

THE OTHER SIDE

February 2010

Remembering Madame McGhee

Madame McGhee was the strongest person many of us will ever meet. First diagnosed with cancer in 1989, she fought her way through six relapses before she died on February 16, 2010. An incredible woman and an unstoppable force

of laughter, it is only fitting that she died on Mardi Gras. Madame was someone who cherished life, every vivid moment of it. She enjoyed the rain and the sun and the smell of the spring through the windows. In her French classes, she would touch the ceiling as she cried "POP quiz!" and would impart upon us beautiful but rather confusing sentiments, my favorites being "sleep on both ears," and "we have other cats to spank." She arrived each day to school, beaming and outfitted in an assorted array of colors and shapes, always a bright and

consuming presence in the halls and classrooms of Green Vale. She was never without a kind word, never without a lifting smile, and she had the incredible power to make you feel special and loved as you spoke to her, even if just in passing.

As the cancer worsened, Madame's body grew weaker but her spirit stronger. She would tell stories to her classes of sitting in radiation, pushing through the pain and thinking of the faces of her students, the warm, good medicine that got her

through the most difficult of times. When our eyes would fall and betray concern, she would stubbornly refuse to continue the lesson until we smiled. In life, Madame never let us focus on the negative. Instead, she helped us to appreciate the good, the fact that she



was there, in school, not succumbing to the pain but pushing beyond it. In death, I am certain she would wish us to do the same. To laugh as we remember her flying Aflac Duck and popping pop-quizzes, feel warm and safe as we always did when we were in her small, stuffy classroom, just children with this bubbly, incredible presence before us.

The last encounter I had with Madame McGhee was after I published the first article about her, the piece about the drug trial that was working so well. I went up to her room and asked her how she had liked the article. With a little smile, she nodded, but said, "It was more for you than me." I was hurt at first. In fact, it was not until

I knew of her death that I realized her words had not been a slight towards me, but an acknowledgement that she had not needed the article to feel proud of herself. She knew of her strength, and her sense of self and pride was not wrapped up in the praise of others. She was independent, through all of her hardship. We corresponded over email for that last interview. And a paragraph she wrote to me near the end seems like a perfect summary of her approach to life. Optimistic and steady, whimsical, beautiful, meaningful,

and just the slightest bit bemusing, Madame seems never more present than in her own, real words. When I asked her how she managed to live and be so strong with the cancer always just behind her, she responded: "Before to start a day, I first meditate and think of God who did allow this to happen. I refuse to put the feet down on negative thoughts. It is a hard step because I know that when I am up, all the pain will emerge from my body and that I have no choice. I have to listen to my body and give it rest and the appropriate nutrition. Knowing that being pioneer in this I am able to help others gives me a refill of energy. My son, my students, my support friends are such great vitamins. When you really reflect on life and its gift you wonder every second of its beauty. Nature carries so much positive energy, so many essences of life. As Peguy (French writer) quoted: "L'Espérance est une petite fille de rien du tout, elle seule, portant les autres qui traversera les mondes révolus." Yes we can overcome changes in life, if we can keep the sparkle in our eyes like a child. At the crossing of a path it is up to you to choose the way: either you will be strong or weak. It is only a choice apart. Stick with your choice! And when you readjust yourself with who you still are, go for it, life is still beautiful. "Si la vie te paraît méchante, l'écho te répond: chante!"

Madame fought death many times, but in a way I think it was more for us than her. We are the ones who grieve her passing, but I am sure she is not sad. Madame was a woman who enjoyed every moment of life, every moment of simply being, bad or good. And I think she would have entered death with the optimism and light she carried with her each day she breathed. Death is the natural succession to life, and for someone who cherished the living world so much, I am certain that she met Death excitedly, ready to experience a part of being that she had never encountered before.

I bet she charmed him, with her insurmountable optimism and perhaps a mixed up English phrase. I bet she told him of her vitamins, of all the people she loved and knew loved her. I bet she told him of days spent in a little classroom at Green Vale, a pillar in the lives of years of students who passed through that brick-walled room. And I know that she did not fear death. When the time came, I am certain she embraced it, ready for this next step in the incredible human journey. Davis L.

Sweet Song - By Philip D.

In memory of Madame McGhee

Ah, how doth the robin sing
And call from brother to brother
For an angel sublime, when death does chime,
Whisks gold from this world to another.

Dare not harm a mockingbird
Which had not crime or wrong
For what of woe does such bird show?
None—it gives to us its song.

Hearst not thou the jaybird's call?
'Tis nothing but true joy
Simply live to give and forgive
And laugh at death's cruel ploy.

Hop along, oh dear, dear quail
From thy form miracula reveal!
Thou art here small, but fathoms tall
In Heaven's Commonweal!

No cross of Styx shalt thou see
No agony, no sorrowed cry
For angel's wine—O nectar, thine!
Forbids thy memory to die!



DAVIS' BOOK NOOK:

The Uprising

by Margaret Haddi

It is the peak of immigration in New York City, at the dawn of the twentieth century. Shouts in dozens of languages whoop through the air and smells from every dish imaginable waft through the streets of the Lower East Side. Tenements, rickety but home, climb the sky, fire escapes snaking down. The streets are crowded with pushcarts and calls. Thus is the setting for *The Uprising*, by Margaret Peterson Haddix. Bella is a young immigrant girl, fresh from Italy and weighted with the daunting task of providing for her family overseas. She is lucky to find a job, though the hours spent hunched over a sewing machine in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory are not quite what she expected.

Yetta has worked at Triangle for months. She lives with her equally rebellious elder sister, and, like Bella, sends most of her earnings home to her family in Russia. She is lively with life and pulsing with her want to change the world, to mean something, to matter. She wants women's rights and safer conditions at work, shorter hours and higher wages. She is determined and fiery, willing to stand for months in the blistering heat and shivering cold, holding a picket sign and striking for union recognition in factories. Yetta is spirited and intense, gladly giving every bit of herself to her cause.

Jane, lastly, is a society girl with an intellectual spark. She is curious and compassionate, spending time with strikers and at rallies for no gain of her own, and finds herself swept up into this passionate world of striking and working and wanting and hoping. There is more to feel, she finds, outside of her ignorant, sheltered life. And these ardent factory girls, so desperate for their cause, accept her and love her—she finds a place with them that she cannot find at home.

The Uprising is the story of these three girls. It is inspiring and adrenalizing (if that was not previously a word, I now deem it one), making me want to jump

up and devote myself to a cause with all of my everything. On the other hand, the book does such a good job of enticing the readers into the world it creates, that it runs the risk of romanticizing poverty to some extent.

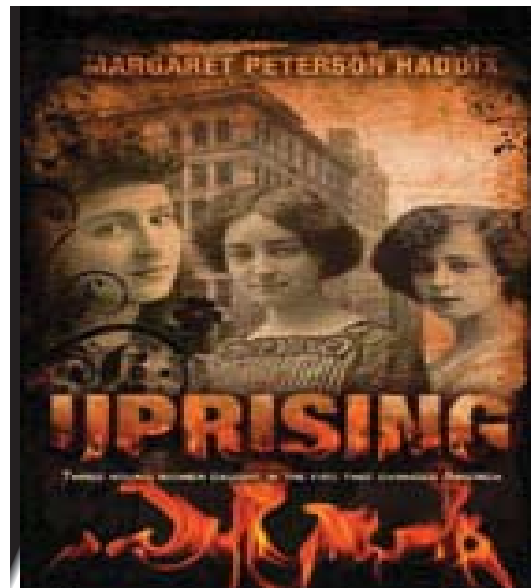
However, all in all, I love the way the book was crafted. The fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory looms ahead for the entire novel. Right from the first chapter, we learn that two of the three best friends will die in the fire, though we do not know which ones they will be. This sets up an interesting dynamic--as I would read and get to know each character better, I would start to root for her to survive, before realizing, dismayed, that the other two would have to perish. It gave the book momentum and a reason for me to keep reading at the few moments the plot lagged.

Furthermore, the author was very skilled at weaving fiction and fact together, creating a story that

haunts and perplexes, makes you think about the world and what you can do to change it, but also makes you care deeply for the three main characters. She succeeded in bringing life to a tragedy that occurred almost a hundred years ago. In making us care not only for the girls who died, but for the factory owners and the workers who survived as well. In painting a horrifying picture of flame and sky and the impossible choice—to jump or to burn?

In making readers understand that if we want change we have to fight for it, as the shirtwaist

girls did in their months-long strike. The author wrote the story to make us understand what it was like to be a factory girl in 1911, with holes in her boots and tears in her dress and the incredible desire to change the world. The author wrote the story to give insight into life a century ago, to teach us to fight and question, and to warn us of the modern-day tragedies, today's equivalents of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, that are waiting to happen unless we decide to fight for change.



Words from Mr. Watters for Madame McGhee February 19, 2010

Good evening.

I'm Stephen Watters, Headmaster of The Green Vale School, where Monique taught for the last seven years. On behalf of the students, faculty, and staff I would like to share a few thoughts with you.

A week ago Tuesday I called Monique at home. She said her body hurt. She began to cry. After a bit she apologized, saying she was just bored, at home by herself. Then her voice became stronger and she exclaimed, "Voila, I have tears! Last week I was dehydrated and now my eyes are wet. It feels wonderfully happy sad." Now if that isn't Madame McGhee, feeling blessed because she could cry.

I sat by her bed this past Monday, stroking her arm, searching for the words I wanted to leave with her. My eyes moved around the room.

- Over her bed a picture of what appeared to be an infant, floating, growing, awakening, imagining.
- On a table were pictures of her beloved husband and adored son.
- On the wall an autographed picture of the mime, Marcel Marceau, reminding me that Monique studied mime and communicated so much of the human condition without using words. I laughed to myself; sometimes her words, her syntax just didn't make a lot of sense, but she was still understandable and clear in her own way.
- In the corner, an easel, another outlet for her creative expression.

I continued stroking her arm as she rested peacefully and thought that Monique was one of those teachers whose lessons truly transcended the classroom. Since Tuesday, the Green Vale campus has been filled with stories and anecdotes. This little French teacher from Belgium had been creating a textbook for living by her daily encounters. Let me share a few.

So here's Monique, last spring, undergoing chemo, in so much pain that she can't march in graduation. By the middle of summer, she is on a plane to France and on a new drug regimen. At the opening faculty meeting in September Monique appears on campus looking radiant, her stylish clothes flowing around her and says with such strength, "Here I am. It's a miracle; I'm a miracle. Success. My success will help other women." When this

Phoenix rose as she did many times, there were no ashes around her, no ashes but hot coals, glowing embers, energy and life burning brightly. A couple of days later, before the opening day of school, she sent a poem to everybody with the message, "Wishing us all the best for tomorrow. Here is a Sanskrit proverb as a sign of support."

Look to this day,
For it is life,
The very Life of life.
In its brief course lie all
The realities and the verities of existence.
Look to this day,
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision.
But today, well-lived,
Makes every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.



Monique loved her students and so relished the joy and possibility of her classroom. Through song, art and acting, as well as more traditional methods, she pushed her students to open their eyes to the world around them, to understand that there were French speakers all around the globe, and she motivated them to want to communicate.

According to her students every-day she would write the date on the board and then spend a few minutes drawing around the date, creating a mini masterpiece. It might take her a few minutes of class time, but her students never interrupted her for all the obvious reasons. The same way they learned to compliment Madame McGhee on her clothing. Little distractions added to the daily flow. Why not? The classroom was to be a beautiful experience.

Some of her students told the vitamin story, Occasionally Monique would point to a student and say "You are my Vitamin A," and then to another, "You are my Vitamin B." One time she went on to point to an overly active boy, "And you are my cholesterol!" And as she was wont to do, she just laughed at the idea and with the class.

A teacher wrote to me, "People would ask her how she finds the energy to fight her cancer and to work. One day when we were chatting she said she would answer them with ... 'You don't understand that it is the children who give me my breath, my life!' Monique would step in our classroom whenever she had a few minutes free and smile at the children, look at them with those beautiful blue eyes and her magnetic smile, take a deep breath and say that now she had her 'penicillin' and now was ready to go back to work."

It certainly was the children who sustained her. It was the reason why she also loved Grandparents' Day so much because she could identify with a grandparent's unconditional love for a grandchild. That's how she felt about her students. Occasionally during class Monique would make or receive a cell phone call from John-Martin. She'd hold up the cell phone and request of her students to say, "Bonjour, John-Martin."

As much as she loved Green Vale children, there was no deeper love than what she held for her son. As any proud and worried parent, she'd fill us in on his school life, later his job searches, and always his successes. Monique's positive attitude about life, even with its constant and to others, overwhelming challenges, demonstrated such strength and hope - especially for her son, John-Martin.

In the spring of 2006 Monique wrote, "Hi, my Green Vale School family, 'You cannot change the direction of the wind. You can only adjust the sails.'" And that she did. In fact, two of her students organized a regatta recently called "Reach for the Cure" in support of Madame McGhee's battle, and they used this quote as the regatta's theme. They raised \$10,000, another lesson taught and deeply learned.

It's time to mention a defining word - courage.

One teacher said, "Monique is the bravest person I have ever met and believe that I ever will meet. She was the "Grande Dame" of Green Vale - exquisite, worldly, romantic, as well as the gatekeeper of what life is really about - living it, being provocative, funny and real. She fought so hard to keep alive, to be alive, to live fully, joyfully, with hope, and with appreciation.

When she lost strength in her right arm, she learned to write with the other hand. When she was late to school, her students would fool around a bit, posting a guard to keep an eye out for her arrival. When she was spotted approaching the classroom, the students would yell "Code Blue" and they'd scramble back to their seats looking attentive when she arrived, enjoying this game. What they didn't realize was that in these last several months, the process of getting dressed and fighting the nausea was exhausting, but Monique fought to get to school, to get her "vitamins, her penicillin, her breath." Such courage.

A colleague wrote, "I learned from Monique how to accept help with dignified grace. She always seemed to exude an inner peace despite what her body was going through. She saw something positive in almost everything. She thought it would help with her health. Instead, it helped those around her."

Back to her bedside last Monday. I continued to stroke her arm, touch her skin. Her eyes suddenly opened, those bluest of wise and kind eyes. The words came. I said, "We love you, Monique. We thank you for your teaching. We thank you for your lessons. We thank you for your life. Merci."

It snowed all day Tuesday. White tearflakes covered everything, acknowledging the loss and celebrating the life of this enchanted one. She improved the lives of all she touched, no higher compliment, no greater legacy.

Madame McGhee: A Life Remembered

Madame McGhee was a lively, happy, creative soul and we will always remember those three traits she possessed. You may recall her bright color palette in her style, or her artistic talent in her artwork displayed around her classroom. If you saw her in the hallway and she smiled at you, or you were one of her loved French students, you will always remember Madame McGhee and her happy ways. As students at Green Vale are deeply touched by her passing, it is very much like Madame McGhee to insist that we should celebrate what she did have - a long, fruitful, happy life filled to the brim with humor, adventure, and fulfillment. -Stephanie D.

Making Changes One Step at a Time

Three years ago, my god-sister, Avery started a program when she was 13 years old called Step By Step For Shoes in California (stepbystepforshoes.com). Her father founded a bike touring company many years ago and in result, Avery has traveled around the world. One of the places she went to was Peru. While on her trip she realized that many of the children in Peru did not have proper shoes and sometimes they just walked around barefooted all day long. She took this into consideration and thought of ways she could help those unfortunate children and she came up with the wonderful idea of Step By Step. This organization collects gently used and new shoes from people in the California area who are willing to donate and ships them to Peru, Ecuador, South Africa and Costa Rica. Recently she was awarded for her astounding work and commitment by Robert Redford, also very dedicated to charities and activism. On behalf of all of her hard work and dedication, I would also like to collect shoes for Step By Step here at Green Vale. I hope to be able to set up donation boxes around the Green Vale campus. I would then make sure these shoes were sent to Avery's organization. So far Step By Step has donated hundreds of shoes to these greatly impoverished countries around the globe, helping the world one step at a time. -Claire M.

Bentel's Bakery: Meal of the Day: Breakfast

Did you know that French toast was actually invented by French peasants? It turns out that the peasants wanted to find a way to turn their stale bread into something edible because they didn't have money to buy fresh bread. So, they dipped their stale bread in to a scrumptious egg mixture and fried it in a skillet. But, who's to say you have to use stale bread? You could use fresh bread – it'll be even tastier!

Crispy French Toast

6 bread slices

1/2 cup milk

2 eggs, beaten

1/4 teaspoon sugar

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

1 tablespoon oil

First, beat the eggs. Then, add milk, sugar, and cinnamon and mix them all together. Use a fork or prong to dip each bread slice into the mixture one at a time. The key here is to dip it in the mixture long enough to soak well, but not too long so you avoid it breaking apart (It won't taste good – believe me, I've tried).

Next, cook the bread on a hot griddle or skillet over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes on each side. If you want to make the toast crispier, read further, if not, enjoy! Use a potato masher or a whisk to gently press down so your French toast is crispy and golden in the center without burning the crust.

This recipe serves 3 people (but you don't have to share).

Garnishes that might make your masterpiece even better: maple syrup, powdered sugar, vanilla, or honey.

Antonia B



Eleven Fun Facts about Gymnastics

- 1) Girls have four events (Bars, Beam, Floor Exercise, and Vault).
- 2) A lot of Vault names come from people's last names like Yurchenko, Tsukahara, and Rudi.
- 3) The first person ever to get 10.0 in the Olympics was Nadia Comaneci (with a broken arm) on beam in 1976.
- 4) Most Olympians started gymnastics when they were two.
- 5) An A is the easiest rating for a trick and E is the hardest.
- 6) There are 11 Levels 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10, and Elite.
- 7) Ancient Romans used gymnastics as a functional sport; for example, warriors used the wooden horse to practice mounting and dismounting.
- 8) Men are the most successful in their late teens and early twenties.
- 9) Female gymnasts are generally between the ages of 14 and 18
- 10) Only women gymnasts perform routines to music.
- 11) Boys have 6 events Floor, Rings, Bars, Pommel Horse, High Bar, and Parallel Bars.

By Julia A

Name the Faculty Member: which current Upper School teacher started life as this adorbal child? Answer next month!!

