

WHY 'THE EXONIAN'?

By Lois Beckett '05



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Thursday mornings I wake up while it's still dark. In five minutes I'm dressed and calling security to open *The Exonian* office. The campus is silent as I pass the Academy Building and turn towards the Davis Student Center. There are no cars to wave to as I cross Front Street. Often, it's so early that I can see the three stars of Orion's Belt, silent and still in the sky above me.

For two years I have half-listened to my footsteps and the creaking of my overfilled shoulder bag. My mind is already in the office. I go over the corrections that need to be made on each section or think of how to rephrase an awkward front-page lead.

Looking back on working for *The Exonian*, that quiet walk will be what I remember most. More than that satisfying mental click during an interview when I realize what the lead of my article should be, more than the afternoons of debating politics and scribbling funny quotes on the office walls, more than the dash to print out pages or the tense phone calls Wednesday night, that walk is symbolic of what *The Exonian* has meant to me.

When people ask, "Why do you work for *The Exonian*?" I have no easy answer. I love writing, but I could have written more articles if I had not become involved with the week-to-week production of the paper. The thrill of seeing my byline on the front page or my name on the masthead faded fast. Working in a small room with a large number of people with strong, conflicting visions of where the paper should go can be rewarding, but it's not easy.

But working for *The Exonian* has given me an understanding of what real life is like. My work for the paper is not graded, and I rarely receive feedback. When I do, it's usually because something's gone wrong. And, unlike a test or paper, the quality of my work on *The Exonian* does not just affect me, but has a wider impact on the Academy community. That impact can as easily be negative as positive. I have more goals for the paper than can ever be accomplished. No matter how hard I work, there is always more to be done. I must accept failure as inevitable and realize that it is the attempt that matters.

Exeter used to be a much harsher place. Students have more encouragement now, and there's a supportive community upon which they can rely. This is all good. But it is possible to overemphasize happiness. A crucial part of an Exeter education is forcing yourself far beyond your comfort zone. That does not mean little failures, like the bad math grade prep year I thought was the end of the world. It means failing at what you care most about, failing irrevocably, and getting up and continuing on. It means never being as strong, or articulate, or focused, or as good a leader as you need to be. It means testing your beliefs, your attitudes, your priorities, and how you see yourself as a person against your complete opposites, and realizing they may sometimes be right. It means figuring out how to interact with them in a way that satisfies you and allows you to respect each other.

None of this is possible without sacrifice: of free time, of sleep, of the ability to concentrate on other things. For me, homework has served as a break from *The Exonian*; history assignments have been soothing, the conflicts in the readings already decided, easy to interpret, calmed by centuries. It has not been fair to my teachers or classmates that some days, no matter how lively the discussion, I have had to struggle to stay awake. But an Exeter education is supposed to teach knowledge and goodness and to inspire passion and dedication. These cannot be learned only in class.

Some people discover a feeling of absolute focus in crew. Others feel most fulfilled when they dance. That's what I've found on those cold walks to *The Exonian*: a sense of purpose. Other concerns fall away; for a few hours, *The Exonian* is all that matters. When John Phillips said that the Academy should teach "the great end and the real business of living," this, I think, is what he meant. And if that were the only thing I had learned in the past three years, it would be more than enough. ●

Lois Beckett '05 was, together with Jennifer Stebbins '05, editor-in-chief of the 126th *Exonian* Board.