

# DEERFIELD

MAGAZINE



FIRST PERSON:

# Clapping As One

by Steve Casey, Perry Vella,  
and Christopher Smith, Class of 1980

There is a Deerfield story that stays with each of us. For some, it's a tale centered on the magical intersection of academics, sports, and creativity within the community. For others, it's the camaraderie of friends, the rumbling power of "The Evensong," or the life lessons we learned. But whenever a member of the Class of 1980 has a story to tell, it typically begins: "In *our* class..."

Truth be told, as individuals we are no different from other Deerfield grads. Within our number one finds many interesting stories and accomplishments. We were, and are, highly competitive with one another. These things are typical for DA. But where we really shine is when we are unified. Years ago, in the lobby of the Dining Hall after Sunday dinners, the Class of 1980 came together to create a loud and unified clap. It was a sign of sincere appreciation for the accomplishment of a team, but it was also an acknowledgement of the honor that team had brought to our school, and it became our class signature.

Some say it started in 1976 (sorry, three-year men), when we arrived for our first picnic outside of Chapin House with Ms. Miles. At first, we were not a particularly cohesive group. We hardly understood the phrase "Be Worthy of Your Heritage." But we began perfecting a somewhat strange mixture of competitive razzing coupled with total support. We respected one another, and like a proverbial band of brothers, always tried to help each other out.

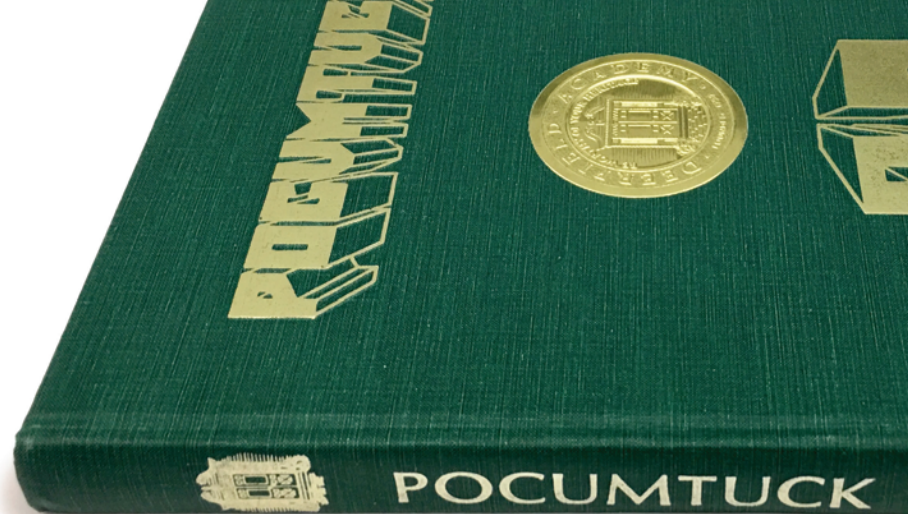
This potent mix of respect and competitiveness grew as we inched toward graduation. As with senior classes before us, we felt certain we were leaving our mark. We'd fielded champion football, soccer, and swim teams. We'd staged a mock presidential convention, introduced "Blood Man," and presented *Damn Yankees*; we celebrated Russ Miller's career-capping turn as headmaster during our senior spring. It was a glorious time in the Pocumtuck Valley. As we prepared to move on from Deerfield, we thought we had done it all. Little did we know, Spring 1980 was just the beginning.

The long-term personality of our class really began to gel under inaugural Class Captain Steve Carr-Davis. Carr worked the phones like a champion to pry donations from the fingers of his poor college friends who were gripping those dollars tightly for "spirited" libations. Ultimately, the cohesiveness of our class overcame our conflicting desires, and by our 5<sup>th</sup> Reunion we proudly came back to Deerfield with a competitive fire for surpassing Annual Fund records. At our 5<sup>th</sup>, we met the announcement that we'd beaten the previous record with, of course, a unified clap and alarmingly loud chants of "80! 80! 80!"

Now among our band of brothers is the King of Jordan. Twelve years ago, he invited us to witness the emergence of his special project, King's Academy, built on a model of "Deerfield in the Middle East." The long Royal Jordanian Airlines flight to Amman was made easier in the company of 180 classmates and their spouses. We found Jordan to be a beautiful country and Jordanians to be warm and generous. From Jerash—an ancient Roman city with a pristine colonnade and amphitheater—to the banks of the Jordan River, Petra, the Dead Sea, and Aqaba, a tour of Jordan is exhilarating and gives one a deep appreciation for the centuries-old culture.

On the first day of our visit, we took a class picture at the amphitheater that we later framed and presented to His Majesty. We also spent most of a day at the King's Academy construction site; we toured future residence halls and classrooms and saw where the dining hall, with its Deerfield-like round tables, would be built. It became readily apparent that this was not just a construction site; it was a vision being brought to life, and one that borrowed from the best qualities of one of the world's best secondary schools—adapting them to create a unique and fantastic Middle Eastern educational experience. On our final night in Jordan we were able to spend time with His Majesty in the beautiful and majestic Wadi Rum. That evening, by firelight and under a blanket of stars, we made a pledge to become an honorary class at King's and to establish the Class of 1980 Fund for King's Academy.

When our goal for the Class of 1980 Fund was reached, an odd feeling of anticlimax set in, and through a series of calls and emails, we agreed to keep going, and the King's





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Academy Opportunity Fund was born; today, it's helping to spread our classmate's vision, which was inspired so long ago in the Pocumtuck Valley.

King's Academy celebrated its first decade in October 2017, and we were delighted to witness the results of His Majesty's vision. Students from 35 countries, membership in top-tier educational organizations, victories in global academic and arts competitions, broad donor support, the addition of a middle school, diverse summer programs, and annual college placements on par with Deerfield's are just a few examples of the school's success.

Several members of our class traveled to Jordan again to celebrate King's 10th anniversary. The trip gave us an opportunity to warmly reconnect with former Deerfield

and King's Head of School Eric Widmer '57 and his wife Meera Viswanathan, and also to reflect on our class' legacy: The KA Opportunity Fund provides a scholarship (tuition and room and board for four years) to a singular deserving student "of great promise and modest means." The first recipient, a delightful and hardworking young woman from Jordan, received her diploma and warm congratulations from King Abdullah himself last spring. During the October trip we interviewed and selected a second Opportunity Scholar—a boy whose family had fled from war in Iraq to Syria, then from war in Syria to Jordan. Through it all, this boy nurtured an infectious optimism and generosity of spirit many of us would find difficult to match.

In some ways, providing a scholarship to this deserving young person brings our story full circle, and in other ways the circle continues to widen: This past fall Deerfield philosophy and religion teacher Jan Flaska spent the term at King's while his counterpart there, Bakir Mohammad, taught at Deerfield.

The Class of 1980 is as varied as any; we came from disparate heritages. Our involvement with King's is just one more opportunity to "be worthy" of the heritage we share—our Deerfield heritage—because the fundamental lessons we learned in the Pocumtuck Valley now allow us to be a unified force that not only enthusiastically supports Deerfield Academy, but one that also enriches the world beyond. //