

PERSONAL HISTORY | By George Bain '69

Anyone who's ever sat at a Harkness table knows there's nowhere to hide. There are no secrets among the students. And 35 years later, there still are no secrets. Want to know how I did in my History 6 class as a senior? The answer is there on a shelf to the right side of the door into Jack Herney's classroom in the Academy Building basement.

Like several of the faculty, Jack saves his grade books, all the way back to his first year at Exeter, the fall of 1968, my senior year. These thin red volumes are stamped on the cover "Phillips Exeter Academy."

Jack had graduated from Dartmouth in 1965. The first class he entered in his first grade book was History 6, Modern European History, with names of 10 members of the class of 1969. It met at 11:10 a.m. It says so on the cover sheet of a paper I turned in on November 27, 1968, called "Anglo-French Relations Concerning the English Channel, 1903-1914." I got a C+. The book shows every grade Jack gave in the class: papers, tests, the final mark. I, not one to advance, finished with a C+.

The highest final grade was a B+. It went to Phil Mease, who uttered the only phrase I recall from those classroom discussions: "burgeoning nationalism." As I remember, the topic was the revolution of 1848, though Jack says it was the causes of World War I.

Looking at that grade book page 35 years later, Jack says he can still picture where each of us sat around the table. It's not, he adds, an unusual trait: Many faculty members can remember names and faces from their earliest years at Exeter. But when Jack sees a student from a year or two ago on an Academy path, he might remember the person was in his class but can't always pinpoint the name.

Jack's expansive classroom boasts three windows overlooking Phillips Hall and the Academic Quad. He opens every class by picking up his *New York Times* and reviewing the front-page headlines, which may be as close as some students ever get to a daily newspaper. I don't remember that from 1968, but some of his other teaching techniques persist.

Because not all of our class could return to Exeter for our 35th reunion in May, several of us held an online reunion, sharing some impressions. Bill Kelly, a program manager at Intel Corp. in Santa Clara, CA, recalls, "When I took my son on a tour of the Academy Building a couple years back

and showed him our history classroom, he asked, 'Was that the teacher who pulled down the maps over the blackboard?' When he was younger and complained about history class being boring, I'd told him about the best history teacher I'd ever had and how he would write notes on the board, cover them with the maps, then wait for the class discussion to reach those issues. Sometimes we'd follow his line of thought and most maps would go up; other times many would remain down as we went off on our own tangents."

Jack admits he still uses the map trick, "not often, but occasionally."

Steve Hendel, a partner at Hess Energy Trading Company in New York City, remembers the first book we used: "Lewis Namier's short (but unreadable and incomprehensible) study of the revolution of 1848. I asked Jack recently whether he really did have us read that book and then write a

paper on it in our first class, a distant memory/nightmare I periodically dredged up but could not quite believe really happened. Jack confirmed it was indeed the first assignment, an experiment that he and Steve Smith (who taught the other section) concluded was a dismal failure." (The grade book reveals the grades Jack gave on that paper were all in the C range.)

Colin Quigley, who divides his time between heading UCLA's new Ph.D. program in culture and performance studies and directing the university's Budapest Education Abroad Program, says the Harkness method "absolutely shaped my whole educational philosophy and practice since." He continues: "Our European history course must have laid down good foundations. After discovering Eastern Europe shortly after 1989 and following my enthusiasm into extended work in Romania, Transylvania and Hungary, I went on a multiyear Central European literature binge. English translators are still working their way into some of these literatures—especially Hungarian, in which there is much worth reading." He is now writing on the performance of traditional music and dance in Transylvania.

Phil Mease, a physician specializing in rheumatology in Seattle, says he can't recall his paper topics or his grade. "However, I vividly remember Jack Herney and that class, which I loved and which showed me what learning could be about! I do a lot of teaching and consulting now, unfortunately often in the form of lectures in large symposia to

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A very special reunion: Steve Hendel (left) and George Bain (center), both class of '69 and both members of Jack Herney's first Modern European History course, visit with their former instructor during their 35th reunion in May.

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fellow physicians. But when I have the opportunity to be in smaller groups, I much prefer the Socratic approach used around the Harkness table. When we came to the 25th reunion, my wife, a clinical psychologist specializing in adolescents and families, attended a class of Jack's and came away thrilled with the quality of the experience."

Thirty-five years later, Jack says, we'd still recognize his teaching style: "I think the kids are similarly bright and responsible and lively. And since they haven't changed all that much, I haven't seen much need to change."

What has changed, he explains, are the course demands on students. "Seniors and uppers have more courses they have to take (five every term, instead of five and four as uppers and four and four as seniors), so our upper-level courses, such as the one you took, have to be somewhat less ambitious than they were. In addition, we have terms, not semesters, so courses are shorter. Thus we

don't have the luxury of assigning as many monographs and really challenging texts as we used to. Sure wish we did, because I enjoyed teaching that kind of history, Namier's *Revolution of the Intellectuals* aside.

"One way my teaching is the same: I tend to ask very open-ended and analytical questions in those upper-level courses, leaving the students the chore of defining the question, as well as coming up with the answer. In that way we often stay on the same issue for the whole class."

Some of the book titles from 1968 remain. The current course that's the equivalent of History 6 is a senior elective called "World War and Modern Society: Europe 1890–1945." Says Jack, "It has a reading list from which the kids must pick one book to



Jack Herney's original grade book for History 6. Says Bain: "Every Exonian treasures the careful criticism and attention of teachers like Jack Herney."

read outside the regular assignments during the course of the term and interestingly it includes both the William Sheridan Allen book, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, and Barbara Tuchman's *The Proud Tower*."

My copies of those books remain on a shelf next to this desk. In a folder I retain two papers from Jack's course. The paper on the English Channel was handwritten. The second one, typed (I must have paid someone to do that, for I didn't learn to type until an elective in spring term of senior year) and dated March 16, 1969, was "Crisis in European Diplomacy: Problems With the Anglo-German Naval Agreement."

Almost every page contains several comments from Jack in pen. Attached to the final page is Jack's typed critique, close to a page in length. Rereading it now, 35 years later, I marvel at Jack's thoroughness and at his ability to both challenge and encourage me. He ended with the paper's grade, in pencil, circled: B. Every Exonian treasures the careful criticism and attention of teachers like Jack Herney. Many of us do so for the rest of our lives. ●

George Bain is an editor with The Post-Standard in Syracuse, NY. Besides Steve Hendel, Bill Kelly, Phil Mease and Colin Quigley, the other members of the History 6 class were Al Ferrin, a real estate president in Seattle; Brad Gross, a screenwriter in Los Angeles; Bill Phillips, a lawyer in New York; Tom Siebens, a lawyer in London; and Charlie Trueheart, a writer in Paris.

A CLOSE AND CAREFUL READER

Here, in its entirety (and with a few typos), is the critique Jack Herney wrote of my final History 6 paper. I doubt any of my college papers elicited so detailed a response from a professor, and I suspect it will make alumni/ae recall similar experiences with their own instructors at the Academy. They make Exeter what it is.

"Throughout this you refer to German diplomats and say that because they wanted peace Germany in this period wanted peace. There therefore is the question of how much power the German diplomats with respect to foreign policy. Hitler after all is really German foreign policy and not the ministers. For instance Neurath is removed by Hitler subsequent to this. No doubt Hitler and the Germans wanted peace then, as there was no alternative, given the strength of Germany's military power. Yet Hitler never conceived of the treaty being a lasting one. He had designs precluding that possibility. So it really is a question of what Hitler wanted and in the long run he wants war and this is a good way to stall the military buildup of others until Germany was ready.

"It would have been good to take this back a bit further. Germany, after all, withdraws from the world disarmament conference in '33. This would have a great deal of impact on the British and this impact would help explain their action in '35. Likewise the March announcement and the British reaction would help explain things. There certainly is need to explain the British mentality concerning this action.

"A description of the old system could help to set up the whole paper. Then we would see the changes unfolding as they do. Also you refer to the new system and there really isn't much explanation of what that is.

"You might have used some statistics to prove the point you are making about the arms race that follows the treaty. That would have driven home the point well.

"What does Cole have to say about Laval and his position. It would have been good to obtain more sources to explain his attitude, since these are the main characters (Laval and Hoare). Perhaps the Cole does not do him justice.

"This is an interesting paper—and well-written. The material on the Hoare-Laval communications is especially interesting. It gives a good insight into how foreign policy works—the sleight of hand and all the rest. That is really fascinating stuff."

—G.B.