

TO EXETER, WITH LOVE | By Eva Glasrud '05



Eva Glasrud '05 at her Exeter commencement

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We had to be in by 10 on Friday nights ... as seniors.

We went to church on dates. Frequently.

We survived frostbite advisories, dickies, sevens, 333’s and the general absurdity that was Phillips Exeter Academy. And somehow, we still loved it.

These are the words that greet me as I click on the link to a website entitled *Go Ahead and Dick Me: Exonians at Stanford*. It’s an online group I joined shortly after I arrived at college last year, and I have visited it often.

This is not to say that I don’t love college—I do! It’s just that the longer I am away from Exeter, the more I miss it. At first, I would remember the more romantic things: looking at the stars on those walks back from the music building—quick, before the ten o’clock bell rings; bridge jumping on the first snow; climbing the tree on the library lawn; bike rides to the beach. What didn’t we do back then?

I still think about those things, but now the more subtle wonders of Exeter have started to resurface in my mind. One of the things I find I miss the most is the Exeter faculty. They were truly amazing, and I do everything I can to stay in touch with as many of them as possible.

During my first year of college, I took a really great Introduction to Humanities class. Though I did not really like the course materials, I loved the professor, whose lectures never ceased to amaze me. One day at lunch, I realized that I’d never even spoken with this professor. Wanting to change this, I asked one of the guys at my table, “So, how exactly does one get to know the professors here? Is it O.K. for me to, say, ask one out to coffee or lunch?”

The guy looked at me in silence for a while, before responding quietly, “That would be so weird.”

His response reminded me of a different lunch conversation, one I had with a dorm-mate my lower year at Exeter. “Why,” I asked her, “are our teachers so good?”

She answered, “Because most of them are qualified to teach at any university they want, but they choose to teach here at Exeter, so they can experience that small, intimate classroom interaction that is Harkness.”

She was exactly right. Teachers want to teach at Exeter because they want to get to know each of their students, to make sure that each of us is learning and thriving in such a rigorous academic environment. If I ever needed extra help, as I did from time to time in math, I had only to ask. I would be invited over to that teacher’s apartment, served cookies and milk, and given the chance to review all the concepts I was struggling over with someone who truly knew what he or she was talking about. Calling a teacher at home with a question was by no means weird, and it was hard to fall too far behind, even if you got sick and missed a few classes.

But perhaps equally important, my teachers were my friends. In my years at Exeter, I was late to a lot of my classes. At the time, I didn’t understand why—it’s not like I was walking really slowly or lollygagging on the way. In retrospect, I realize it was because after every class, I would spend five or 10 minutes talking with my teacher. Sometimes, we even talked about school stuff. Exeter teachers would come to my basketball games, and I felt comfortable talking to them about their lives. These are some of the people I miss most from my high school years.

I also miss the general feel of Exeter. All the discussion about *non sibi* and “knowledge without goodness,” was not just talk. People at Exeter were polite and considerate. I can’t count the number of people I met there who would drop everything in a heartbeat to help out a friend, acquaintance or stranger with any issue they were having. I can’t count the number of times I myself did this, expecting nothing in return, because helping out is just what we did at Exeter. You never didn’t hear “please” and “thank you” and “excuse me,” and I always got hit by a door or two the first day I left campus to travel elsewhere in New England—I was so sure the person in front of me would hold it, then *bam!* *(continued on page 107)*

Finis Origine Pendet

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At the opening assembly of every school year, Principal Tingley would remind us that we should always wave to the cars that stopped for us when we crossed the street, adding that if we ever saw him cross the street without waving, he would buy enough Ben & Jerry's ice cream and toppings for the whole school to have an ice cream party. Obviously, there was a lot at stake for him, so this didn't happen very often. But one weekend during my upper year, Principal Tingley made a daytrip into Boston on the same weekend that the Exeter symphonic choir had a performance in a Boston concert hall. Coincidentally, the choir's bus happened pulled up to a crosswalk just as Principal Tingley was crossing the street. In his haste, he did not wave to the bus. As he stepped onto the sidewalk, he heard a familiar voice yell, "Principal Tingley! You didn't wave!"

Though the incident took place off campus, in a big city (and Principal Tingley made sure we all knew this), we nevertheless ended up having an all-campus ice cream party. I never really got over this, the fact that it was so important to our faculty not just to give us the tools to conquer the world, but also to remind us to stop and thank those around us, to do good deeds and be good people. That knowledge without goodness is dangerous.

So I was surprised to learn that Exeter wasn't always like this. According to a book on the school's history that I bought my lower year at the campus bookstore, the old cliché used to be that "Exeter is not a warm nest." In the years since, the nest has obviously gotten a lot warmer, particularly in the dorms. Indeed, I

always felt that dorm life at Exeter was somehow magical. It's hard to explain the closeness that we felt with our dorms, or the personality that each dorm came to have. By the end of each academic year, I could pretty much tell by talking to someone exactly which dorm he or she lived in. Exonians are at least as busy as Stanfordians, but somehow—in spite of lights-out for underclassmen and four hours of nightly homework and all of our sports and clubs and commitments—we still had so much time for each other. Or maybe it wasn't so much time, as energy. Even a quick, five-minute interaction in Langdell Hall could sometimes feel as meaningful as a call home.

This is something I thought college dorm-life would easily emulate. However, even by the end of my first year, there were people in my dorm whose names I didn't know. We have a lot of funds to subsidize dorm trips and dinners and games, and each time I attend one, I leave thinking, "It was nice to meet you all. I'll see you next term." For some reason, there just isn't the same connection here that I found at Exeter, and it is a connection that I really miss.

What else do I miss? Exeter boys. They always looked so nice in their ties and jackets, like little businessmen. College boys just don't dress like that. When I ride my bike around campus on a school day, I look around at the other bikers and think, "There sure are a lot of people on their way to the gym right now." But then I realize that they're actually on their way to class, and the sweatpants and T-shirts they are wearing are their daily attire. This always catches me by surprise—it never occurs to me that a boy without a tie could be going anywhere but to work out, and

I still can't imagine going to class in anything less than a blouse and nice slacks.

I also miss my classics teachers. Though the entire Exeter faculty is incredible, there is still something...*different* about the classics teachers. Not in a bad way, just a... *different* way. On my first day of Latin my prep year, Mr. Morante threatened to rip a girl's tongue out for chewing gum during class. On Valentine's Day of that year, Miss Otenti came into class wearing all black and bearing a quiz whose text was in the shape of a broken heart. I got a 10 percent on that quiz, and mine was the high score. Then I started taking Greek, and instantly realized it was 10 times harder than Latin. But in general, I loved the traditional, refined education that I was receiving, and reminded myself before each test, "*Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.*" And frankly, knowing Latin and Greek in this day and age never fails to blow a professor out of the water. Except for once, when one of my professors learned that I was reading *The Odyssey* for his class in the original Greek. He simply looked at me and said, "You must have gone to Exeter."

And I miss Harkness, which played a huge role in my Exeter education. I loved the discussions we had in every class, including math. Before Exeter, I hadn't realized math could be a discussion-based class. Harkness was such a unique way to learn—it was engaging, and it forced you to push what you knew to entirely new levels. On many of my tests, I was asked questions that I wasn't expected to know how to solve. By building on the concepts I did know, I was usually able to reach a solution to something I knew to be a college-level problem, or to make a new insight that wasn't cov-

ered in the reading. Even now, in everything from discussion-based classes to simple, everyday conversations and dinner-table debates, people note that there is something distinct about the way I listen and respond to those around me. Basically, Harkness provided me with tools that I still use today, and that I know will help me for the rest of my life.

Finally, I miss assemblies. Some of the defining moments of my Exeter experience happened there, in the Assembly Hall on Monday, Tuesday and Friday mornings. Eventually I became very attached to the room itself, so much so that during my senior year, when people would ask me where I wanted to hang out or where we should go to play our guitars, I would longingly answer, "The Assembly Hall."

One of my favorite assemblies was given by a woman named Granny D., who had walked all the way across the country, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, when she was almost 90 to raise awareness about campaign finance reform. When she came to Exeter, it was with a very important message: she said that you need to fall in love.

There was a time when my response would have been, "Love? Ew!" But because of my experiences at Exeter, I knew exactly what she meant. I knew, because I was in love. In love with my dorm, in love with my friends, in love with my teachers and my coaches and all of the things I was learning. In love with the campus and the woods and the river and the playing fields. In love with the theater and the new science building and the library. In love with my alma mater, Phillips Exeter, which has given me so much it's hard for me to imagine how I might ever repay her. Thank you.