How Four Became Number One

Converging Lines

The Emerson String Quartet
Risk Books
by Jessica Levine-Pizano ’98

Converging Lines is an appropriate title for the autobiography of the Emerson String Quartet, the Hartt School’s quartet-in-residence for the past 21 years. The four members—Eugene Drucker, violin; Philip Setzer, violin; Lawrence Dutton, viola; and David Finckel, cello—weave the stories of their lives and the convergence of their careers into a story of the world’s preeminent string quartet.

Over the past 25 years the quartet has transformed itself from four separate young musicians into a six-time Grammy Award-winning quartet of international stature. In Converging Lines, each quartet member details his childhood and tells how his life became part of the celebrated quartet that is today known as the Emerson.

Setzer, the son of two musicians who played in the Cleveland Orchestra, grew up with a violin in his hands. “At the age of four I went to my parents and said I wanted to play the violin,” Setzer writes. “My parents said, ‘Well, you’re too young. When you’re five, if you feel the same way, we can try.’ And so, on my fifth birthday, I walked into my parents’ bedroom in the morning and said, ‘I’m five years old. I want to play the violin.’” So began studies that continued through adolescence and took Setzer to Juilliard, where he met Eugene Drucker.

Like Setzer, Drucker grew up in a musical family. His father was a violinist. In order to avoid going to the day camp he had hated the previous year, Drucker began learning to play the violin at the age of eight. His skill grew through music lessons. When he became a student at Juilliard, his path crossed Setzer’s and the Emerson String Quartet began to take shape.

Unlike Setzer and Drucker, Dutton’s musical life started in school, in the public school systems of Long Island. “We were invited to come after school and see the instruments, and I remember the first instrument brought in was the violin. I never went any further,” writes Dutton. His hard work took him to Juilliard’s pre-college division, where he learned to play the viola. Dutton began his college career at Eastman School of Music, where he had been offered a large scholarship. Eventually, his path brought him back to the Juilliard School in New York and to the group that would become the Emerson.

Also born to a musical family, Finckel began his life immersed in music. Unable to imagine another life, “I learned to play an instrument and started teaching, like my father. I didn’t know how to do anything else and never really considered that I would. Never for a moment did I think that I would be anything but a musician for my entire life,” Finckel writes. Attending college distracted him from his lessons with Mstislav Rostropovich, so he left school after one year and eventually moved to New York City, where he first met the other members of the Emerson.

After performing with several different violists and cellists, the quartet came together as the Emerson String Quartet we know today. The book, conversational in tone, follows the history of the quartet and tells stories of the members’ experiences, individually and collectively.

All revenue from the book, published by the Risk Waters Group, will go to the Risk Waters World Trade Center Foundation. To purchase the book online, visit <www.emersonquartet.com>. 
‘Kenny’s Program’
Is Now a Model for
the Nation

Conflicts Resolution: A
Blueprint for Preventing
School Violence

Kenneth Gwozdz ’70, ’76; Mary
Meggie; and Steven W. Edwards
The Solomon Press

by Margaret Wilthey

Bullying, fights, and drug use in public schools had been increasing for 20 years, a situation known to school personnel and guessed by others. Then came the shootings and killings of the 1990s and 2001. Media attention focused on violent incidents in urban and suburban schools coast to coast and abroad. The silence had been broken. The general public now knew the depth and breadth of violence on school campuses. Neither school officials nor anyone else could turn away from the fact that schools had been unable to control lesser violence and had been unprepared for the killings.

While new get-tough programs to control drugs and weapons were necessary for school safety, they were not enough. Enter grass roots efforts by communities to face up to violence in their own schools. USA Today with corporate help launched a national recognition program to identify programs that worked. From thousands of applicants, only seven were chosen on the basis of their success locally and their ability to serve as models for other school districts. In 1996, the Student Assistance Center of East Hartford (Conn.) High School, developed and implemented by Kenneth Gwozdz ’70, ’76, was a national winner, receiving a Community Solutions Award. The book

Conflicts Resolution: A Blueprint for Preventing School Violence, a detailed description of the East Hartford High School program and a precise instruction manual for other schools. Gwozdz is co-author of the book with Steven Edwards, former principal of East Hartford High School, and Mary Meggie, professional development coordinator at the school. In addition to being founder and director of the Student Assistance Center (SAC) known in town as “Kenny’s program,” Gwozdz was responsible for student activity programs and alternative education.

Helping other “at risk” districts has become a mission for Gwozdz. As Conflicts Resolution makes clear, success depends on involving the entire community. “Without everyone’s help, we don’t exist,” Gwozdz has said. Politicians, law enforcement personnel, the clergy, and others with a stake in the results serve voluntarily on the steering committee. In addition to the director, the SAC is staffed by graduate interns and teacher volunteers.

The backbone of the program, however, is student involvement, primarily through the SAC, whose purpose is to “help students reach their learning potential safely and peacefully.” Peer mediation is the method of choice in order to “solve conflicts before they become violent.”

Statistics tell part of the success story of this remarkable program. According to Gwozdz, the success began almost immediately. Detentions and suspensions dropped from 2,570 to 1,438 in the first year. Despite a rise in school population from 1,400 to 2,400, disruptive acts dropped 44 percent. Class-cutting and truancy dropped 70 percent in the first two years. Instances of physical violence have continued to be reduced by 35 percent. The dropout rate is down to 3 percent. Since 1993, the number of students involved in the SAC has grown to over 12,000.

Gwozdz has been on staff at East Hartford High since 1972. He has been a teacher, coach, activities director, department chair, and interim assistant principal. As director of the SAC and ancillary programs, he runs current programs, plans new ones, develops the budget, writes grants, and interviews staff. He also represents the program in the community and serves on the boards of youth services organizations including, among others, the Child Plan, the YMCA Teen Center, and Partners in Business. He is the voice of the program in reaching out to other school districts. East Hartford High School has had 500 on-site visits and 2,000 inquiries from other school systems. Thousands of copies of Conflicts Resolution have been distributed.

When Gwozdz was a student at the University, a newspaper article called him “Mr. Everything.” He starred on the baseball and basketball teams and set a new record for most rebounds in one season. He was an All-American honorable mention for small colleges. He was inducted into the hall of fame of Enfield, his home town, and into the University of Hartford Athletic Hall of Fame. He received both his bachelor and master’s degrees from the University.

As an educator, Gwozdz has achieved and continues to work toward other kinds of goals. In the words of Conflicts Resolution, “To teach children, schools must first be able to reach them.” To achieve this goal of teaching and learning, “We must continue to empower youth.” Gwozdz now devotes much of his considerable energy to perpetuating the success of the East Hartford Student Assistance Center and to carrying its message of violence prevention to schools throughout the country.

Copies of Conflicts Resolution: A Blueprint for Preventing School Violence may be purchased from The Solomon Press, 98-12 66th Ave., Suite #2, Rego Park, NY 11374; phone, 718-830-9112; fax, 718-830-0351. Copies are $16.95 each, plus $3 for shipping and handling. For orders of 10 copies or more, there is a 10 percent discount.