In Touch with THE LEXINGTON SCHOOL TLS

Special Edition, Spring 1998

A New Beginning

John Fixx Appointed Headmaster



At left, a family portrait of John Fixx, his wife, Liza, their son, Nat, and daughter, Emily.

By Nancy Grimes
President, Board of Trustees

The arrival of Mr. John Fixx as our new headmaster, on July 1, 1998, will herald the beginning of a new and exciting era for The Lexington School. Who is John Fixx? John is a young, highly energetic, motivated and experienced educator. He currently is Assistant Head of School and Director of Upper School at The Country School in Madison, Connecticut. He also teaches sixth grade English there.

As an undergraduate at Wesleyan University, John pursued English as a major. He received his master's in business administration with a concentration in non-profit organizations from the University of Connecticut. He has served in positions in admissions at the Hoosac School in New York, Bancroft School in Massachusetts and Westminster School in Connecticut. John expanded his career to include teaching English and coaching athletic teams.

In his position at The Country School, John's responsibilities have included coordinating all aspects of the Upper School which includes grades 5-8. He has been able to successfully enhance parent communication and education,

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A Message from Recently Appointed Headmaster
John Fixx

Dear Lexington School Community,

I am excited by the opportunity to work with you as headmaster. In Manhattan recently for the annual meeting of the National Association of Independent Schools, I met with Molly Strassner and then had a pleasant dinner with a handful of TLS teachers, administrators and trustees. Sunday morning my wife, Liza, and I took our children to the Central Park Merry-Go-Round. I watched as Emily and Nat giggled and waved, rising and falling, turning and revolving.

When Donald Werner was retiring from Westminster School after leading it for well over two decades, he described the role of headmaster as:

> *much less linear than cyclical, in fact essentially circular, with some ups and downs built into the ride. For this reason the job of a headmaster strikes me as much less like the driver of a bus moving smartly from Point A to Point B and much more like the operator of a merry-go-round. At some point the fellow chosen to run the carousel gets on, paints up a few ponies, perhaps changes a llama for a zebra, puts a couple of new tunes on the calliope, spends a lot of time urging most of the riders to stretch farther for the brass ring (and a little time cautioning some to be more careful)...*

I like the image because it speaks to the circularity of a school year and of a career in education. I like the image for its continuity throughout the generations, parents taking their children for a ride on the merry-go-round, then the children, now older, riding by themselves. Eventually the former children bring their children to the merry-go-round, riding with them for safety and comfort, then allowing their children to ride alone, and so on.

Mr. Werner's metaphor, although elegant, is partially unsatisfying to me, though, because the merry-go-round remains in one place, well-maintained but essentially unimproved. For the image to capture properly for me the triumph of schools, I want the riders to be strengthened for having ridden the merry-go-round. For the metaphor to be ideal, each generation of children and parents would enjoy the merry-go-round and then leave it enhanced because of its participation.

In the Presidential Range of the White Mountains of New Hampshire, there is a backpacking philosophy that we are to leave the trail and campsites better off for having used them, picking up after each other. Similarly, with apologies to my former headmaster Werner, I confess that in school work I am motivated by establishing some Point A to Point B goals and trying to improve a situation, working with teams to discover solutions to challenges, exploring with my colleagues innovative ways to teach young people.

As I consider my approaching time at TLS, my tendency, then is to embrace Werner's merry-go-round symbolism but combine it with a sense of progress and steady strengthening, looking forward toward goals—helping TLS move from Point A to Point B—but also occasionally looking backward and taking pride in the ways we have enhanced it for the students.

Molly, Alex Boone and the entire Search Committee and Board have urged me to come down a number of times this spring with my family for special occasions and simply for the chance to get to know you better and for you to get to know us better. I am eager to meet more people from your school community, talk about your dreams and ambitions for TLS, and surrender to the extraordinary opportunity I have been given to help you advance your school.

TLS has been fortunate to have Molly Strassner a part of the community this year. Molly is a seasoned, steady leader, adept at gently tending schools. In my work with her this winter and spring I have been charmed to find her enormously loving of TLS. Schools grow and evolve at a pace they can absorb, and Molly has been sensible about TLS's area of potential growth and already outstanding strengths. I intend, as well, to work carefully with TLS's Board, teachers, students and parents to remain

sensitive to the pace of change within the school, insuring that future progress, however natural and needed and embraced, does not upset even momentarily the strong academic program.

My position in admissions at Westminster School allowed me for years to evaluate TLS through its students. TLS has always enjoyed a national reputation of some envy, with students entering competitive secondary boarding and day schools and the local public schools, more than holding their own academically, well prepared for the rigors and high expectations from the teachers. That, finally, is one of the marks of a strong school—a convenient yardstick by which we ought to judge any school and by which we should want to have TLS scrutinized. Are we preparing young men and women for lives of contribution to their communities, fully prepared to be aggressive learners in their next school, eager to ask questions when confused, willing to take assignments beyond the minimum, stretching themselves and their classmates?

Having been in three schools that endured a change in headmaster, I am interested in how our institutions adapt and respond during these times of challenge and opportunity. I expect to spend some time this spring, summer and next year like an anthropologist, observing the school "in action," asking questions and studying how the enterprise moves through a year. Schools are in balance, I have observed, connected in obvious ways but also connected in invisible, unpredictable ways. When we tinker with one aspect of a school it can alter—in good and unfortunate ways—other aspects of the community. This dynamic tension needs to be recognized and respected.

In my sixteen years of school work I have had the unusual opportunity to work with seven different headmasters who possess a range of leadership styles and strengths. Believing that "if you bring good people together, good things happen," my leadership style is collaborative. It is also one of the roles of the headmaster, I believe, to be the chief cheerleader for the school, reminding us constantly that, whereas there may be components of the school with which we might tinker, the overall benefit for our students is unmistakable. We need constantly to convey the school's strengths internally, as well as externally, reminding everyone why TLS is so terrific.

Teachers are a school's greatest resource. TLS is fortunate to have an enviable mix of senior masters, mid-career professionals and promising younger teachers. I look forward to working with this impressive group, helping them steer their energies in the directions that are going to benefit our students the most. I have been impressed with the vigor of the pedagogical debate on any number of issues within the faculty and within the wider school community. As headmaster, if time allows, I hope to assist the teachers and coaches, continuing the work with young people that I have enjoyed at The Country School, Westminster, Bancroft and Hoosac.

I am eager to ensure that TLS is always a community imbued with the attitude that everyone within it—students, of course, but also teachers, administrators and parents—is trying every day and every year to do things a bit better than they were done before. It is critical in today's competitive independent school market that schools offer every year an even stronger education, a better "product." Just as we expect our students to improve throughout a year, so too does it seems reasonable to expect teachers and parents and administrators to raise their games constantly. Through this emphasis on growth and goal setting, the entire school is strengthened.

I am greatly excited by the opportunity to support Debby Coleman in the admissions office. We have a responsibility to articulate the school's strengths frequently and cleverly so that TLS maintains its competitive place in the Lexington educational community. But we also have perhaps a greater obligation to trumpet loudly the virtues of TLS so that all families whose children deserve the chance to study at TLS will know that the school is accessible to them. For far too long portions of the population in cities and towns have felt that the doors of independent schools were closed to them. We want to spread the work widely that we at TLS want in our classrooms the finest, most agile, probing minds in the greater Lexington community. Parents, students, teachers and trustees can all share responsibility to articulate the strengths of TLS so that other young people can embrace the same special opportunity our own children enjoy. Admissions and recruitment is everybody's job.

Family gatherings for the Fixxes have always involved educational debate. My wife, Liza, earned her master's in elementary education and before having our children worked as a preschool teacher, a second grade teacher at Bancroft School, and then Director of Publications and Publicity at Westminster School. My mother, until retirement, was Assistant Dean of Students at Oberlin College. My maternal grandfather was a teacher, principal and then the Superintendent of Schools in Clearview, Ohio. One of

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the elementary schools in Clearview is, in fact, named after him. Although the extent of my father's involvement in education after graduating from college was largely limited to giving commencement addresses, as a writer he worked with words his entire life. His father—my paternal grandfather—was also a writer, rising without a college education to become editor of Time magazine.

From my earliest involvement with families visiting Westminster while I was there and from my recruiting trips to Lexington and TLS over the years, I have heard Lexington described as an unusually wonderful place to raise children. A university town offers the advantages important to Liza and me, combining the benefits and happy distractions of a large city with the enveloping of a small town. We greatly look forward to our lives in Lexington.

Aldous Huxley is quoted as saying, "Perhaps the greatest result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the things you have to do, when they ought to be done, whether you like it or not." Huxley's sentiment reminds us that although joy, inspiration and shared happiness are the fruits of a good education, none of these can be cultivated without a good dose of old-fashioned hard work. Often the greatest boost to self-confidence and the greatest spur to self-development in a young person's life come when the student finally confronts a challenge he or she thought overwhelming and discovers that he or she is, after all, able to achieve more than anticipated. Huxley reminds us, finally, that perhaps the most significant and the most crucial challenge we face as teachers and parents is fostering in our young people an appreciation for the quiet rewards found in diligence, tenacity and commitment.

John Fixx



John Fixx enjoys running for exercise. Here, he is pictured treating his daughter, Emily and son, Nat, to a speedy ride through the neighborhood, while gaining an invigorating workout for himself at the same time.

Division Head Appointed

By Molly Strassner, Interim Head of School

It is a great pleasure to announce the appointment of Susan Touchstone as Head of Lower School beginning July 1, 1998. Susan comes to us from the Southfield School, a preschool through eighth grade coed day school in Shreveport, Louisiana. Her administrative experience includes holding lower and middle school head positions, as well as that of admissions director. Prior to her tenure at Southfield, Susan accrued over ten years of teaching experience in both self-contained elementary classrooms and as a fifth and sixth grade math instructor.

Susan first visited The Lexington School last November. The feedback I received following interviews and meetings with our faculty included such comments as: "she's a skilled listener," "she's very professional," "outstanding," and "thoughtful." Susan's current headmaster at Southfield says, "She knows how to build consensus and trust among her faculty and parents."

The atmosphere in which teaching and learning take place defines the difference between a good school and a great school for Susan. From her viewpoint, these are the ingredients of an excellent program: students who are not only productive, but happy and inquisitive; teachers who have long since shed the role of disseminators of information and



Susan Touchstone

and have rather become facilitators of students' learning; a priority on curiosity, questioning, and risk-taking, as opposed to pat answers and rote learning; a genuine feeling of excitement in the air; a large dose of mutual support and respect among all members of the school community.

In reflecting upon her administrative experience, Susan finds herself drawn back to certain beliefs. "Ask a great deal of your students, your parents, and your faculty, but also ask a great deal of yourself. Expect professionalism in every facet of the school's operation, but moderate it with healthy doses of humor and flexibility. Above all, keep the focus where it belongs, on those teachers and students who create the special moments that make it all possible."

Share a School Day with That Special Child

Grandparents Day
Friday, April 24

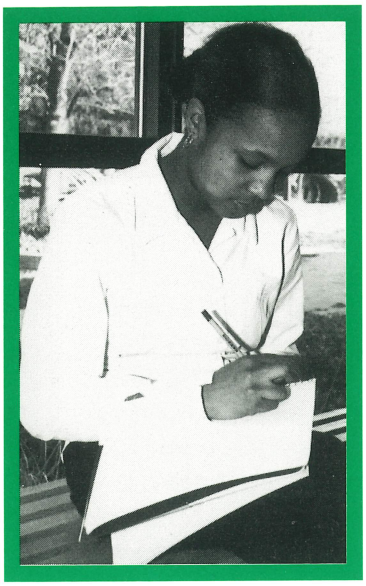
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assess and strengthen faculty evaluation and professional development, encourage interdisciplinary planning and coordination and to accelerate initiatives to integrate the curriculum from prekindergarten through eighth grade. In addition, he has served on a variety of committees which have included: Educational Practices and Curriculum, Diversity, Admissions, Secondary School Placement, Growth Issues and Financial Aid.

It was while he was the director of admissions at Westminster that John came to admire and respect the educational product of TLS—our students. He aggressively recruited them for placement at Westminster. He came to love Lexington, and his enthusiasm for The Lexington School was evident to the Search Committee from the first.

John's strong work ethic and his commitment to family values, combined with intelligence and sense of humor, unanimously won over the members of the Search Committee and other school constituents who met with him during the search process. We on the Board can't wait for John's arrival and feel confident that you will be charmed by this dedicated and charismatic person.

John and his wife, Liza, will arrive in early summer with their two children, Nat, age five, and Emily, age three. The Board of Trustees and Search Committee of The Lexington School encourage all of you to stop by and meet John and his family or simply to give them a welcoming telephone call. Let's show the Fixx family that special kind of hospitality for which Lexington is famous.



Tori's Talks

An Interview with Mr. John Fixx

by Eli Zimmerman, in the absence of Tori Thurman*

Q: *What do you hope to accomplish at TLS?*

A: It is early to know that. I intend to take time talking with people to see what teachers and parents *want* the school to accomplish. I don't have any concrete ideas about what the school wants to accomplish. I feel strongly that people need to work together in a collaborative way, to imagine the ways TLS can become stronger and then work together to produce steps to that growth.

Q: Where did you attend school? How did that influence your decision to come to TLS?

A: The first question is simple to answer. The second is probing. I hadn't considered a relationship but I appreciate the chance to respond. I spent the first five years of my education in Jackson Heights, New York which is just outside Manhattan. My father worked as a magazine editor, as his father had done before him. When I was five, we moved to Greenwich, Connecticut where I attended the public schools until I went to college. I think the opportunity to attend a strong independent school, like TLS, is special, and is certainly a gift that I wasn't given. Perhaps then, some of my enthusiasm for committing myself to TLS comes from my eagerness to help young people, including my own children, to learn and explore and to grow in a challenging school environment.

My public education, I should add, was wonderful but because of the large number of students (I had 918 classmates when I graduated from high school) the teachers were not able to stretch us, to tailor their expectations to our individual abilities, as your teachers do each day. From this, a student learns that one's best effort is expected day in and day out.

Q: *What do you think about having a more formal dress code at TLS?*

A: I knew that question was coming, Eli. I have worked in a range of schools, from those with no dress code to those with skirts or dresses for girls, and coats and ties for boys worn *every* day. I know exciting learning took place at all those schools, but I believe that there is some correlation between how we look and dress as people and how diligently we apply ourselves to responsibilities. That said, I would very much follow the teachers' lead as the school considers changes to any program that so directly affects the students.

There is, we all confess, an inevitable tension between what the majority of students want and what the majority of teachers want. Invariably, in every school, students are trying to dress down, while teachers are trying to get them to dress up. In my current school, Country School, some boys try to sneak past with shirts untucked, while girls will wear progressively rattier tee shirts, until a teacher finally calls them on the infraction.

Whatever the dress code is, students and teachers, along with various observations and perspectives from parents, will battle over it at times. I hope TLS has, or soon will have, a dress code that minimizes the friction. I say, minimize, not eliminate, because I think it is natural, and indeed, healthy, for you students to test us. If it becomes a distraction, though, to the learning experience, it has become *too* much.

Q: *Many students are interested in adding sports and clubs here at TLS—what is your opinion?*

A: You have asked me what I think about adding more sports teams, more clubs, perhaps a cheerleading squad to the school program. To that list I might throw in the possibility of more theatre productions, more musical groups and activities such as community service. I add those, not because I am already angling for those expanded programs but because any discussion of introducing a new activity or expanding an existing one needs to take place as part of a broader exploration of what the mission of TLS is and how best to fulfill it.

That is to say, if there is a possibililty of students committing more time to after school, all the possibilities need to be put on the table for discussion and debate. It is important — and I hope to watch Ms. MacCarthy referee a number of these discussions—that the toughest or most persistent five doesn't always prevail but that the program that best serves the students triumphs.

Q: *Overnight class outings are really popular — what about adding more of those?*

A: My response to this question is similar to that about the activities, etc. If the overnight trips take place on Friday and Saturday nights, then I already know I am all for expanding them. If, however, the proposal is for overnight trips during the school week, then I would listen as Ms. MacCarthy leads the Upper School teachers through a discussion of whether time can be carved out of the established curriculum.

Over the recent two or so decades, more information that used to be conveyed at home and more activities that used to be important to families have been transferred into school life.

But schools have been hesitant to jettison—do you know that word?—other programs, so the time during the school day and year has become increasingly compressed. Schools now teach human growth and sexuality. One school I was at taught driver's education. We commit time to community service, and we counsel about drugs, alcohol abuse, family dynamics, etc.

I suppose at some point soon, schools and families should sit together in partnership, step back and collaborate on what properly belongs at home and what is the responsibility of teachers and would welcome that investigation.

Q: *What do you think about purchasing new uniforms for the existing sports teams?*

A: This will sound like a wishy-washy response, but I would trust the Athletic Department to control their own budget and determine when new uniforms were appropriate. Fundamentally, though, interscholastic sports are a huge part of a healthy school spirit, and I would hope that these student ambassadors would always look and act as fine as possible. I love sports. I have always played sports, and I know I will watch many, many games and practices at TLS.

In my former position as Admissions Director at Westminster School, a boarding school in Connecticut, I have heard many of your students speak with pride of their involvement in TLS interscholastic sports. I hope that enthusiasm can even be amplified.

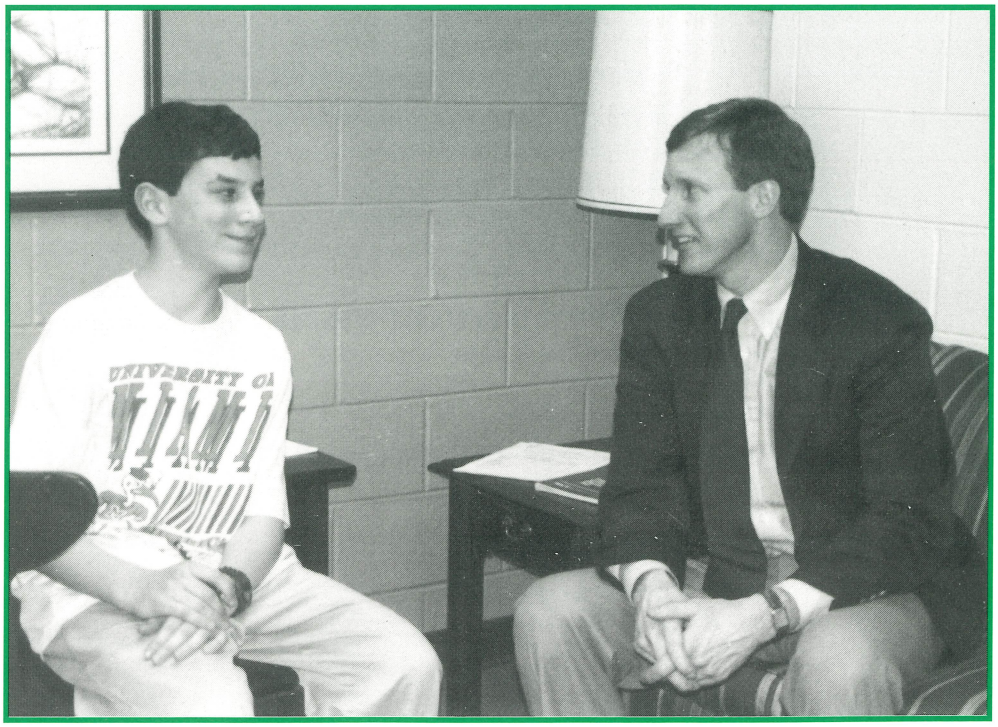
Q: Will your children attend TLS?

A: I certainly hope so. My wife and I are beginning the admissions process with Mrs. Coleman for our son, Nat, who is enjoying kindergarten this year at Country School. If all goes well, he will enter your first grade this September. Our daughter, Emily, will go to another year of nursery school in Lexington and then, we hope, she will enter Mrs. Beer's prekindergarten in September, 1999. My wife and I are very excited about the chance to provide our own children with the same opportunities that you have enjoyed at TLS.

In closing, Eli *and* Tori, I would refer again to your first question which asked about what I hoped to accomplish at TLS. Essentially, I want to help the teachers and parents ensure that the education offered at TLS remains the strongest, most challenging and most supportive in the Lexington area. I want to see that the focus is always on you, the student, and that we are preparing you to thrive in and strengthen a constantly changing world. I want to ensure a civility on campus among the students, among the teachers, among students and teachers, and among teachers and parents.

I am excited and energized by the chance to help your school find ways to do even better what it obviously already does superbly. Thanks for interviewing me, Eli, and thanks to you, Tori, for preparing such thought-provoking questions.

*Eli Zimmerman conducted this interview on March 13 in the absence of regular columnist, Tori Thurman, who prepared the questions. Tori and Eli are eighth grade students at The Lexington School. Both are members of the TLS yearbook staff. Tori contributes as a journalist and darkroom technician. Eli is Managing Editor of the 1998 book.



Eli Zimmerman thoroughly enjoyed interviewing recently appointed Headmaster John Fixx. Mr. Fixx visited Lexington in March to begin looking for a residence for himself and his family.

A publication for parents and friends of The Lexington School
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THE LEXINGTON SCHOOL

CELEBRATION '98

The Dawn of a New Beginning

A Special Welcome to Alumni—Reserve a Table Now

5:30 p.m. — Silent/Live Auction

Keeneland Entertainment Center

Saturday, May 9

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