

There Really Was a Super Suicide Society

By BERNARD CARRAGHER

"Exeter tempered me and brought out in my nature a very strong competitive and ambitious streak. It tuned me up for life. I suppose if I hadn't gone to Exeter I would be quite a different person today."—John Knowles, Exeter '45, author of "A Separate Peace."

"I didn't like Exeter or its philosophy, but one thing it did instill in me was an educational outlook on life."—John Heyl, Exeter '71, star of the film version of "A Separate Peace."

TWO generations recall their prep school days. The school is Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, New England's most exclusive and prestigious Ivy League preparatory school. It is the setting of the new film version of John Knowles' highly acclaimed novel "A Separate Peace," which introduces two striking new talents, recent Exeter graduate John Heyl and Parker Stevenson from the nearby Brooks School in North Andover, Massachusetts, together with a flock of young Exonians.

Since its original publication in 1959, Knowles' novel has become a cult classic among young people (to date there are 3,500,000 copies in print, with a half million paperbacks still sold yearly) and is part of the reading curriculum of high schools and colleges throughout the country. The story is of two roommates—the quiet, intellectual Gene (Parker Stevenson) and the outgoing, brilliantly athletic Finney (John Heyl)—at Devon (i.e. Exeter) during the crucial summer of '42, trying to establish a peace away from the furor of World War II.

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Their close friendship is shadowed by an unadmitted stain — envy in Gene's character. As the summer lolls on, Gene comes to resent Finney's influence over him and during one of their Super Suicide Society's "war games" of jumping from the limb of a tree into a river, he commits an irrational act of violence that cripples Finney.

Recently, I spoke with Heyl and Knowles about Exeter and found that although (Continued on Page 17)

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