

MY DAY IN THE LIFE OF SEYMOUR HERSH | By Liani Balasuriya '07

There I was in *The Exonian* office, peering over Seymour Hersh's shoulder (with his permission) as he responded to his email. What I saw made me gape: boldface subject headings and email senders that read "From the CIA," "What You Really Want to Know about Khomeini," and French words that I didn't understand. Mr. Hersh nonchalantly deleted many seemingly important emails, saying he "wasn't interested." However, when he spied a link to some information about the Israeli government, his excitement was evident. "Just wait till you get a look at this!" he said. Unfortunately, the link wouldn't open.

The empty newsroom was strewn with papers and uncapped pens; a dozen computer monitors, their screens filled with still-open files, rested after much abuse from staff members. Mr. Hersh, now 70, seemed right at home in this orderly chaos. His fingers pounded the keyboard as if he were playing an up-tempo piano piece. Like *Exonian* staffers rushing to close that week's paper, he seemed to thrive on some kind of existential deadline, a permanent journalistic "high."

The Exonian had invited Mr. Hersh, perhaps America's premier investigative journalist, to give a public lecture on February 1. He spent the day at the Academy, meeting with history teacher Andrew Hertig's War and Peace class and with student journalists. Mr. Hersh also had dinner at the Principal's House with Mr. and Mrs. Tingley, faculty from the history department and former and current executive board members of *The Exonian*. He managed to seem both relaxed and extremely alert, as he shared personal anecdotes from his career, including his experiences with inside sources at the Pentagon and with the soldiers who took part in the My Lai massacre. It was clear he was a man who did his research, and I was in awe of how much he knew.

Immediately afterwards, Mr. Hersh delivered a lecture in the Assembly Hall, entitled "American Foreign Policy." His presentation style could be characterized as energetic rambling, yet he somehow managed to connect all of his personal accounts of flawed, even corrupt policy decisions in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East into a larger portrait of American foreign policy. While his bleak assessment left the audience in a somber mood, his own example of the necessity of soldiering on was uplifting.

Throughout the day, Mr. Hersh emanated enthusiasm, charisma and passion. Although he is reputed to be harsh when working on deadline with an editor, during the Q&A sessions, he kept encouraging students to drill him with questions. Later that night I asked Mr. Hersh how he prepared for interviews. "Read before you write," he replied, meaning always do some research on your subject, and also be sure to tell the person something they don't know. (Following that advice, I found it fascinating that Mr. Hersh, a best-selling author and Pulitzer Prize winner, flunked out of law school.)

Planning for Mr. Hersh's visit began last summer and involved a lot of teamwork, between members of *The Exonian* staff; our adviser, Mr. Golay; and Exeter's communications office. In addition to its own speakers' fund, *The Exonian* received financial support from the Day Fund, Friends of the Library and the Principal's Office. The success of the lecture within the greater Exeter community motivated *The Exonian* to make this an annual event; the 129th *Exonian* Board has already begun planning next year's talk—and it's not even summer yet!



BRIAN CROWLEY

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh (right, with Liani Balasuriya and history instructor and Exonian adviser Michael Golay) spent a day at Exeter at the invitation of The Exonian, meeting with student journalists and delivering a public lecture on American foreign policy.

Liani Balasuriya '07 was director of content for the 128th Exonian Board.