

NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE

By Sara Hoagland Hunter '76

I thought I was leaving Dartmouth on June 13th, 1976. It was a perfect day for closure. The graduation flags waved as we hugged each other, cried, and went out into the world determined to follow President Kemeny's behest, "Men and Women of Dartmouth, all mankind is your brother, and you are your brother's keeper." I hit the open road in my Chevy Vega with Paul Simon's "Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover" cranked as high as my delusions of departure. Little did I know that a giant, invisible bungee cord from the Motherland was permanently hitched to my wagon. Since then, I've felt like Groucho's Captain Spalding trapped in an endless chorus of "Hello, I must be going."

First came the string of Dartmouth weddings in the Bema, in Rollins, in the White Church, in New York, in Boston, in California. (More than 100 of us '76ers married each other or other Dartmouth students.) Then came the invitation to serve on the Alumni Council: "You will be one of the first women ever to..." (didn't hear the rest - flattered, hooked, reeled in without a struggle). Next were admissions interviews, fund raising, and later, videos and language instruction for John Rassias. (How do you refuse a job offer from a favorite professor when he's kneeling in front of you with his hand on his heart?) So, when the call came two years ago to serve as Editor of our 25th Reunion book, I suffered the usual sinking feelings of inevitability. I sputtered. I muttered. I explained how important and busy I was with life after Dartmouth. Then I do what I always do; I caved.

Witnessing the moaning and hand wringing after I hung up the phone, my son took advantage of my weakened state and asked for a mound of money and a ride to the mall. In response to my incredulous look, he observed, "If I were from Dartmouth, you'd say yes." My husband, a UNC graduate who is convinced Dartmouth is a cult not a school, suggested I use the Reunion book as a deprogramming exercise. It didn't work. Two years, four hundred pages, and three hundred essays later, I'm crazier about Dartmouth than ever but at least I finally understand why.

The first essay I received confirmed I was not alone. My soul mate was a classmate I had never met – the son of a Mexican immigrant raised in Los Angeles. Cesar Munoz wrote, "While at Dartmouth I searched and found 'Walden Pond' every weekend when I lost myself in the New England woods and mountains... Returning home to Los Angeles after graduation was like an expulsion from Elysium. I was like a heroin junkie going through withdrawal... I washed dishes and scrubbed toilets at ski resorts, swung a pick-axe and moved boulders building trails at 10,000 feet just so I could live year-round in the mountains. At these times I felt sad for my father who probably wondered why I was throwing my education away for some quirky lark. Despite his four years of schooling [he] knew the value of education and had worked hard all his life to see me get the best. Yet, when I skied to work from my little cabin in the woods, I truly believed I was the richest man in the world."

In the ensuing weeks, countless essays followed detailing the draw of the North Country on souls, hearts, and minds. As I gathered historical material for the book, I stumbled on the tape of a speech made by a man I've always thought of as Santa Claus (not just because of his pink cheeks and angelic face but for his miraculous gift of my admission to Dartmouth). At our first meeting as a class in September of 1972, Director of Admissions, Eddie Chamberlain said:

"Each college has its own mystique. But for you it is Dartmouth. You will not be able to walk these campus paths or see these hills in fall and spring or feel the frost on your face in winter... without some of this place rubbing indelibly off on you." He then quoted former president of the college, Ernest Martin Hopkins: "[Whoever] spends four years in our north country and does not learn to hear the melody of rustling leaves or does not learn to love the wash of racing brooks over their rocky beds in spring, who never experiences the repose to be found on lakes and rivers, who has not stood enthralled upon the top of Moosilauke on a moonlight night or has not become a worshipper of color or seen the sunset form one of Hanover hills, who has not thrilled at the whiteness of the snowclad countryside in winter or at the flaming forest colors of the fall, I would insist that this student has not reached out for some of the most worthwhile educational value accessible at Dartmouth."

That the spell that remains on most of Dartmouth's 45,000 graduates is an enchantment with the outdoors is no startling revelation. But studying our class reminiscences, I saw for the first time the degree to which Dartmouth's setting transformed characters and friendships. Classmate Nelson Hall put it this way: "Dartmouth succeeded at inculcating in me a wonder of the world and my place in it". This strong sense of place located us for life with a sense of perspective. I realized what I have always loved about Dartmouth is that the potential for pomposity, rampant in an urban environment, is punctured here. Stars and pines provide too inspiring a backdrop for pretention. At the same time, I've always been surprised by any description of Dartmouth as isolated. How could anyone surrounded by 4,000 bright peers feel cut off?

I found our class essays typical of the humor and humility displayed by Dartmouth overachievers. You wouldn't know from the reunion book that we own a Super Bowl ring, a Rhodes scholarship, a World Series ring, a Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Award, and fourteen Emmy awards. We have performed on the Today Show, the Tonight Show, and CNN but the only headliner performance written about in detail was Jamey Hampton's account of unwittingly mooning the Princess of Monaco when his pants fell off during a Pilobolus performance. Our top CEO, Jack Brennan of Vanguard, was described by his wife, classmate Cathy Joyce, as an avid coach of his kids' sports teams. She claimed he was often mistaken for a gym teacher. David Shribman didn't care if I listed his Pulitzer Prize credit but wanted to be sure I noted that he was a Trustee of the College.

Where did this lack of pretention originate? It was modeled from the top down. Classmate Robert Lindberg wrote: "Freshman trip, at the Grant. I can still feel it. The air was bracing, the nights were cold, the days golden...I was fly-fishing for the first time. John, our leader, was a jack of all trades. He split the wood, filleted the fish, and positioned us just so on the stream. A wonderful raconteur, his stories were steeped in history. He knew the Grant like the back of his hand and we eagerly explored all his favorite haunts. We made fun of his snoring at night...That night, at the Lodge, I was surprised to see a picture of our guide with a former U.S. president. A short time later he was introduced...It was only then that I realized that John wasn't an employee of the Dartmouth Outing Club. He was the President Emeritus of the College (John Dickey '29)."

Our class valedictorian, Jeff Rieker, didn't disappoint. He wrote of trying to convince his girlfriend (now wife) that he "wasn't some boring medical school weenie". He wrote also of the "dreamlike, fairyland quality" of Dartmouth and the moment he most remembers (not his valedictory address): "December of '72...walking down the sidewalk in front of Dartmouth Hall in the early evening. It was snowing lightly with big fluffy flakes. The Green was ringed with small lighted Christmas trees. I don't know which one of us started it...We walked up the hill to just in front of Dartmouth Hall and began running down the sidewalk and then sliding all the way down almost to the street. Very quickly, the sidewalk was very icy and the 'run' became faster and faster. In addition, a large crowd quickly appeared and everyone started having a great time. It was my first sense of the Dartmouth spirit of community."

This spirit of community is what stays with me. While the phrase BIG GREEN has always left me cold, the big Green that stretches from the Hanover Inn to Baker, from Dartmouth Hall to College Hall holds my heart. It is the place where high powered intellect meets humor and humility in snowball fights, twinkling lights, and spills in the mud. Where else on earth have so many smart people taken themselves less seriously for so many years?

I decided a letter home our Reunion Chair, Julia Miller Shepherd, had saved from Freshman year:

December 3, 1972

I've had such an unbelievable 3 months. I'll never forget them. Thursday we had a big snowstorm about 6 ins. It's really beautiful Also- the Christmas lights were turned on. There are little trees with red and white bulbs all around the Green and throughout the whole town of Hanover. In the center of the Green is a huge tree with all different colored lights and a star. It was really beautiful – especially with the falling snow. People get very rowdy around here when it snows. We had around 20 people throwing snowballs at our window until 1:30 A.M.”

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the New England north country. Only Ivy. Cesar Munoz Martha Hennessey. Julie Miller's letter home.
Wayne Hooper lyrical. Kobokovich

. Melanie Fisher Matte exuberance.

Dr. Seuss Life's a great balancing act. David Slade painting landscapes Chris Davis environmental law
Jamey lumberman choreographer David Urion beekeeper neurologist
Wendy Simila Snickenberger. William Keefe.

OF course what outdoors does to bonding: Steve Bell Steve Melikian Win Raynor not to mention the 56
marriages Leslie Madden Beth and Bruce Howard

I doubt that you will find higher wattage such a beautiful backdrop
Outdoors and what this does to perspective humor understated, place in nature and world, healthy rah rah
happy. Confuse fun obscured by crew skiers high powered ivy league numbers powerhouse our #s

Gleaming..miraculously builded in our hearts. Singing with glee club.granite I my brain distinct possibility

Criss crossing overlapping on the Green view from Baker Christmas lights, sliding criss crossing hi
Dartmouth Hall view from the Inn