

The Chair in the Corner

Mary P. Chatfield

At the end of this past April, Charlie and I went on a "grandchild trip." A whole winter without seeing a grandchild made us long for the wonderful verbal exploration of the almost-three-year-old, the determined motion of the one-year-old, and the musical jabber of the seven-month-old. We found them all practicing as hard as they can at being just a bit older, more deft, more communicative than they actually are. They don't know they're taking risks (especially the one-year-old climber)—they simply go about living, in ways which give them immense satisfaction.

In talking with Eric Davis this spring as he worked on some crucial sections of Commonwealth's Accreditation Report for the NEASC, I came to sense more strongly than ever—Eric's words are always great clarifiers and uplifters—how Commonwealth School defines itself around risk-taking. The school, from the beginning, constituted a risk. Charles Merrill writes in *The Walled Garden* that people thought him very foolish to start a city school. The parking, the land for playing fields, the people with smart children were all in the suburbs. What was the point of a city school? We have been answering that question successfully for thirty-seven years.

Then there's the ethos of how one teaches at Commonwealth. If you teach for the questions and not the answers, class discussion becomes for both teacher and student a risky business. Will the class

veer off in an unlooked-for direction? What will happen to the plan for that class or the usual way of teaching that text? Maybe you can't depend upon that plan or that usual way. One special part of a Commonwealth education for all participants comes in learning to take disciplined risks.

The fun of taking risks, once one dares to take them, is heady. The formerly tentative questioner learns to challenge everything. But then what? When you've thrown all the toys out of the toybox, and maybe broken a few in the process, you still have to contend with the mess. Even the almost-three-year-old must pick up his books and toys, learn to share with his little brother, and discover what it means to be part of something larger than himself. Herein lies the other special part of life at Commonwealth. All the time one is learning to challenge, to imagine, to dare, one is also learning to construct—to become a crafter of words, a meticulous mathematician, a disciplined fencer, a painstaking photographer. If the old shape will no longer do, we owe the world not just demolition, but a new shape, created in generosity and firmness of purpose.

I spend a fair amount of time at Commonwealth these days, not all of it on development or the building or salaries. A half hour with a patient student interviewer, a lunch conversation with the captain of one of the street hockey teams, the chance to attend an assembly, all give me a glimpse into the heart of the place—and I find it as inventive, as wacky, and as warm as ever.

Development Report

Ellen Elias-Bursac

Over the last three years, former students, current and past parents, and members of the Board of Trustees have pooled their resources and directed their energies toward securing reliable annual funding for Commonwealth. Our goal in Development for 1994-95 was twofold:

- a) to raise \$170,000 for financial aid and \$50,000 for special projects (library, science equipment, and the summer tutoring program), and
- b) to make contact with a much larger number of former students and other members of the Commonwealth community.

Fundraising efforts included eight telethons and a special phone campaign spearheaded by Larry Geffin. By the end of the fiscal year, we had exceeded our goal of \$220,000. The contributions for 1994-95 mark an increase of 48% over funds raised in 1991-92.

This year saw parties hosted and attended by former students now living in several cities far from Boston. A Chicago party at Michael Pucker's ('79) house, a gathering at a restaurant in Madison, WI, and an evening at the home of Joel Michaels ('68) in Washington, D.C. were firsts for Commonwealth. A party at Chris Havens's ('71) apartment marked the fifth year Commonwealth has held a reunion in New York. At each of these events, after dinner, Judith Keenan

talked with alums about her vision for Commonwealth, the School's programs (Joel Michaels's son expressed keen interest in ultimate frisbee), and its plans for the future. Mrs. Keenan calculates that after five years as Head, and through these dinners and the annual alumni/ae buffet at the School, she has met nearly one third of all the students who have passed through Commonwealth.

Now entering its fourth year, the Parents' Association holds receptions

after school performances and organizes telethons to raise money in the parent community. The wonderful lunch arranged for the faculty during the June grading meetings—although probably less of a surprise in its second year—was a treat.

The time our current parents give to the School makes it a more welcoming, more accessible place. In addition, many past parents continue to show what an important role Commonwealth has played in their families by supporting the School for years after their children receive their diplomas.

We have been working these last few years to strengthen personal ties between Commonwealth and all of you. We thank you for your ongoing concern, interest, and commitment which strengthen the School.



Jackie's Dancers, l. to r.: Ilya Zaremsky '98, Jeremy Taub '96, Anna Jacobs '97, Emily Paradis '97, Naima Bigby '98, Gigi Abdul-Rahim '98, Dania Chambers '98, Jessica Katz '95, Jessica Penney '95, Jaime Cheah '95, Kristian Kime '95.