with engaging and relating. I’m glad to work at a school that values building relationships with students and that lets us craft curriculum around the excitement of shared interests.”

As Paideia’s school psychologist and Half Day coordinator for the past 52 years, Barbara Dunbar has always had listening, learning and the individual child at the forefront of her work. One of her core beliefs is that “play is the foundation for all learning.” It has been a central part of her curriculum and research throughout her time at Paideia and remains an essential part of both Half Day and Elementary classrooms.

“Barbara’s always been a champion of block play, and for many years most of our Elementary classrooms had their own set of blocks (not just the youngest classes.) And, of course, our Elementary playground would not be the same without her finding that iconic fire truck on Lawrenceville Highway and having it towed to the school for kids to play on,” recounts another teacher.

Imaginative play is a precious commodity often devalued or encroached upon when adults get anxious about academic achievement and standardized testing. Rather than a diversion from important learning, childhood

play is the foundation upon which long-term learning is based. As children play out their ideas, they take on the role of others and experience the world from another’s point of view.

This type of thinking underlies reading comprehension and abstract reasoning. When children participate in imaginative play, they are engaged physically, mentally and emotionally. They use language, make and sustain social connections, and try out and elaborate on their own ideas. Rules for learning to play together are paramount. The classroom is a place to learn how to share, hear another person’s ideas, accept differences, sometimes lead and sometimes follow. A basic ground rule of playing together is that when someone asks to join in, the answer is an unequivocal “Yes.”

“I have only seen Barbara herself play a few times, but she encouraged me from a young age to enjoy and explore the world, and she has spoken so well about affinities,



games and having fun. She gets credit for some of my most powerful teaching techniques and blame for some of my shenanigans as well. I wouldn’t be the teacher I am without my longtime work with Barbara,” commends one teacher.

Through her years of teaching, example and guidance, we have felt empowered, as educators and as advocates for our students. We have been changed for the better because of her influence.

“I have been very grateful, as a parent and certainly in my teaching, for Barbara’s wise reminder to not futurize about children,” appreciates one teacher. “It can be easy

to imagine certain behaviors/tendencies persisting even into adulthood, when in reality child development is a long, circuitous journey. Remembering this has been so helpful in focusing on the child before me and meeting them just where they are.”

Thank you, Barbara. Thank you for passing the baton. We hope to make you proud. Enjoy your retirement; you deserve it!

ALUMNI NEWS

- **Bryson Prince '19** will be finishing his degree in Theater at Georgia State University. Recently he has enjoyed being back on campus for an internship with Jesse Evans before he will venture off to the Peace Corps. Way to go, Bryson!
- Emory University 100 Senior Honorary (Class of 2023) has three Paideia alumni awardees. They are **Tommy Davis**, **Ali Beskind** and **Josh Beskind '19**. They were honored in a ceremony on Feb. 8. Congratulations, Pythons!
- **Emily Strasser '06** writes, “My first book, *Half-Life of a Secret: Reckoning With A Hidden History*, is forthcoming from University Press of Kentucky on April 4. It’s a deeply researched memoir tracing the toxic legacies of secrecy of my grandfather’s work building nuclear weapons. I’ll be reading at the Georgia Center for the book in the Decatur Library auditorium at 7 p.m. on April 12.”

1509 Minutes of Giving

Wednesday, May 19, marks 1509 Minutes of Giving, a social media campaign designed to bring in as many gifts to the Alumni Fund as possible in 1,509 minutes (or just over 24 hours.) All gifts to the Alumni Fund support 100% financial aid at Paideia and our goal is 100% alumni participation. Be sure to follow us on Instagram @paideiaalums and watch Why I Give videos from your fellow alums. Shout out to **Todd Harris '97** for designing the logo!



THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL

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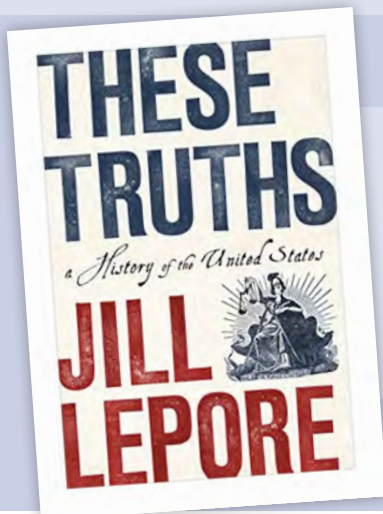
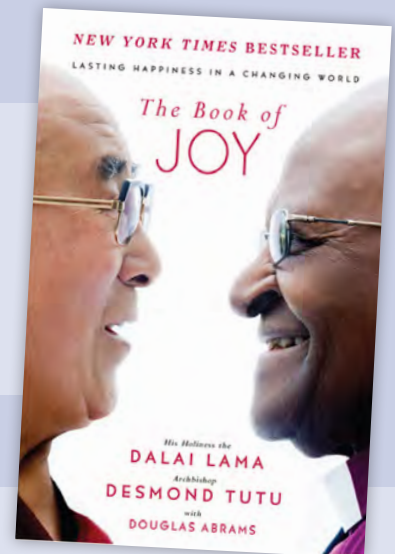
THE PAIDEIA SCHOOL is nonsectarian, serving families with children ages three through 18. Paideia does not discriminate in employment or in admissions. It actively seeks racial, cultural, and economic diversity in its student body. The ancient Greek word *Paideia* conveys the concept of a child's total education: intellectual, artistic, and social. The Paideia School Newsletter is published 10 times a year. The deadline for the newsletter is the 1st of the preceding month. Send all correspondence to Caroline Driebe, Editor, at Paideia School, 1509 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307. Phone number is 404/377-3491, ext. 339; e-mail address is driebe.caroline@paideiaschool.org. For information about sports schedules and upcoming events visit our web site at www.paideiaschool.org

BOOKED ON CAMPUS: Barbara and Paul's Picks

Barbara's book: *The Book of Joy* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Who's reading it? High School, Faculty, Parents and Alumni

About the book: Douglas Abrams joined the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Tutu for a weeklong conversation about the nature of joy, what it is and how to find it. Listen to the audible version so you can enjoy the laughter and friendship of these two spiritual leaders from very different traditions who share the ways we can find happiness in each moment.



Paul's book: *These Truths: A History of the United States* by Jill Lepore

Who's reading it? High School, Faculty, Parents and Alumni

About the book: This is an elegantly written history of the U.S., accessible to anyone in high school and above. It does not get stuck in the weeds of detailed history. I have read it in pieces from time to time.