Tales from the Boyden Era

By Doug Gortner ‘61

While serving as Deerfield’s first Planned Giving Officer (’83—91’), it was my distinct privilege to visit with alumni and some parents from the first 40 years of Frank L. Boyden’s (FLB) headmastership. When asked to recall their favorite memories of FLB and their time at the Academy, I was treated to some of the most wonderful and astonishing stories that give insight into how Deerfield became renowned for building character in boys. Pretty clearly, FLB felt that it is not what you say, but what you do that has lasting impact your charges. Without much embellishment, here are some of the more interesting anecdotes burned into my brain forever.

**§ Grade Deflation**

Bob Calder '33P: "I had graduated from high school at age 16 and been accepted at Princeton University. Much to my dismay, mother announced that she certainly was not going to send her son off to college at such a tender age, and that I would be taking a post graduate year at Deerfield Academy. I can tell you, my nose was more than a little bent out of shape. Having been given no choice, I went off to Deerfield, and, though more rigorous than my previous school, I found the work not overly challenging and cruised along with what I was confident would be an honor roll average.

Of course in those days, Dr. Boyden would meet with each student in his lobby office and read the semester's grades out of a large ledger book. To my chagrin, I was advised that I had received 2 Bs, a C+, and a C. I was so mortified that I resolved to really hit the books hard when I returned from Thanksgiving vacation and show them what I could do.

When mother picked me up a few days later I told her that Deerfield was more competitive than I had anticipated. But I also said that the Frank L. Boyden legend—that he knows what's in the hearts and minds of every Deerfield boy at all times—was bunk! Most of the time he acted as if he didn't even recognize me.

I returned from vacation fired up, threw myself into my studies and extracurricular activities, had a great year, and matriculated at Amherst College the following fall.

Some years later my mother told me that she had stopped by for a visit with the Head before picking me up that day. She recalled that Boyden had told her "Bob thinks he is a little too good for this place, so I didn't tell him his real grades. Also, I am giving him the I-don't-know-who-you-are treatment. Don't worry, he'll be fine, and I make sure he gets accepted at Amherst. (Can you imagine that?") - CUT

Bob and Erin's son John attended the Academy, graduating in 1966. On a trip to pick him up, Bob arrived early and decided to visit Helen Boyden's classroom. "I walked in the back door, and, well you know she was practically blind. I said 'It's Bob Calder Mrs. Boyden' to which she replied “How nice of you to visit Bob. Boys, Mr. Calder was one our finest students in the early years. Bob, why don't you take you your old seat which I see is vacant—you remember the…

second one from the left in the third row." (Can you imagine having a memory like that, particularly with 30 years of others having been assigned to that desk?")

Bob served for many years as General Counsel of the Campbell Soup Company, was President of the American Association of General Counsels, and served with distinction as a Deerfield Class Agent from the inception of Annual Support in 1965 until his death in \_\_\_\_. He rarely returned for reunions explaining:" I like to remember my classmates with flat bellies and hair."

**§** **On Rugged Individualism**

F. Earl Williams '19 loved to recount the story of his first day trying out for the football team. "I was a newboy junior trying out for quarterback, a different position in those days. After a rigorous practice, Dr. Boyden dismissed the team and then said "Earl please stay after for a few moments… and you too Moose." Picture this: Moose was the 230-lb. fullback who came from a local Polish farming family, I was 6'1 and 147 lbs. soaking wet. When all but the three of us had departed, the coach turned to Moose saying "Moose, I want you to walk down the sideline about 30 yards. When I give the signal (and he made a chopping motion with his right arm) I want you to run past me to the other end of the field, staying on the sideline marker. Oh, and Moose, make sure nothing stops you. Turning to me he said, "Now Earl, I want you to position yourself astride the sideline right over here, and Earl, make sure nothing gets past you." I knew that my career hung in the balance. Somehow I brought him down, and I was sore for a week!"

Following his graduation from Mass Aggie (now UMASS) in the summer of 1923, Earl secured a position as Principal and (sole teacher) of a two room school in Cummington Mass. Naturally he sought out his role model for some advice. "I told Mr. Boyden that those hill town boys were mighty rough, and had run two principals out of town the previous year. Did he have any words of advice? Dr. Boyden replied: “Earl, just make sure that from the moment you walk into that classroom everyone knows who is in charge.” “I was fired up that first day” Earl told me, “and, before the first class commenced, was presented with the perfect opportunity. All the students were seated except one girl who, arriving late, scurried down the center aisle clutching her books to her chest (as they did back in the days before backpacks.) Some wise guy stuck his foot out in front of her and she fell flat on her face. Well let me tell you, I was on that boy quicker than a duck on a June bug. I grabbed him by the belt and the back of his shirt collar, ripped him out of his chair, carried him to the door, kicked it open, and threw him out on his face. You know, I don't know what they were talking about; I never had a discipline problem during my four years at that school. \*\*\*

Earl, antecedent of the Deerfield Williams Bros. Farm family, went on to a distinguished career as a headmaster and principal, and served the Academy as Class Agent for many years. When he died in 1988 he left $750,000 to the Academy for scholarships, and the beautiful painting "North Mowing" .which hangs over the fireplace in the Memorial Building lobby. The other half of his estate went to Smith College for the Ruth Williams Scholarship.

**§ Remorse**

In his 66 years running Deerfield, Boyden expelled only four boys during the course of the school year, and in general punishment was not something to which he subscribed. He understood that genuine remorse was what was sought, and he was the master at its elicitation.

John (Johnny) Suitor '34, long time English teacher and chief Boyden factotum, confides the following tale: "One Monday night my roommate and I sneaked out after curfew, hitched a ride to Greenfield, and were enjoying a libation at the local watering hole. Much to our dismay, a faculty member arrived and, acknowledging our presence with a nod, took his place at the bar. When he finished his drink, he turned to us and said “I imagine you boys would like a ride back to campus.” Naturally we accepted. As he turned off the highway onto The Street, he said “I trust you boys understand that I must to report this to the Head,” to which we replied that we understood that it was his duty to do so.

I went back to my room and didn't sleep a wink that night. You see, my mother was the school nurse, and my father the groundskeeper. I was truly family, so my actions were particularly egregious. “What,” I thought, “was the Quid going to do to me?” Tuesday came and went, Wednesday came and went. Finally on Thursday evening, our corridor master poked his head in the door and told us that the Headmaster would like to see us after study hours. Per instructions we went to Ephram Williams and took a seat in the outer office. At 9:50, the door opened a crack, and, without looking out, Mr. Boyden asked (name?) to come in. Ten o'clock came and went; Eleven o'clock came and went; the grandfather clock announced midnight. By this time I was sitting in a puddle of perspiration saying to myself, “If he is doing this to (Sam?), what the heck is he going to do to me?” I swore an oath that if I came out of this alive, I would never break another rule so long as I was at Deerfield. An eternity later the Quid wandered out of his study in his bathrobe, and seeing me, said running his hands through his hair: “Johnny, Johnny Suitor, what are you doing here? Why Johnny it's almost 1:30. You'd better get back to your room and get some sleep or you will be a wreck in the morning.” … Remorse elicited!

Johnny taught at Deerfield from 1938 until \_\_\_, worked at, then ran Camp Timanous each summer from \_\_\_ to \_\_\_, and is best remembered for his piano stylings at the Sunday night sings. He was instrumental in securing the Academy's first life-income gift, and as a consequence the John Suitor '34 Scholarship was established at the Academy with more than $1 million in funding.

**§ And then there was Red**

Red Sullivan, whose essence was best encapsulated by John McPhee when he wrote in the *New Yorker*: "…for many Deerfield students, Red Sullivan was probably the first “real man” they had ever encountered, served as school master from 1925 until 197\_\_. Red was no intellectual, but he understood how to make a man out of a boy, and did so for generations.

Michael Friedlander '55 recounted two fascinating examples of Red's frontier-style justice which occurred during his freshman year at John Williams House. "There was this boy on my floor from Connecticut who kept making anti-Semitic remarks to me. Now I'm from New York City, so I knew this sort to thing existed, but I had never previously encountered anything like this. It was “Kike this and Jew that” every time I turned around. I'd finally had enough of it and took a swing at him…just as Red walked through the door. He demanded to know what was going on, and we told him. He pointed at us and sternly said: “Down to the Lower Level you two, and only one of you come back!” We dutifully trudged down to the playing fields, squared off, and started slugging it out. I was getting by far the worst of it, this short pudgy boy from the city taking on a tall preppy who had been weaned on tennis, golf, polo, and summer camp. In desperation, I closed my eyes, sucked in my breath, and threw a desperation haymaker. My God, I hit him square in the Adams apple and he dropped like a stone. I truly thought I had killed him. After about twenty minutes, I got him on his feet, slung an arm over my shoulder, and limped back to the dorm. When Red saw us, he raged: “I thought I said only one of you come back! Get in the car.” He drove us back down to the lower level, disgorged us onto the cinder track, and bellowed: “Start running!” He then climbed back in his car and started chasing us around the track. By this time it was dark, and we were two deer in the headlights. I was convinced that I would stumble, be run over, and die. Well that didn't happen, and when we were thoroughly exhausted, he let us back in the car and returned us to the dormitory. You know, I never heard another anti-Semitic remark from that fellow."

"Just before the Christmas holiday that same year, we got our first snowfall. Boys being boys, we were having an indoor snowball fight. I stood at the top of the stairs, and my friend Joe stood at the bottom just inside the door. Just as I hurled a real zinger (for a short chubby city boy), the door opened and in walked Red. Joe ducked and Red took it square in the chest. I said “Oh shit,” and my friend wailed something even worse. Red grabbed us by the earlobe, bent us over till our noses rubbed on the carpet, and marched us to the common room sofa. “Stay here” he command. A few minutes later he returned with bath-sized bar of Ivory soap. Fishing his penknife from his pocket, he cut the bar in half, handed a piece of each of us, and said: “Eat it.” While you may wonder how you would respond to such a command, I assure you that there was never any question in my mind how I would respond. I spent two days in the infirmary with the worst case of (lower GI problems), but after that I was fine.” Asked: "How do you feel about Red Sullivan today,” Michael replied: "Oh, I love the man!”

Michael had a remarkable career in investments. He (very quietly) was the broker for Carl Icahn, the Emir of Kuwait, most of the Saudi Princes, and the Tisch brothers. At age 50 his doctor advised that he had congestive heart failure and he had best put his affairs in order because he probably would not last long enough to get the heart transplant he desperately needed. Michael recalled: "That made me sit down and decide what was real, and what was B.S. The answer was simple—Deerfield and horses were real—so I am splitting my estate between the two." Michael got the heart transplant, moved to North Carolina, and was jumping horses less than a year later. and lived for another 10 ??? years.

**§ McGlynn**

Though it was not my privilege to encounter the great Bob McGlynn in the classroom or the dormitory, it was a distinct privilege to have him as a colleague for one year. When I visited him in graceful retirement in Middleburg, Virginia, he prepared a lunch of black bean soup and a fine salad. Over lunch, I asked him what it had been like working for Mr. Boyden: "He was such a

wonderful man that every time you did anything you thought “How would the Head want me To do this.” You really wanted to please him. Of course, he had a very busy schedule, but if you had five minutes on his calendar, you were the center of the universe for those few minutes. He would never look at his watch."

McGlynn graduated Summa Cum Laude from Wesleyan in 1943 and accepted an offer to teach English at Andover. When he checked in with the headmaster on his arrival a few days before classes started, he asked for, and was given directions to the local Roman Catholic Church. The next day the headmaster summoned him to the office, asked him if he were a Catholic, and received an affirmative answer “I’m about as Irish Catholic as you can get!” In response the Headmaster said that to his utter shame, he had to withdraw the job offer “since the Academy’s charter specifies that all instructors must be Protestant Gentleman.” He picked up the phone and called his friend at Deerfield, explained the situation, and was told to send him along, that he would surely find a place for him. A year later McGlynn was summoned to the office where he met with Mr. Boyden and, to his surprise, the Andover Headmaster. ”He told me he was so mortified by what he was required to do to me that he had told the Trustees at their next meeting that they would either amend their charter, or find themselves another boy to run their school.” As a result he told me “I am now in a position to offer you that position.” Mr. Boyden looked up and said “You’re happy here aren’t you Bob?” I replied “Yes Mr. Boyden.” McGlynn stayed at Deerfield for another 42 (?) years. For hundreds, if not thousands (including he best friend, the esteemed author, John McPhee), he was the most inspiring teacher they ever encountered.

**§ Building a Wealthy Alumni Body**

In the pre-war years, Deerfield represented for many of the boys a second-chance-school. Early on, Mr. Boyden had a vision of the school he wanted to build, and he knew that he would need rich families to do so. He must have thought to himself, “How can I attract rich kids to a school in the middle of nowhere with sub-standard facilities?" At some point the answer came to him "Take some students who have worn out their welcome at one of the elite schools.” In those days, if you were caught with a smoke, a chaw, booze, or a girl, at most schools it meant instant expulsion. Dr. Boyden clearly believed to his core that good teenagers break rules (perhaps he even believed that it was what they were supposed to do.) He called up or wrote to the heads of the elite schools and said something to the effect: "The next time you feel bad when you kick out a boy, send him to me. I will work hard to put him on the straight and narrow, and you will have a much easier phone call to the parents. "Mrs. Jones, I am dismayed to report that young Jeremy was caught smoking a cigarette last night, and you will understand that I have no alternative but to enforce our strict policy calling for dismissal. But don't you worry Mrs. Jones, I have already had a conversation with a wonderful (little) man named Frank Boyden in the western part of the state who works miracles with reprobates. I told him that Jeremy is a fine boy who just needs a dose of his specialty—teaching respect for adults and for the system. By your leave, I will arrange to have him and his belongings dropped of later today at Deerfield Academy."

And when they arrived FLB was ready for them! Here are the tenets of the Deerfield Program designed to keep these kids in school.

* No Rules: At least nothing codified or prescribed. Students were expected to act like gentlemen and bring honor to the Academy.
* No Expulsions: Not every boy is enamored of leaving home and his friends for boarding school with all its rigors and regimen. Schoolmasters have known for years that intentionally, or unconsciously, some students get "busted" for the sole purpose of getting expelled and a return to a comfortable home life. Though unspoken, Deerfield's no expulsion rule was intended to let the boys know that if they behaved badly, there would be no rewarding trip home. They would stay and do penance.
* No Freedom: We were checked-in at meals, at each class, at sports, and in the dormitory—thirteen times a day! A runaway couldn't get very far before his absence was noted and a posse dispatched to retrieve him. If you brought more luggage back from vacation than you left with, your luggage was checked for contraband.
* No Girls!
* Smoking Allowed: Upperclassman could smoke with permission from their parents. He didn't make it easy though. Smoking was limited to and area dubbed The Bank. This location had two advantages: 1) it was far from the road so visitors would not see the boys smoking, and 2) being located at the southern end of the meadows where the winds swept down unimpeded from the north, in the winter The Bank was one of the coldest places on earth. (Being particularly creative, the Great Class of 1961 (my class) built an igloo and kept a fire going most of the winter.)
* Interscholastic Sports For All: At one point in time, the school had six football teams and eleven soccer teams. Everybody played on teams with outside schedules, even as one friend told me “if we could not walk and chew gum at the same time.” At that time most boarding schools had perhaps three football teams and the same number for soccer, leaving the less gifted to play intramural games. Getting all the boys involved in preparing for serious games helped to focus some teenage angst, and certainly lowered their reserve of roughhousing energy.
* Great Food: Very little has as much importance for a growing male athlete as food. Deerfield always had an unlimited supply of delicious and nutritious food—day-in and day-out.
* Great Faculty: but great in a different way. Frank Boyden hired teachers who loved kids as much or more than they loved their discipline.

**§ Instant Linguist**

One teacher told me that at the end of his job interview during his final college semester as an English major, Mr. Boyden told him: “You will live in Stebbins House, coach freshman soccer and varsity skiing, and teach Spanish.” "But Dr. Boyden" he replied, "I don't speak Spanish." "Oh don't worry about that Don, you can pick it up in summer school."

**§ Influenza**

Before WW II, infectious diseases were a menacing factor in society, the more so in boarding schools where everyone lived cheek by jowl. . During a flu outbreak, Deerfield would rent a floor of a local hotel to use as an infirmary. This gave Dr. Boyden a terrific excuse for one of his most brilliant fund-raising strategies (read on).

**§ No Winter Weekend**

Two weekends home, one in the Fall and the other in Spring, none in the Winter. We all groused about it. The Flu was the fall guy ("We don't want boys bringing the germs back into our closed little community.") Here is the real reason. Deerfield was now a school with its fair share of rich kids, but, long before most, Mr. Boyden understood that cultivation is the key to successful fund-raising. He must have thought: "How cab I run a school if I have to spend all my time in New York, Boston, and Chicago? Ah ha! If I don't let Johnny go home, his parents will have to come here to see him. And I'll be ready!” Ready he was indeed. The grounds were already immaculate, the boys were admonished to dress well and Sunday lunch was the best meal of the week. After lunch, a reception was held for parents at Ephram Williams House featuring tea and coffee served by football players in white gloves. This gave Mr. Boyden an opportunity to cozy up to those who could (and did) make a financial difference to the school.

**§ No Signs**

Unlike most of our sister schools and colleges, your arrival at Deerfield Academy as not announced by any signs. The buildings had no signs either. Mr. Boyden wanted the public to talk to his boys, and boy did he have us prepared. At least once a week at the evening meeting he would say: "Now boys, if you see anyone wandering around campus who does not seem quite sure of where they are heading, step up and offer to be of assistance." I have not heard those words for forty years, but they are etched in my memory, and engrained in my subconscious. One time when I was working in the Financial District, I approached a puzzled looking individual with a map in his hand and “offered to be of assistance.” Perhaps it was my close-cropped hair and bow tie, but he looked up at me and said: "Did you go to Deerfield?" It gets better. Remember Bob Calder '33 mentioned above? I told him my story and he said in an astonished tone that he had had a similar experience. When entering the American Express office in Paris a duffel-type piece of luggage caught in the revolving door so that he could go neither forward nor backwards. Facing the door on the inside was a long row of chairs, most of which were occupied. Everyone seemed intrigued by his plight, but none lifted a finger to help. Then a college-aged boy, who had been reading the newspaper, spotted him and immediately jumped up to render service. Bob asked if he had gone to Deerfield, and in fact he had!

**§ Saturday Night Celebrations**

A fellow from a class in the early 40s told me about a friend who beat the luggage check system by taking home for Christmas vacation absolutely nothing but his toothbrush in a suitcase then referred to as a two-suiter. Returning with the same amount he left with, his luggage was not…

 checked. Plunkett Hall, known as the New Dorm until the death of its benefactor, Mr. Plunkett, had a dirt cellar, and that first night back, he lugged the suitcase down to the cellar and buried the dozen or so bottles of Scotch he had brought from home. Every Saturday night for the reminder of the term he would dig up a bottle and have a small party.

**§ Resident Curmudgeon**

Bryce Voter Lambert taught English and served as faculty advisor to the school's award winning newspaper from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Never one to hide his light under a bushel, he quickly earned recognition as a maverick of the first order. Though there are myriad tales to be told on Bryce, two capture his essence:

1. When a student would request an extension in turning in a paper, citing other papers or exams due on the same date, Bryce would respond: "You have known about my assignment since the beginning of the term. How long, Billy, have you known about the others?" In most cases the response would indicate plenty of advance warning. At that point Bryce would reply: "Billy, your failure to plan does not constitute my emergency. Request denied!"
2. When Dr. Boyden retired, Ephram Williams House was converted into a sophomore dormitory, with Bryce as Dorm Master. One of the first changes made by the new Headmaster, David Pynchon, was to allow students to have radios and record players in their rooms. Since the dorm was a 200-year-old frame building with un-insulated walls, Bryce announced each year that, due to the nature of the building, music was not to be played so loud that it could be heard outside the room with the door closed. Grudging compliance was initially granted by the boys, but on the first warm spring afternoon, a 2nd floor student placed his speakers in the window and cranked up the stereo. Bryce quickly arrived in his room to gently remind the student of the house rule. The stereo was damped down, briefly, but was back at full blast in five minutes. Bryce re-ascended the stairs and this time gave the boy a real dressing down. Being the soul of audacity, it took no more than ten minutes for the building to start reverberating once more. Bryce calmly entered the room, clipped the speaker cords with scissors, and threw the offending items out the window onto the sidewalk. With a devilish grin on his face, Bryce assured me that he had never had another incident of a too loud stereo in his last 20 years in the dorm.

**§ Sportsmanship**

FLB was probably the greatest advocate for sportsmanship that ever lived, and, in general, his boys bought into it. But it wasn't always easy. While playing golf one day, I got paired up with two fellows from the class of '34. They were a veritable Mutt and Jeff and regaled me with stories of their exploits on the gridiron. Their specialty, it seems, was to simultaneously hit 'em high and hit 'em low on kick-offs and punts. They told me that the coach (FLB) had a strictly enforced rule that after you knocked someone down, you were to help them up. Being day-boys from a tough nearby mill town, this really grated on them, but they understood that failure to observe this etiquette would lead to picking up splinters on the bench. They determined to hit them just as hard as they could, then, as they offered a helping hand, to say in dulcet tones "So sorry, do hope we didn't hurt you. Let us help you up.” What the Quid couldn't hear didn't hurt them.

**§ A True Genius**

How to build the reputation of a school? A question which confronts all but a select few Headmasters. One of FLB's answers was to build a great glee club. Fully half the Upperclassmen were involved, and as an extra incentive to try out, rehearsals were held during evening study hall. None of that would have meant a thing if it were not for a gifted leader. Ralph Oatley was not your typical schoolmaster. You could tell he drank too much just by looking at his face, and his sexuality was ambivalent (in an era when any deviance from the norm was taboo). However, the man was a true genius when he picked up a baton. Though my recollection is not clear, I have spoken to many of his admirers, and they all agree: he could meld 80 voices into four. I had been selected to the All State Chorus in Connecticut the year before arriving at the Academy in 1959. Naturally I tried out for the glee club. I was crushed not to be selected, and thought it was my mediocre grades which kept me out. Not so! I had a very loud bass voice, and an untamable teenaged ego. I would not have melded, and Ralph, who knew boys as well as music, spotted it immediately. Every year over the holidays, a competition was held at Carnegie Hall pitting the glee clubs from as many as 28 schools against each other. During Oatley's entire tenure (19?? —1960), Deerfield took first place at every single competition!

**§ The Bailout**

For the first 2 ½ decades of Boyden's tenure, the school was both the public high school and the private Academy (Dickenson High School and Deerfield Academy). In a backlash against the increasing Irish influence in the eastern part of the state (Mayor Curley, etc.), the Legislature passed a bill in 1926 prohibiting the disbursal of public funds to any private school. The Academy had just opened its first dormitory (John Williams House) the year before, and the instructional building belonged to the town. FLB opted to be private and not public, but he had to give back his building. He had no wealthy alumni, and few wealthy parents to turn to. He shared his plight with the headmasters of Andover and Exeter and Taft, who, over the years, had often shipped their struggling or derelict pupils for Mr. Boyden’s remediation. Together, these three men put together a hardcover book about their friend Boyden and the very special school he was building. They took this book to their alumni and parents, who ponied up enough money for Deerfield to build two buildings that remain the most impressive—the Main School Building, and the Arms Building. What an extraordinary act was this!

**Additional Topics**

Harry Bird ‘29 Visiting Charlie Merrill

permission to borrow from McPhee? Mrs. Boyden

Frowner The role of sports

The PR Man The depression funding

Values Character over Intellect Bill Lane ‘40

Sydney Chase ’21 Bill Burt ‘34

The non college boys