

A frog jumps Into the old pond Kerplunk.*

TWO COLLEAGUES PAY TRIBUTE TO THE WIDMER ERA

MIXED METAPHORS AND WIDMER SPACES

BY SUZANNE HANNAY, ENGLISH TEACHER

"NO, THAT'S *YOUR PLACE*," you said firmly, pointing to the space at the head of the table, right next to the chair in which you were about to settle yourself. "You are chairing this meeting."

How typical of you, as I would learn over the next 11 years. You had asked me to co-chair the committee with you, and I had been honored at the thought of such a wonderful opportunity to work for Deerfield at the side of the headmaster. But as so many things go at Deerfield, in the subsequent months, there had been little time for us to talk through how we would coordinate the Bicentennial Educational Initiatives Committee. Throughout the spring and summer, I pattered away with educational journals and the list of committee members you had selected for this pivotal committee meeting. I'd written reams of notes to give to you and I'd come up with outlines and schemes that seemed promising at the time. But now it was opening

meeting, and as we gathered together in the library with the greatest "talking heads" in education, I was relieved to know that we were starting on a cooperative venture.

There are those who would say that you were thoughtless in this abrupt shift in plans—whimsical, even unpredictable. I suppose these and other thoughts must have roared through my mind in the half-second of panic as I sat down in the space you'd designated for me. I looked over at you with my best facial messaging of "Help me!" But you just sat down in the chair next to me and smiled.

I don't remember exactly what happened in the opening minutes of that meeting. Probably something like "Welcome...we are honored to have you in our midst and..." slipped out as I tried to focus on those notes, on that outline. But as my heartbeat returned to something of a regular rhythm and my breathing resumed a gentle pattern of in and

out, and my brain righted itself in my skull—somewhere in the minutes that spun out in front of me, I became aware that the voices in the room were in a healthy exchange of observations and comments, that the earth was still rotating on its axis, that God was probably still in His Heaven somewhere, and that I seemed to be managing to navigate the tricky surges of current in and around the room. I was chairing this meeting.

I live in a world of metaphors and fiction and poetic license, and the result is that I spend an inordinate amount of time seeing figurative connections between things. I have never forgotten the exhilaration of that day. Since that afternoon, when you unexpectedly pushed me into that space, I have been aware, over and over again, of this gesture of yours—this sink or swim/do or die launching off the diving board and into the current—as more than just a quirky irregularity in work style. To me, this ex-

* Eric Widmer's translation of Matsuo Basho's haiku as published in the letter announcing his retirement, May 2004.



Oil on canvas, John Martin, 2006



A yearlong series of goodbyes included a Trustee bike brigade and the gift of a frog weathervane to adorn Harold Webster Smith Dormitory.

presses your vision of others. Many just roll their eyes at the dangerous spontaneity you have so often exhibited. You, on the other hand, enjoy a level of optimism, a faith that comes perhaps from a gift of recognizing more in others than we might imagine. How like a great teacher to recognize an undiscovered something in a youngster of any age and to bring that something out by giving it a space in which to grow.

In a school that doesn't take kindly to change in any form, the next best approach may be simply to make space for something to happen. You have an eye for invention and renewal that this school will enjoy for years to come. For the 12 years you have been at Deerfield, you have created spaces where things did happen—unexpected things and small miracles of trust in an outcome yet to be imagined. You made space in the curriculum that in time produced "River, Valley, Rock" and the Cambridge Seminar. Soon there was space for Chinese to flourish and then for Arabic to take root. You made a space in our busy lives for community service and the tireless peo-

ple who guided us in a new mode of activity that transformed our relationship with our neighbors. You made a space for technology on campus that has gradually forced even the Luddites in our midst to get on a bandwagon rolling into the 21st century. And coming on the western horizon, the Koch Center glows in the darkened space beyond the Boyden Library.

Even houses reflect your ingenuity. There's the old Hitchcock Dormitory that has taken on a new life as the Academy Bookstore right in the middle of campus. All hours of the day and evening, students and faculty and staff meet in the old wood-paneled rooms between the aisles of books and antique harvest tables holding baskets of pens and pencils. A student lingers in the arm chair thumbing through the pages of his next novel while two others contemplate in which colorful journal they will write. Ephraim Williams across the lawn tries to maintain its dignity as the home of the Alumni and Development Offices, but the cozy living room in winter is full of students and teachers gathered around

the fire in the hearth, talking about philosophy or equations or the latest I-pod. In other seasons, you can hear the muffled voices from tea and coffee makers where everyone gathers on the way to somewhere else. The Manse, quiet and serene behind the roses and the picket fence, welcomes everyone under its garden tent or into its kitchen where we've gathered to create Indian extravaganzas under Meera's clear directions. In the spring, the *Albany Road* salon invades your home and invites student artists of every description. Anyone walking by on that May evening would marvel at the sound of laughter and singing, voices in verse or prose or song ringing from your house.

Now it is history. ■

God stand between you and harm in all the distant empty places you must travel.

—Ancient Egyptian prayer

Rabinna ma'ak, wa tisafer bissalama, nishoofak ala kheir.

—Traditional Arabic prayer for those who journey

A TRIBUTE TO AND MILD STIR-FRYING OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FOIBLES OF ONE ERIC WIDMER IN INVERSE TIME LITANY FORM

BY RICHARD A. BONANNO, THE DEAN OF THE FACULTY

MEMORY IS TRICKY! Because we live our lives day to day, change over longer spans of time is often masked by our daily experience. Thus to appreciate the accomplishments of the Widmer Era and to highlight the uniqueness of our headmaster as well, I propose to load you all into a Time Machine and take you back to what I will call B.E.W. Before Eric Widmer...that is before 1994 of the common era...

B.E.W. there was

- No Dance Studio
- No Jim Smith Football Field
- No Ephraim Williams Alumni House
- No Heritage Day
- No community service
- No substantial crew program
- No Boat House
- No COLOR! in *The Scroll*

B.E.W. there was

- No opera sung at the Christmas party
- No charades
- No costume parties
- No shredder in the Mailroom
- No telephones in student rooms
- No Internet...I know Al Gore has taken credit for that, but Eric did extend its reach to Deerfield...

Before 1994 there was

- No John Louis Dormitory
- No Louis Marx Dormitory
- No Lynch House Dormitory
- No Harold Webster Smith Dormitory
- No Pocumtuck IV Dormitory
- No endless red brick walks
- No South Fields

- No air-conditioned Dining Hall.

Over a dozen years ago there was

- No Headmaster's Trio to play Brahms
- No bagpipes
- No *H.M.S. Pinafore*—oops, he never did get his Gilbert & Sullivan...so at least one challenge remains for Eric to achieve at King's Academy.

In the time before Eric Widmer there were

- No annual review of the history of senior pranks
- No W.I.G.—the Widmer Inverted Gauntlet—the only known human creation to defy the laws of Euclidean geometry
- No kings at graduation
- No presidents at graduation

B.E.W. there were

- No "Salons" at the Manse
- No record-setting capital campaign
- No portrait of David Pynchon in the Caswell
- No STEP Program
- No Step Team
- No Deerfield website
- No Deerfield Academy Press
- No fires in the Main School Building all winter long
- No Admission wait list *longer* than the actual admit list

B.E.W. there was

- No Chinese
- No Arabic
- No Wilson Fellows
- No *Festschrift*—thank you for teaching us the meaning of that word!

- No elevator in the Main School Building
- No Chapin...now Bewkes House
- No bookstore
- No students from Nepal, India, South Africa, Botswana, Kenya, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, Peru, Uruguay, Afghanistan, Croatia, Dominica, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, China, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, and South Korea... Eric has taken us around the world
- No grammar lessons at School Meeting

B.E.W there were

- No massive, furry cats stalking the Manse grounds
- No appeals to the football coach to resurrect the "Statue of Liberty Play"
- No "Woody" ambling about campus
- No Koch Center
- No lamb chops, smoked lamb, rotisserie lamb, grilled lamb, leg of lamb, rack of lamb, lamb loin, marinated lamb, lamb kebabs...try to say that quickly. Over these years Eric controlled the sheep populations of three continents...

And finally, B.E.W. there was

- No Headmaster with funny hat perched crookedly on head riding unsteadily on his bicycle all around campus!

What a remarkable set of accomplishments during your tenure, Eric... Thank you for being that guy with the funny hat on that unsteady bicycle. As with Mr. Boyden, many of these vignettes will live on in the stories Deerfield faculty and staff will tell of the E.E.W.—the ERA of Eric Widmer. ■