



# GARDEN SCHOOL NEWSLETTER



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## *Thoughts for the week*

*By Richard Marotta, Ph.D., Headmaster*



A few nights ago I attended the Guild dinner for Heads of independent schools in New York City. The dinner was held at the Century Club, which was founded in the 1800's to support art and artists. Throughout this rather lovely building, there were numerous paintings and texts, representing different periods and different styles of art. It was a fairly typical heads business meeting located within the walls of this rather remarkable building.

After a while, our conversation turned to our students and graduates and then to those of our alumni who had become writers. Each of us was able to point to certain graduates who had written books on subjects ranging from medicine, to history and fiction. I left the meeting thinking about how many of our own Garden graduates had successfully developed careers as writers.

As I looked around my office, I began to pick out the volumes on my bookshelf that in some mysterious and miraculous way had their origins at Garden School. Perhaps it was a classroom experience, a reading experience or a discussion with a teacher; somehow, our graduates felt the need to pursue some of these early ideas later in life and become writers.

In a work entitled, *The Wisdom of Life Through My Patients*, Thomas Waldinger, Garden '72, explored the lessons he had learned from some of his older patients, who had lived through some very tumultuous historical events and yet had lived long and fulfilled lives. Dr. Waldinger drew on these experiences and then through his own commentaries reflected on the lessons to be learned about how to live a life that is thoughtful, reflective and filled with wisdom.

Laura Hapke, Ph.D., Garden '63, looked at history and lives from both a fictional perspective as well as a cultural-historical one. In two of her books, *Labor's Text: The Worker in American Fiction* and *Daughters of the Great Depression*, Dr. Hapke examines the representation of historical struggle within the context of literature. She examines the presentation of labor, economic struggle and the struggle for human rights and dignity within the last two centuries of American fiction. Her findings and analysis offer a remarkable insight into how fiction and history begin to exchange identities.

Some of our other former students who taken an expository as well as fictional look at other moments in history. Phyllis Newbeck, '79, who was a lifer at Garden, wrote a most interesting study of interracial marriage in America; her book, *Virginia Hasn't Always Been for Lovers*, examines the legal and social history of interracial marriage bans in the US, and in particular, the case of Richard and Mildred Loving of Virginia. With her background as an attorney, Ms Newbeck probes into the details of the Loving case that led to the Supreme Court decision in 1967, declaring bans against interracial marriage to be unconstitutional.

Taking a fictional approach to history is another one of our former students, Lois Shapley Bassen, who, in *Summer of the Long Knives*, creates a fictional account of the assassination of Adolf Hitler in 1934. Ms Bassen's novel creates a vivid picture of the turmoil taking place in Germany in the 1930's and the impact of that volatility on the lives of her characters. Her account of the events leading to this fictional assassination of Hitler in 1934 presents a world in which foresight and hindsight converge into a dramatic and powerful resolution.



Our most recently published alumni writer is Matt Burgess, Garden '00, whose first book, *Dogfight*, received wonderful reviews from the New York Times Book Review, and which has just been followed by *Uncle Janice*, both published by Doubleday. Mr. Burgess has created a fictional world within the Jackson Heights community, in which his character struggles to survive within a vividly constructed underworld. His writing, in the words of the famous Irish writer Roddy Doyle, creates a 'brilliantly realized character! "

All of these writers studied literature at Garden School and have transformed their love of literature and writing into a continuation of that love. Congratulations to all of them!



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