Lucinda Childs ’58 in her studio on Broadway. Photo by Michael O’Neill
For the next installment of our new series on Brearley Pioneers, we are spotlighting alumnae in the arts. From musical composition to modern dance choreography to performing arts to contemporary art to teaching art, the women who occupy these next pages have made distinctive, profound contributions to their field. As important as it is to celebrate the success in their careers, though, it is equally important to recognize the obstacles they have faced and how they have been able to surmount them. While they may not necessarily see themselves through a trailblazing lens, they are true models to emulate, for no accomplishment comes without challenge. Spanning several generations, these five artists are illustrious emblems of the grit, determination and can-do attitude of a pioneer. Their stories may be unique, but they all point proudly to Brearley for laying the foundation for their remarkable professional trajectory.

—Jane Foley Fried
MARY RODGERS GUETTEL ‘48

Mary Rodgers Guettel ‘48 was perhaps best known as the composer for the acclaimed Once Upon a Mattress, which premiered in 1959 and ignited her Broadway career, but her lengthy résumé included songwriter (“William’s Doll” and “Girl Land” on the iconic 1970s album Free to Be You and Me), author (award-winning 1972 children’s book Freaky Friday and its subsequent film release), and lyricist (theme song for Captain Kangaroo, in 1957). She served as Chairwoman of Juilliard’s Board of Trustees from 1994 to 2011, and was one of the first two women to serve on the board of Exeter, from 1974 to 1987. The daughter of Broadway composer Richard Rodgers, Mary was the mother of five children. In May, she sat down with daughter Kim Beaty ’73 to muse, reminisce and reflect on her long, storied career and, of course, her family in what was to be her last interview.

Mary with children Tod, Nina and Kim Beaty in 1959. (Photo by Donald Uhrbrock//Time Life Pictures/ Getty Images)
We are deeply saddened to report that Mary Rodgers Guettel ‘48 died on June 26, 2014. We are so grateful that Mary agreed to discuss her life as a pioneer in the arts for this issue.

KB: Lyrics, composing, Young People’s Concerts, Little Orchestra Concerts, children’s books, screenwriting, Exeter board member, Juilliard...Do you consider yourself a pioneer or a trailblazer?

MRG: Well, I was only a trailblazer in that most women got married and had children immediately and didn’t think in terms of working.

KB: You got married at 20, had three kids by the time you were 24! When was it that you thought, “I just can’t do this—I have to do some other things!”?

MRG: I guess it was jogging with the stroller to the park every morning, noon and night, to the 76th Street playground, and Tod being hit over the head with a shovel...I thought, “There must be something better than this.”

KB: At this point in your life, did you think that you were going to do things in the theater? You had wanted to be a doctor, didn’t you?

MRG: I wanted to be a doctor until I realized that I was having a hard time passing chemistry, and if I couldn’t pass chemistry, I was never going to make it to doctorhood! I don’t think I had any idea what I really wanted to do until the Westport Playhouse summer. I was probably about 18, at Wellesley, and I went to the Westport Playhouse because Nancy (Nancy Ryan Brien ‘48) and another Brearley girl were there. I was writing music at Brearley though. Hymns, whatever they would give me to do.

KB: After Brearley, were you writing at Wellesley? Was there composing?

MRG: No. There was no composition major. Wellesley didn’t teach it because they didn’t believe in composition for women. Definitely women were not expected to be composers. It was all right to stand in the bow of the piano and sing your little heart out. But no composing.

KB: You say there were not a lot of women composers when you got into the business. Did you feel that was a problem, being a woman?

MRG: Oh, a producer might say stuff was too “feminine.” [But] I was a multi-tasker in that, whatever I did, I did several other things in different areas...[for instance] I met Marshall (Marshall Barer, lyricist, Mary’s writing partner on Mattress) because he was the editor—under contract to do all the lyrics for the Little Golden Records [for which Mary’s sister, Linda Rodgers Emory ’53, also wrote music]—and he said “I could hire you if you promise to do the lyric writing because I can’t possibly write enough to get it all done.” And I said, “Well I’ll do the lyrics that you need if you’ll let me write the music that goes with it.” Which I’d never much tried (writing lyrics), but I was desperate to do something.

KB: So you certainly weren’t thinking any great feminist, pioneering thoughts. You just wanted to do something.

MRG: I just wanted to work and be paid for it.

KB: Did you feel you needed to be paid for it at that point?

MRG: Oh, yes! It was part of the expected package. I think my father imbibed me with that notion. Of getting paid for what you wrote. Mrs. Mac (Millicent McIntosh, Brearley Headmistress from 1930 to 1947) made a speech in assembly once... “Just remember, you’re not getting this very fine education in order to join country clubs!” It was a unique thought at the time; you’re supposed to use this for something.

KB: How did you start writing with Leonard Bernstein?

MRG: I would say it was through Steve Sondheim. We’d become pals, and I had gone to DC with him to see West Side Story which was trying out there (Aug. ’57). We had dinner with Lenny and he talked about the [NY Philharmonic] Young People’s Concerts which he was just about to do, and he said to me, “Maybe you’d be good at writing scripts for that?” and I took him up on it!

KB: What would you say to a graduating senior today who is interested in composing?

MRG: Study orchestration! [Had I known orchestration] I would have been more musically literate. For one thing, if you said to me, “What keys do you write in?” or “What’s the range of the flute?” I’d say, “I have no idea!” And every time, in orchestra rehearsal [for Mattress], if something sounded horrible, I’d go racing down the aisle and say “No, no, no, NO!! That’s not what I meant!”, but the trouble was I didn’t know how to say what I did mean! I couldn’t figure out how to communicate. In the end, between talking and writing down what I wanted in manuscript, I could make clear what I wanted, but it would have been a lot simpler. It would have changed my life.

KB: So...can you say what your advice is for getting a job?

MRG: Get yourself educated! [Especially today] when there aren’t a lot of jobs, look at any opportunity as a chance to learn. And if something [doesn’t] work, then go do something else. Whether it was a theme song for the Little Orchestra Concerts, or whatever—I kept working. You just sort of had to get things done. Something I learned from Brearley: Never say “No” to anything!

Kim Beaty ’73, daughter of Mary Rodgers Guettel ’48, niece of Linda Rodgers Emory ’53 and sister of Nina Beaty ’71, is a figurative artist who painted the portraits of the past two Heads of School at Brearley. She is currently painting the official portrait of Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (mother of fellow 73er Jane Ginsburg) for the Supreme Court.
LUCINDA CHILDS ’58
Internationally renowned dancer Lucinda Childs ’58 spends much of the year on tour. When she is not she calls Martha’s Vineyard her home, where she has lived for the past ten years and from where she recently spoke by phone to Philippa Kaye ’87.
Known for her minimalist aesthetic, attention to timing and absorbing geometric pattern-making, Lucinda Childs is a distinguished choreographer, director and performer. Her career began in her twenties presenting solo works as part of Judson Dance Theater—a group of artists committed to the avant-garde who performed their work at Judson Memorial Church on Washington Square Park. In 1973 she began making dances with her own company of dancers which mined the possibilities of upright movement—walking, skipping and changes of direction. In 1976 she co-authored, choreographed, and played a leading performance role in Einstein on the Beach, the opera directed by Robert Wilson, with music by Philip Glass, which brought her and the other lead artists international recognition; she was appointed to the rank of Commander in France’s Order of Arts and Letters in 2004. Lucinda is called a pioneer of post-modern dance, and of this description she says, “Pioneer is appropriate. I don’t think of that as being important though—the thing for me is, I don’t like to repeat myself.” Proving this, revivals of her works read as fresh, and she is consistently engaged in new projects.

Lucinda believes that the academic demands of Brearley prepared her for the perseverance and diligence necessary for her achievements. “I think that actually it prepared me not only for Sarah Lawrence [College], but for a lot of things that you come up against in terms of just dealing with demand. You just had to say; OK, let’s just get down to this and just do it—get it done. I’m saying these things to myself now, you know, I know that rehearsal will never go well if I only focus on certain things. I have to focus on many aspects of a rehearsal. I have to examine all the material that I need to cover before I go in. I find that then I feel a sense of joy and a sense of accomplishment.”

In typical Brearley-girl style, Lucinda pursued her own interests. Although it was important to her to do well in school, she was frustrated that she could only train in ballet and modern dance on the weekends and at summer intensives. During her second year at Sarah Lawrence, she was excited by the writing of John Cage and began taking classes at the Merce Cunningham studio in downtown Manhattan where she met many of the artists who would soon become a member of Judson Dance Theater. Her parents did not support her choices: “My father didn’t really like the idea of me going so far downtown to take a dance class, and my mother thought there were other things that would be more interesting.” Lucinda relates with triumph that her mother did become a fan beginning in the 80s. “She came to absolutely everything and I forgot about all the years she didn’t come.”

Determination has seen Lucinda through the difficulty of supporting a dance company in New York City. From the outset, she looked for and purchased a studio space to rehearse her company; the fourth floor of a pillar-free cast iron building in Soho in a building found by Judson Dance Theater friend and choreographer Trisha Brown who occupied the fifth floor above her. Lucinda made the decision to fold her not-for-profit company in 2000. The National Endowment for the Arts has stopped giving general operating funds to dance companies in the late eighties, and even after a successful performance at Brooklyn Academy of Music and a European tour it was very difficult to maintain a group of dancers in the highly competitive fundraising environment. As she was in demand elsewhere, acting in the work of Robert Wilson and choreographing for European dance companies, she gave up the “ideal” studio loft space in SoHo she had worked in for thirty years. She says, “I couldn’t stand to be there alone, without dancers to work with.”

In 2009 Bard College asked for a revival of her 1979 piece, “Dance.” This signature work, to music by Philip Glass, has a black and white 35mm film by Sol Lewitt that is projected on a scrim downstage of the live dancers. Bard’s support enabled Lucinda to train a new group of dancers and for Sol Lewitt’s film to be preserved in digital format. The energy generated from this revival has led to a strong group of dancers touring “Dance” and other works from Lucinda repertory for the past six years. Pomegranate Arts, a top-flight production company directed by women, is producing and managing the tours. In effect, Lucinda has a company again, but without the responsibility of a board of directors, administration or a studio space.

When asked about her daily routine, Lucinda says it is most important for her to be healthy, otherwise the work can’t be done. She thanks the practice of Pilates for healing a bad spinal injury she thought she’d never recover from. She works out as best she can while on tour, and plans to get the Pilates equipment for her home in Martha’s Vineyard where she has a small private dance studio. She looks forward to more performance opportunities; for instance, she would love the chance to re-investigate the text-based solo she made with Susan Sontag called “Description (of a Description).” Meanwhile she is preparing for an opera in Germany this summer, a revival of “Available Light,” her dance with a split-level set designed by architect by Frank Gehry and music by John Adams at Disney Hall in Los Angeles, and waiting to hear when work will begin on a new piece in collaboration with James Turrell and Philip Glass.

Lucinda is grateful for her roots in the Brearley community and the foundation it can give to young artists and thinkers. “They are in a community where there is an exchange of ideas, and I think that’s wonderful. For me to be at the school....to have learned those skills in an environment of having friends, wonderful teachers, very interesting classes, was really a privilege.”

This October, Lucinda’s company will perform Concerto, a piece from 1993, at Fall for Dance at City Center. (Get your tickets as soon as they become available; this show sells out fast.)

Philippa Kaye ’87 is a choreographer living in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. She and her husband recently bought a warehouse in Detroit, MI, to develop into mixed-use loft spaces, and she is taking time off from making dances to raise her son.
ELIZABETH STAINTON ’77

Liz Stainton is a remarkable woman. From her drive and creativity has emerged a career entirely in the arts—while raising a daughter on her own. A Brearley girl herself (indeed, a member of the 13-year club), she is the Head of the Brearley Art Department, taking her passion for art, which was instilled in her early on by her own teachers at the School, and passing it on to the girls. Some of her students have gone into the arts in some way themselves. Others have incorporated the strong lessons she has imparted into other professions. But with all the pride and joy she has in being a teacher, she is an artist first.

—Christa Savino ’92
By the time she entered Class IX, Liz knew that she needed to create. She would wander through the Met, transfixed by the paintings, especially the Medieval and Baroque works with their magical, golden skies and drama. Beatrice Thompson, the legendary art department head, encouraged and inspired Liz with her guidance at school and by exposing her to the world of art in NYC. As Liz says: “Beatrice was an inspiring teacher, teaching that art was a deeply intellectual passion and not just something you do with your hands.” Beginning the tradition of Brearley girls designing and building sets for theatrical productions at the School, which they continue to do today, Mrs. Thompson’s stewardship motivated Liz to study set design intensively in college. After immersion in the theatrical design at Wesleyan and a stint at the Metropolitan Opera Costume shop, she missed her studio practice and resolved to focus on painting.

After college, Liz went to work as a freelance artist, painting private commissions, faux finishes and installations, including murals at The Pierre and “Fragonards” and Magritte clouds at The Limited. Her practice has led in many directions. More recent commissions include an 8 x 3 foot, historical panoramic cityscape of New Amsterdam in 1650 for the Dutch Reformed Church. This has led to other historic painting commissions such as a view of the Brooklyn when it was the largest feature of the landscape and a painting of Agincourt—a place Liz looks forward to visiting this summer. Happily, she says: “I’m on a history kick.”

As in the old tradition of successful, working artists, Liz’s commissions influence her private work; she distills her experiences from months or years of immersion in these large-scale projects in a variety of ways, including landscapes, cityscapes and single, elegant objects. The objects might be a key, a bird, one of her daughter’s toys or her own gesturing hand. These symbols, painted on small square canvases, capture a thought or a special moment or memory. Often, she includes gold leaf backgrounds, infusing the mystery of icons. They are personal works which can read like small poems or couplets.

At Brearley, Liz is invigorated in the give-and-take with students which energizes her own painting. It has been a tradition at Brearley to hire professional artists to teach at the School. Liz does not believe you can be a great art teacher if you are not engaged yourself. The creative process is a difficult one, filled with the need to push oneself toward the unknown and mysterious. The path to successful art making is “a process of intensive looking, learning and exploring the world around us and inside ourselves.” Liz’s greatest challenge at Brearley is compelling the girls to grapple uninhibitedly, which sometimes means embracing failure. This discovery process feeds all aspects of one’s education. “If you are doing something that isn’t perfect, you’re learning...Every project starts as a big mess and then you have to fix it. Painting is all about fixing failure.” It is an important lesson at a school where girls strive for perfection.

When asked what advice she would give young artists, Liz is hopeful. As a young woman, she experienced misogynist gallery owners and an art scene difficult to break into. With the Internet, communities have formed outside these circles and artists are able to have more control over their own promotion. Further, information is much more accessible. Instead of days at the library doing research for a project, Liz can do the same research at 2 am in the comfort of her home. The Internet, she believes, facilitates finding one’s way to interesting opportunities.

Liz has always been able to support herself by creating art. “All my life, I am happiest when I’m making something.” Whether that is an artwork or cooking a nice meal, it is the process of imaginative transformation, the exploration, the challenges, the failures and successes that keep her stimulated and drive her. For Liz, being an artist is a beautiful struggle, one she loves sharing with her students.

Christa Savino ’92 is the gallery director at Jill Newhouse Gallery in New York City, which specializes in master works on paper of all periods.
MEGHAN BOODY ‘82

Sitting in the inner sanctum of Meghan Boody’s Looking Glass Labs studio in her Tribeca loft, one can easily get lost in the wondrous other-worldly art and creativity that surrounds you. Working in sculpture, photography and video, Meghan emotionally transports viewers via her familiar yet fantastic characters and their trials. The artist herself has a similar magnetic presence. On a recent visit, I listened eagerly to her description of the complex interplay of forces, desires and transformations in her current project, *Psyche and the Beast*. These epic narratives are digital tapestries that are woven together with archetypal characters and mythical elements, each composite image taking months to produce.

Meghan, who was incorporating Photoshop in her art photography before many people had personal computers, has a pioneering spirit. She ensnares the viewer with her art, luring them into beautiful but unsettling scenes unfolding within a system ruled by its own rules and regulations. Through the toil of its heroines, the Truth of human nature is revealed (sorry, I couldn’t stop myself). She kindly agreed to answer my questions and share some of her insights.

—Barbara Johnson Stemler ’04
BJS: How has Brearley influenced your work?
MB: It’s kind of crazy how many of my stories revolve around close-knit communities of women. Female empowerment is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for my young and often struggling heroines. There is also my recurrent theme of the irreverent girl posse, which works together—and sometimes against—each other. My work also explores the feeling of being in a strict and regimented environment with a heavy dose of pressure—that you have to excel or else you land in a quagmire. This “clock is ticking” mentality to achieve is necessary for my heroines who undergo test after test. Sound familiar? But against all odds, they are able to succeed in the nick of time!

BJS: Were there any teachers in particular that inspired you?
MB: Ms. Conant who taught Middle School math. It was her manner in which she demystified a difficult subject that I loved. She had a no-nonsense approach and maintained a nonplussed manner when solving complicated problems.

BJS: In addition to Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queen, which you often reference in your titles, are there any specific works of literature that continue to inform your story-based art?
MB: Well, the Odyssey and The Canterbury Tales come to mind. Being familiar with Chaucer’s Middle English sparked my interest in English dialects and my love of playing with language—which shows up in my narrative titles. I am fascinated by Odyssean character-transforming quests and the positive effects of arduous challenges in life. My subjects are poster children for this ethic, blossoming as the result of their labors and perseverance! I also often think about the slow and devastating death of the horse in Steinbeck’s The Red Pony. I guess it’s no accident that my current favorite piece is of a dead horse burning on a funeral pyre!

BJS: If you could start over, would you do anything differently?
MB: I wish I had attended a college that was smaller and in the middle of nowhere, instead of an urban university. I think it would have helped me focus and feel like I was a part of a community. I missed the intensity of a smaller group of students who knew each other really well. I would also have liked to have spent more time abroad, but there’s still time for that!

BJS: Do you have any advice for graduating high school seniors interested in the arts?
MB: Take a gap year to follow your dreams and gain experience before you embark on your college studies. You will appreciate them more! And don’t specialize too quickly—explore lots of interests and be open to anything. On a lark, I took an Intro to Photography course and discovered during my first roll of film how much I LOVED taking pictures. Find a mentor and become an apprentice. There is nothing like learning the ropes one on one from someone you admire. I had the luck of apprenticing with Hans Namuth and so much of what I know about photography is based on that relationship. Try not to look at the amount of competition or the sheer numbers of other artists. It will distract you and take your energy away from doing your work. And I can’t stress enough the importance of community. A friend and I recently formed a think tank for women in the arts to counteract the effects of a diffuse and scattered art world. This has been a great joy and support to me as an artist.

BJS: What are some of the highlights of your career to date?
MB: A few years ago, I had a show of The Lighthouse and how she got there in Berlin. Through a crazy sequence of events, the pieces still hadn’t arrived the night before the show was supposed to open. My worst nightmare!! Instead of throwing in the towel which I was very tempted to do, I pulled an all-nighter along with my boyfriend. I divided each of my large images into small sections and we printed them out on cheap computer paper that I then pieced together as massive mosaics. I ended up stapling the paper directly onto the walls, which was a very weird, and ultimately freeing, experience for someone so devoted to print quality and elaborate frames! And of course, the imperfections and striations from the low end printer ended up having its own beautiful, messed up aesthetic. I was on a ladder stapling during the opening but it didn’t matter. People thought it was part of the installation, and I ended up with a pretty decent show!

BJS: How do you balance having a career and a family?
MB: When my son, Toby, was young, I tried to incorporate his interests into my work so we could both make things together. I would watch him stack his animal figurines on top of each other and I wound up doing a series based on similar piles of creatures. I tried to make simpler, less time consuming work during that demanding time—not that complication didn’t end up creeping in anyway! I always had a studio in my home, so it was easy to grab a few hours of work on the sly. And I would try to get my son involved so he wouldn’t feel shut out, often asking him for feedback that I admire. I had the luck of apprenticing with Hans Namuth and so much of what I know about photography is based on that relationship. Try not to look at the amount of competition or the sheer numbers of other artists. It will distract you and take your energy away from doing your work. And I can’t stress enough the importance of community. A friend and I recently formed a think tank for women in the arts to counteract the effects of a diffuse and scattered art world. This has been a great joy and support to me as an artist.

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Diane Paulus ’84

Diane Paulus ’84 is the Artistic Director of the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Mass. She is the 2013 recipient of the Tony Award for Best Director of a Musical (Pippin) and was just recently named to TIME’s Annual List of the 100 Most Influential People in the World. This spring Diane took time from her busy schedule to talk to Megan Jones ‘12.

Far right: “We’ve got Magic to do, just for you!” from Pippin. Photo by Michael J. Lutch
MJ: What were your favorite classes at Brearley? Favorite teachers? Did any of your classes have a profound influence on your career?

DP: Ruth Carpenter was such an inspiration—how she taught us to read, teaching us a love of language. I loved history at Brearley. As a director, I’m always fascinated by understanding how theater functioned in different historical moments. I’m never interested in a play just as literature, but I’m looking at what the play meant in its time, in terms of the audience and its history, its social and political context. When I think of history, I think about lives, people, and what it meant to be alive at a certain time, and that’s what I try to access when I’m studying plays. When I directed opera, I looked at how opera functioned at different times: what was *Marriage of Figaro* like when it premiered? I loved Mrs. Sagor, too. We did Shakespeare with her. Ms. Wachman as well. All these incredible humanities teachers. I never fancy myself a science person, but Mr. Tokieda and Mr. Mase, both of them were teachers I’ll never forget. When you go to Brearley, you are given this incredible gift, this empowerment to speak up and express yourself, this feeling that, as a woman, you can do anything that you want in the world. Those thirteen years at Brearley were this bedrock for me: I always assumed I could be or do anything and change the world in the process. That confidence—to have a voice—is something that I think has been instrumental to my life now as a professional director, and as a leader of a theater.

MJ: Were you involved in theater at Brearley? Is there a show that stands out as being particularly influential?

DP: The rite of passage for any Brearley girl is doing the Class VII Gilbert and Sullivan, so I remember distinctly doing that with Mr. Walker, who was the drama teacher at the time. And then in Upper School, working with Robert Duke. I’ll never forget the all-female, Brearley girl-only version of *Hay Fever* that we did, and that epitomized Brearley for me; “Sure, we can do an all-girl Noel Coward! We can act beyond our age and transmit ourselves into other people, male or female.” And then I did musicals. Of course, the most critical theatrical endeavor of my life was doing *Wonderful Town* at Brearley because that’s when I met my now-husband, Randy. My life may have been completely different if I hadn’t done that show or if he hadn’t hurt his foot running track at Collegiate and hadn’t been convinced to audition. He was, I think, Policeman #4 in the Chorus, but I spotted him. I was a junior at Brearley then. I feel like going to B-Deck and being in that auditorium was really the heartbeat for me of my life at Brearley.

MJ: What’s the largest challenge you face as a director?

DP: Of course, I always think about raising my two daughters. Every day is a challenge and every day you strive to be the best mom you can be. I’m very happy that I do what I love professionally. I’m very passionate about the power of art to transform our lives and to speak to what we as human beings need right now. I’m grateful that my work is something that I love, so that is an accomplishment and hand-in-hand with that is that I’m a mom with two kids at the same time. I feel very lucky that I can share my work with my family, and my children can be part of my professional life.

MJ: Can you name some female artists you truly admire?

DP: I’m inspired by women like Hallie Flanagan, Judith Malina of The Living Theatre, Eva Le Gallienne. They are my heroes. Anne Bogart, my directing teacher at Columbia. Ariane Mnouchkine [founder of Theatre du Soleil]. I’m completely knocked out by Eve Ensler. Her dedication, her humanity, her passion—she’s a force of nature. I’m also a pretty big fan of Sara Bareilles right now [who is composing music for Paulus’s musical *Waitress*, which will premiere at A.R.T. in the future].

MJ: What advice would you give to a graduating Brearley senior considering entering the Arts professionally?

DP: The more you learn, the more you stretch yourself, the more you grow as a person, the more you see, the more you study, all of these things are going to make you a deeper and better artist. To be an artist, you have to start by being the most fully engaged human being. And follow your heart; start to develop what interests you. A life in art is about plugging into your own personal passions. Leaving Brearley is the moment to begin your journey of developing what interests you. Art is a big, general word. Theater is a big, general word. What about the arts interests you, what kind of theater? Find your obsessions. Develop your own personal inquiry and if you develop that, it doesn’t matter if you have bumps in the road or ups and downs because it’s all part of the journey.

Megan Jones ’12 will be a junior at Harvard University this fall. She has worked as an intern for Diane Paulus for the past three years on such projects as *Finding Neverland* (performances began July 2014) and *Pippin*.
As a child, you traveled a great deal, within the Philippines, to Europe and America, and attended very little school, according to your mother’s belief that primary education should be in the arts. When you were nine years old and in your first year at the American School in Manila, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and you and your family were sent to the Santo Tomas Internment Camp. What childhood skills helped you to survive the next three years there?

In extreme situations, the most vital skills are to read reality for what it is non-judgmentally and to find a path of action which fits the circumstances as they exist—not as what you think they should be.

I believe I learned these skills at the age of three. I was on a long journey with my mother aboard a ship with the most fabulous playroom imaginable. But a cruel German governess presided over the playroom, and after one afternoon with her, I knew I absolutely must never go there again. Thus, I had to find a way to entertain myself without burdening my mother. My solution was to befriend any and all crew on the vessel, from engineers to chambermaids. I constructed a human resource pool that gave me coverage and liberty at anytime of day needed, and I was never again escorted to the playroom!

Those same skills came into play immediately in Santo Tomas. In the first weeks what I observed of the adults was an endless stream of complaints about the Japanese who had dealt with us in such an inexcusable manner and who would get their comeuppance next week with the return of General MacArthur. My reaction was: we are going to be here for as long as I can think and complaints are useless. Find solutions to keep yourself intact for as long as needed.

How did Brearley help you to heal from your wartime trauma?

Brearley created a new stimulating reality. My effort was to blot out what had preceded.

The School performed miracles for a young person who had mastered the French language, but had no idea that there was something called grammar, and had never learned how to write, and regarded spelling as a creative art. I could subtract, but had difficulty adding. I had learned to multiply in my brief brush with 3rd grade, and I mastered long division in my brief experience in fourth grade. I was at an eighth-grade level in Latin when I arrived, and Brearley arranged a private Latin class for me so that at the end of my first year there I was ready to join my classmates in the tenth grade. Brearley did a wonderful job accommodating my knowledge gap. The education was excellent. In retrospect, my years there were the best part of my education. I thrived on the intellectual stimulation. What gifts!

Brearley’s self-government had an “immensely positive effect” on you. Why?

In Santo Tomas, I realized that our survival and safety very much depended on the democratic and organized procedures of self-government we created. I was mightily impressed by a school that followed similar procedures. Each class elected officers and monitors, who were responsible for reporting violations of school rules. All discipline in the school was handled by Student-Government, with the exception of any behavior that might result in suspension or dismissal. The weekly
Self-Government meetings taught me how to lead meetings in a democratic and effective manner. The meetings also provided a forum for student disciplinary hearings.

At the time and to this day, I think this was one of the most important parts of Brearley life. It was an education in civic behavior. In my mind, it should be standard procedure in our schools. What is more important than knowing how to participate in a democracy?

At the end of your sophomore year at Radcliffe, you got married and followed your husband, who was serving during the Korean War, to Germany. Within the next decade, you completed your BA at Radcliffe, taught high school, got a PhD in history and had four children. How did you manage this, especially at a time when fewer women were combining work and family?

It is with the support of key individuals, willing to ignore rules and create individual opportunities for me that I have accomplished what I have! It was the same story at Brearley, Radcliffe and the University of Washington. My Radcliffe Dean set up special summer courses for me so that I could complete my degree quickly. At the University of Washington, I was allowed to space out my general exams since my fourth child was born in the midst of them. No one had ever been so accommodated before, and to my great chagrin the department voted that this should never be done again! None of us does any of this unaided. Our life successes are not just our private creations.

I also benefited from the availability of household help, which relieved me of most (time-consuming) domestic chores.

As your children grew up, you assumed leadership positions at colleges around the country. Along the way, you also divorced, re-married a widower, and “inherited” his three teenage sons. What advice would you give younger women who are trying to do it all?

My world of wisdom is: you never do it all on your own—if you try, it will wipe you out. Parenting can and should be shared. Our children learn different things from different people. The American model of child-care is ridiculously limiting. The care a child gets does not all have to come from his or her genetic pool! Some points:

• Be sure to get help. Use every penny of your earnings, if necessary, to give yourself that break.
• Remember that becoming a mother should not lead to your totally abandoning being an evolving adult.
• Adjust your pacing. It took me four years to get my masters and ten to get my PhD. My pacing was not “normal.” But it worked. And I never got off track! Just know what you want, be clear and find the right help—domestic and professional.
• Children learn important lessons from those beyond family boundaries, including those without the cultural/educational backgrounds of family members.

Did you set out to become a leader?

No, I never set out to be a leader. My primary love was, and continues to be, teaching.

Your mother hoped you’d be trilingual and proficient in music, art and drawing by the age of 8. What did you make sure your own children learned?

It was important to me to help my children learn how to handle basic living chores independently and skillfully. All four children, three boys included, learned how to hem garments and replace buttons by the time they were ten. All are competent hikers and campers who can use a compass with ease, and two are outdoor fanatics. My daughter can still change a tire faster than you can get out of a car.

It was also vital to me that the children respect food and a clean plate. To this day I am upset by food waste.

I certainly nurtured their love of books. Diligence and love of schooling was important. Intellectual activity was simply part of the household ambiance. My eldest son is an MD academic physician, my second a PhD computational physicist and climatologist, my third a PhD anthropologist and writer, and my daughter a nurse-practitioner-hospitalist. So I guess the delight in learning was absorbed.

You have lived in homes all over the world, including Vienna, Manila, New York City, Rochester, Cambridge, Germany, Virginia, Sun Valley and Seattle. At the moment, you live in Portland and make annual trips to France and Hawaii. Do you have a favorite place?

One basic attitude that I have developed comes from my camp experience: I have learned to live mostly in the present. Where is my favorite place? Where I am right now!

You write that happiness is a learned skill. When did you learn it?

My first glimmer of that reality came shortly after my first marriage. There were many steps to follow.

When you have survived an event that leaves deep marks, it can be difficult to absorb the fact that what was no longer is reality.

The first months of my first marriage I could not believe that my husband was “there.” I expected him to vanish at any moment, because that had been my experience of human relations to that point. I finally grasped that this was a different time. That is when I said to myself, happiness is a learned art, and I needed to learn it.

I am still learning! For me the key is being convinced of the difference between then and now. It is part of the importance for me of living in the present.

You are currently writing your memoir. How do you tell your life story to yourself in a few sentences?

Flexibility: I have had to change direction more than once.
Pig headedness: refusing to give up/give-in.
Luck.
Wonderful assistance at key moments!
Love and support of key individuals, not least, my children/family.
What at first may appear as a catastrophe may open new doors, viz, my second marriage. Seconds are not by definition second rate!

There is much to marvel at in your story. What are you most proud of?

The successes of my children and grandchildren, although those successes are their own. The most I can say is that apparently the platform to which I contributed was good for them.

I am pleased with the very limited, but unique pieces of research I have accomplished.

Finally, the impact I have had on my students. A year ago, one of my former students funded a scholarship in my name at Lewis and Clark College.

Meghan Nadosy Magyar ’97 lives in New York City with her husband, son and daughter. She wrote about Millicent Carey McIntosh, Head of Brearley from 1930 to 1947, for her master’s thesis.