

"First, to find a spacious house and ground about it fit for an academy, and big enough to lodge a hundred and fifty persons, whereof twenty or thereabout may be attendants, all under the government of one, who shall be thought of desert sufficient, and ability either to do all or wisely to direct and oversee it done."

Milton, OF EDUCATION

COMMONWEALTH SCHOOL  
151 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02116



# At Commonwealth



A very senior, very wise member of the faculty remarked not long ago that the pace of this school year's first quarter was as lively (crowded, hectic) as he could remember; without any basis whatever for comparison, I would say he must be right. Perhaps the appropriate metaphor comes from Hancock: the non-stop, round-the-clock reading of *Ulysses* beginning at 2 o'clock on the first day and concluding at 9 o'clock on the third day, in which more than 100 students and faculty members participated.

New faculty members, myself included, have moved into classes, advising, grading meetings and other responsibilities as though jumping on to a carousel already in motion. (As far as I know, everyone is feeling fine, if dizzy.) Hilmar Jensen, who taught at Commonwealth

in 1982-85, is teaching a course in the history of American protest, while he and Alexander Star, '85, are sharing responsibility for U.S. history. Farhad Riahi, who has experience as both a university professor and chancellor in Iran, is teaching physics and math; Louisa Burnham has come from Westminster School in Connecticut to teach Latin, Renaissance history and art history; Molly Winans, the first recipient of the Chatfield Teaching Fellowship for new teachers, is teaching English.

The closing weeks of this calendar year are especially busy. The fall theatre production — a uniquely Commonwealth version of the Beauty and the Beast tale, directed by Heather Glenn Wixson, '81 — was performed in November, and the winter concert, under David Hodgkins's direction, on December 9. On a very different track, we are moving toward completion of a major project to determine how and where the school might best use computer facilities. Working

with faculty member Bill Wharton, David Gleason '79 has been the guiding force behind the project, enlisting all interested members of the school community as his consultants.

In the midst of the holiday season, many of you may have some time to call your own. We hope that whether you live in the Boston area or are just passing through — you will manage to visit Commonwealth. The school is always eager to see and hear from you.

— Judith Keenan, Head



The longest memories belong to Charles Merrill and Ellen Cole; the corporate memory is enormous. But still I will dip my hand into the store of memories in that spacious house and out comes — Valentine's Day 1971, when we arrived at school to find, suspended on strings thumb-tacked into the ceiling, a hand-

made Valentine for everyone in the school. Long before the days of the burglar alarm, Michael Oshima and his elves had stayed in school all night to make them. Then there was the fire one afternoon in an art-room closet. The fire department came, the sprinkler system went on and on, and Charles walked up and down, his head in his hands, as if his life's work were melting in front of his eyes. We all stayed late that day, and came early the next to wipe walls, mop stairs, spread out sopping wet books, and deal with the aftermath of fire prevention which was far worse than the fire.

Water makes me think of the spring Hancock when it rained all three days, and when, on the afternoon of the third day, we couldn't sing another madrigal, a bunch of us went walking in the downpour (what the hell) and found a little lake we hadn't known existed. There were wonderful faculty plays at Hancock, often *The Fatal Gazogene* with the headmaster playing the landlord "Here now, who's been eating moy ceiling?" and one which Tomás found about a man who wanted a wife and prayed to Venus and Venus transformed his cat into a beautiful woman. Chris Carlson was the man and Ellen Kaplan the transformed cat. I was Venus standing on the railing of the upper barn in a sheet and Ellen's Harpo Marx wig, and Rod Ditzler was the mouse who caused the woman to revert to type.

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*Chatfield, continued*

My first office had no telephone — Ellen Cole got a lot of exercise in those days — and I taught Latin to quite a number of people in there, including our daughter Barbara. She was brave enough to take not only Latin from her mother but English from her stepfather. She always called me Mom, and her closest friends — Carolyn and Elaine and Angela and Karen — took to calling me Mrs. Mom. Charlie put his foot down at being called Mr. Mom.

Remember the 7:45 grammar classes and the years when sports happened right after lunch and sixth period began at 3 PM? The soccer players would arrive all muddy and bloody and disinclined to learn; and in 1973 Ellen Kaplan and I gave a class in the History and Literature of England up to Elizabeth which met in 2C every day at 3:45. One waning winter afternoon, sitting in the back of the room, I didn't know I had drifted off until I heard her voice say "Isn't that right, Mrs. Chatfield?" There was the class of 1978, the rowdiest group I'd ever encountered, whose aim in Ancient History class was to see who could tip over a chair with someone in it before I noticed what was going on, and whose aim outside of class was to see if they could shake André Jones hard enough to make his contact lenses fall out.

There was the winter of the Commonwealth hockey team, comprised in large measure of little brothers and faculty children, but masterminded by B. Parsons and Chris Cerf. We practised (I say we because having two sons on the team I drove a lot) at 6 AM in the MDC rink

near Watertown, and actually played a game against St. Sebastian's. There were the years of graduations in the gym with grandmothers in the kitchen and younger brothers and sisters on the stairs. Always music, although I also remember when Charles Merrill said he never wanted to hear "Riu Riu Chiu" again. There were memorable senior chapels, such as the one when Sheila Kennedy was the director of admissions to the University of Hades, assisted by other directors named Beelzebub, Baal, and Mephistopheles, or the one in which all the seniors blew into bottles to play "The Spacious Firmament".

And students — I remember Kit Kennedy coming to me in tears because I'd written in a comment that her prose was limpid and she thought I meant limp. Or Chris Brown — now in the ministry — playing jazz more repetitive than the "Bolero" on the piano that used to be under the stairs. Those were the days when one struggled to stay in contact with the young so we all grinned fixedly and bore it. And finally, I remember a three-years-of-Latin-in-one-year class (of the four seniors who made up the class two have become linguists and two artists) to which one afternoon Nina Tovish ran up from physics shouting "Everything fits!"

— Mary P. Chatfield

*Excerpt from a Graduation Address*

**T**he main event for me this past spring was a trip from Budapest to Prague to Warsaw. If you haven't known the reality of Freedom, it has an intensity that we Americans cannot comprehend. There was excitement,

particularly in Prague, at being able to hear and speak the truth. A tiny non-fact — that it was American soldiers who liberated Plzen in 1945 — which everyone had known and no one could state, becomes a symbol of smashed taboos to plaster on billboards.

Yet May is a hypocritical month: the flowers and sunshine and girls in pretty dresses can fool you into thinking that things are okay, which of course they aren't. In Eastern Europe, if your slow-moving, high-cost factory is sold to foreigners who make things profitable by firing half the staff, what happens to your job? What is to become of the woman seated on the steps of a church in Warsaw holding a sign in Polish and English: "I have AIDS. My children were taken from me. I was forced out of my family and my job. What can I do? Help me."

What to do? One plugs in where one is useful. In Olomone, 80 miles east of Prague, I met the rector of Palacky University who stated that Czechoslovakia could never compete in a world market until its young people knew English well and also knew Western methods of administration. In Krakow I visited a number of tiny private schools who were trying to set up a democratic, humane alternative to the heavy handed rote learning of the state system.

So, my summer has been spent raising money — a lot of it from you — from my desk at Hancock to fund scholarships for Palacky students to attend American colleges, and to help these five little schools in Krakow survive during a period of brutal inflation. The first two students from Olomone are enrolled in language and computer math at Moravian, a college in Bethlehem, PA. Six other places are interested for 1991.

Back at Commonwealth: last week I went to the first trustees meeting run by our new boss, Judith Keenan, and like the others who have come to know her was impressed by her judgment, clarity, forcefulness, and values. We lucked out.

— Charles Merrill

**L**ean downstream!!" I scream. I can barely hear myself over the thundering water.

We manage to keep the boat from going over. We are now pinned sideways against the rock, the current hammering the upstream side of the canoe and water pouring in over the gunnel.

I see another instructor downstream from us in a rescue boat. He begins to paddle toward us nonchalantly, stopping about 15 feet away. He slowly surveys the situation, looking somewhat amused by our predicament.

"Something wrong?" his sarcastic expression seems to say.

"We're stuck!" I yell. "What do we do?"

He looks at our canoe again. He looks at the rock again. Finally, he begins to shout something. I can't hear anything over the water. Eventually, he begins miming instructions with his hands and paddle and shouting them at the same time. Suddenly, I realize what he is saying:

"Stand up and push off the rock with your left foot!"

"No way! I'm not going to do that!" I scream.

"Stand up and push off with your left foot!"

I look at my partner. Our boat is filling up with water. There's nothing else to do. I stand up and start pushing. It moves a little, but it's getting heavier. Now the water is pouring in faster. My partner and I both realize that our boat is swamped.

"We're swamped!" I yell to the instructor.

He rubs his beard and ponders this new bit of information for a while.

"Guess we're gonna have to rescue you," he finally says with a smirk.

— Jonathan Rotenberg '80  
From an "Outward Bound" Journal

# WINTER-SPRING 1991 Calendar

**January 5** - Boston Alumni Reception, Commonwealth School, 6:30

**February 16** - New York Alumni Reception, Doral Court Hotel, 3:00 - 7:00

**March 4 - April 1** - Project Month

**March 11 - 15** - Project Week

**April 21** - Spring Concert

**May 3 - 4** - Spring Play

*Jonathan Rotenberg is Chairman and retired President of the Boston Computer Society (BCS), which he founded in the Commonwealth School library in February 1977. BCS is the world's largest personal computer user organization, with nearly 30,000 members in all 50 states and in 57 countries. Jonathan is now working on an M.B.A. at Harvard Business School.*