

Becoming

The Harley School.
Celebrating 91 years of commitment to our motto, "Become what thou art."

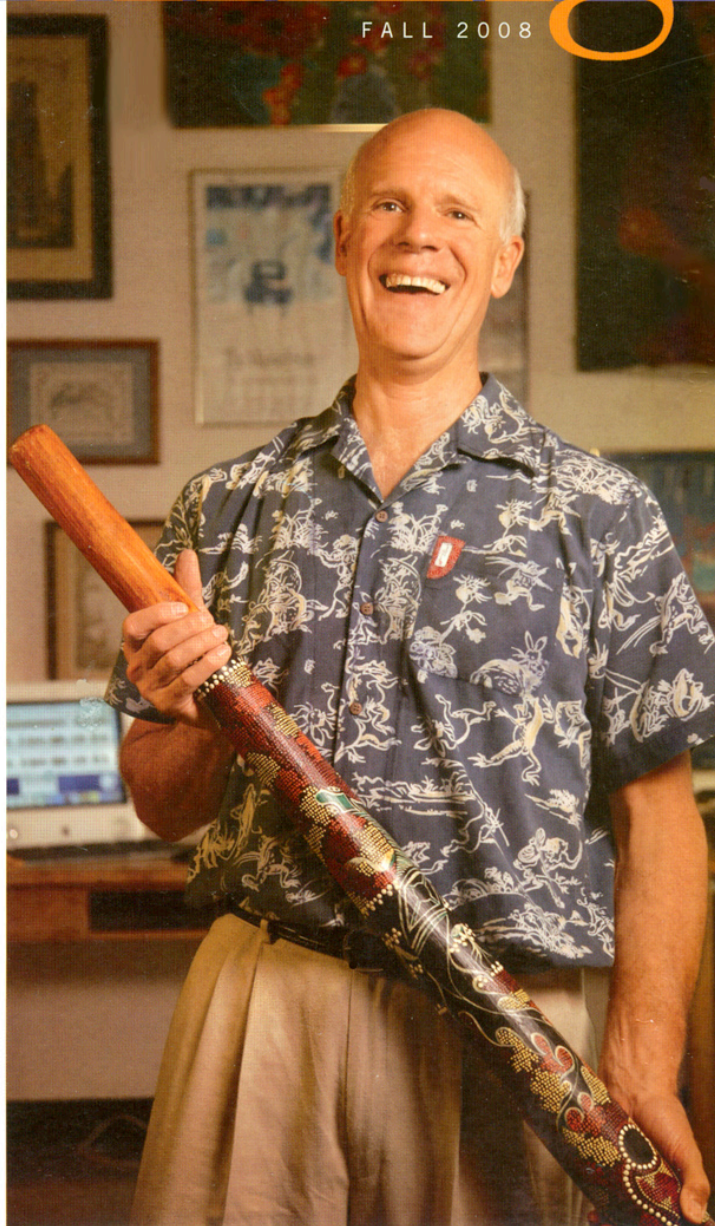
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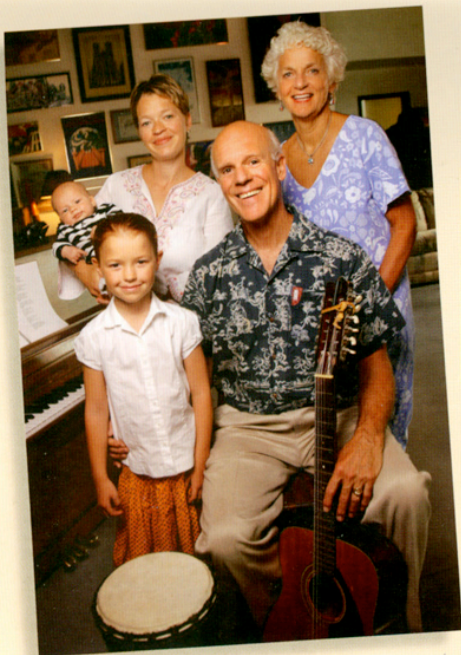
THE PIED PIPER *of* HARLEY

Where JAY
STETZER leads,
children follow.

No, he's not a rat catcher. And he's more apt to tell a folk tale than to be in one. But Lower School Performing Arts Teacher Jay Stetzer is something of a kid magnet. Through music, storytelling, dance, and his own infectious love of play, he leads Harley's youngest students down magical paths of learning.

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*Pictured here are Jay's wife and former Harley faculty member, **Maura Allen**, daughter and current Harley Middle School teacher, **Kirsten Reader '90**, and Kirsten's children **Zoe Reader '20** and **Liam Reader**.*

Jay has been at Harley for 38 years, but teaching little kids wasn't at all in his original plan. "If someone had told me when I was 15 that I was going to grow up and work in Utopia with young children, I would have laughed them out of the room," he says. Now he couldn't imagine doing anything else. "Every day I'm invited to create in this big room with all this stuff to play with. It's like I've died and gone to heaven."

Most people know Jay as a storyteller, and of course, when you sit down and talk with him, he tells wonderful tales, like the one about how he discovered his first love, music. Born in Pittsburgh into a family of 10 children, he would often watch his older brother Dale practice his piano. "I was in first grade, he was in third," Jay says. "I would sit atop the piano and look down like the Cheshire cat and watch him. Then he'd leave and I'd slip down into his seat and play what he had just done. I found I could do it pretty well."

So did Dale, who hated piano lessons and offered Jay a nickel to practice in his stead (at age seven, it was his first paying gig). The theory in this bait-and-switch was that their mother, who was upstairs, would think Dale was practicing his heart out. So Dale would go off to play softball, and the imposter, Jay, would practice for hours. "Of course, I fell in love with it,"

he says. "I couldn't practice enough. But don't think for a minute my mom didn't know what was going on!"

Completely self-taught, as a teenager Jay was good enough to join the musician's union and perform in public. "I played jazz and standards, and made more money in three hours than my friends pumping gas made in a week." Then at 16, he fell off a horse and broke his arm. "The horse and I both lived and that was the good news," he says. "But I couldn't play piano for six weeks and I was miserable." The accident made him realize how important music was to him, so he decided to study formally with a piano teacher—which brings us to another story.

Having found him in the Yellow Pages, Jay went to audition for a maestro named Joseph Esposito, Jr., "a wizened old Italian man, very kind, very gentle." He was ushered into a beautiful living room with two Steinway grand pianos—one shiny black and exquisite, the other old and beat up. The maestro asked him to play, so naturally Jay went right to the shiny black piano. "Oh no," the maestro said, "you must play at the student piano." So Jay went to the beat-up piano and played *Stella by Starlight*, *Manhattan Serenade* and a piece he had written called *Junebug*.

With his young man's overconfidence, Jay assumed he had nailed

the audition. He turned to the maestro and said, none too humbly, "How's that?" Jay says, "The maestro just laughed and laughed. Then he went to the shiny black piano, and as soon as his hands hit the keys, there was a blur of activity—he was all over that keyboard." When the maestro stopped, he turned to Jay and said "Now, how's THAT?" Despite his reservations, the maestro agreed to take Jay on as a student. "He was classically trained and I was self-taught. It was East meets West, but within two years, I became a classical pianist practically overnight."

Story number three—the one where Jay comes to Rochester and stumbles onto Harley. No longer a piano player, but a pianist, Jay is accepted into the Eastman School of Music at the tender age of 18. There, he earns his undergraduate and master's degrees in music theory—analyzing Beatles songs by mainframe computer. He was just about to finish his doctorate when fate intervened. His sailing buddy, then Lower School head **Don Backe**, asked Jay to fill in for music teacher **Adele Gundlach** while she was on leave. Jay says, "I was getting a Ph.D. I was going to be a college professor. I would not bend my nose one inch to come down to the level of little children!"

Next thing he knew, Jay was doing more than bending down to their level; he was teaching them—and loving it. He was a natural with kids, and right away, wanted to do more than traditional music education. "I was interested in how kids learn, and I realized that small children can't just sit and listen to music. They have all that energy. They need to move." Even though he was supposed to be at Harley for only six weeks, he took dance with Garth Fagan in order to bring movement into his classroom.

Suddenly, Lower School students were no longer sitting and listening. They were following Jay all around the room as he beat a drum, calling out action words: "Run, walk, twist, turn, dive, float—freeze!" They were singing, dancing, and making their own instruments—which had never been done before, even at the progressive Harley School. When Mrs. Gundlach returned, she was so impressed that she asked Jay to stay on. For the first couple of years, he taught with Mrs. Gundlach and never questioned how the School was supporting both their salaries. When she died a few years later, Jay found out that she had been donating her salary so that he could stay on. Jay says, "I had been

touched by an angel. She saw something in me that I didn't see."

That "something" was the ability to connect children to learning through the magical properties of play, not only with music and dance, but with storytelling. "Every dance or piece of music has a story behind it," Jay says. "The story is the blueprint." For instance, one day he told his students to imagine they were a ball of clay and that a sculptor had walked into the room. "I put on some music and they acted out the story of how the sculptor shaped them. With no one guiding them except the music and their imaginations, it was beautiful." Last year, his students made an opera from a children's book called *Hooway for Wodney Wat*, about a rat who can't pronounce his r's. At only five and six years old, they wrote music and lyrics, then performed the opera at Assembly. Over the years, Jay has singlehandedly transformed the Lower School performing arts department, using mime, sign language, music, dance, and technology in his classes, where the only rule is "Be your best self."

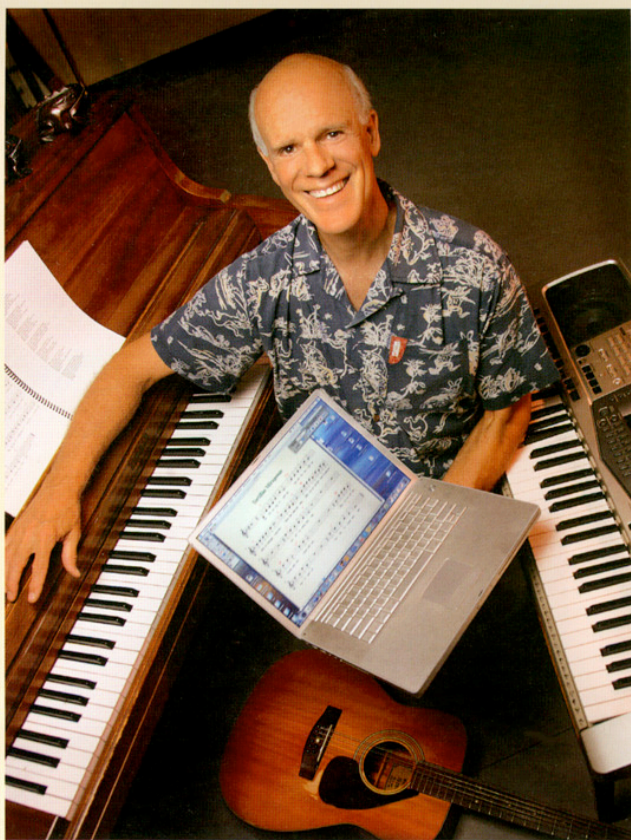
Thirty-eight years ago, fate brought Jay to the School and thousands of stories unfolded from there: how Harley introduced him to his beloved wife **Maura Allen**, a former art teacher. How their five children all attended Harley. How one of them, **Kirsten Reader '90**, is now an English teacher in Harley's Middle School. How Jay became an internationally acclaimed storyteller, performing throughout Canada, the U.S., and Japan, with radio shows on WJZR and WXXI and three award-winning CDs. And how it has all come full circle: Jay now delights in teaching his granddaughter, **Zoe Reader '20**, who is in the Lower School.

To Jay, Harley is a village where life, art, family, and work blend into one. He says, "The wonderful thing that Harley does is blur the

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where life, art, family,
and work blend into ONE."**

line between work and play. In our culture, we've categorized play as something that isn't work. We've categorized work as something that isn't playful. That's sad. I am lucky to be able to play where I work, and where I work is also my home."

And in this home, dance becomes sculpture, music becomes poetry, childhood is forever, and there's always another story to be told.



DOER'S PROFILE

PET PEEVE "People who leave their garbage around for other people to pick up, literally and figuratively."

LAST GOOD BOOK *The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield

THREE WORDS TO DESCRIBE HIMSELF
Eclectic. Creative. Loving.

FAVORITE FOOD Thai food. "Chicken basil yellow noodle. You can't beat it!"

FIVE PEOPLE HE WOULD INVITE TO A DINNER PARTY "My wife. She's the most entertaining person I know! And people who are great at play—Jim Henson, Shari Lewis, Mr. Rogers. And Jimmy Carter, because his idea of play is to make a better world."

FAVORITE MOVIE *Mary Poppins*. "I see her as a Christ figure in that she comes down, all is made right, and she ascends again. She's an avatar. There's a lot to learn from Mary Poppins."

FAVORITE PLACE TO BE Bali. "The Balinese are musicians and artists. But they don't have a word for art in their vocabulary because everyone does it—it's part of their daily lives."

In October, Jay Stetzer received the Arts & Cultural Council award for literary/performing arts. The Arts & Cultural Council presents awards annually to individuals and organizations that have made a significant, demonstrable contribution to the growth and well-being of the greater Rochester cultural community. Congratulations, Jay!