

almost three decades separate their boarding school days, they had many Exeter experiences in common. Where they seem to differ most is in their feelings about their alma mater.

At 20, Heyl, a blond-haired, blue-eyed, well-scrubbed member of the Woodstock generation, who was brought up on the Exeter campus where his father has been the school doctor for the past 25 years, feels nothing but resentment and bitterness about the time he spent at Exeter as a student. While the remembrances of the middle-aged Knowles, whose natty demeanor reminds one of an Exeter master, are more tempered and nostalgic.

Heyl on Exeter: "Right off, let's get one point straight. My four years at Exeter certainly weren't the happiest of my life. Just because I was a faculty child I was immediately labeled a jag. I used to go around campus saying friendly 'hellos' to people, and everyone thought I was high all of the time. One of the biggest problems was that when I was at Exeter it was an all-male school. But all that's changing now with the addition of girls. Girls have a humanizing effect.

"The competition at Exeter was maddening. Some people went crazy. The constant pressures sent others to drugs. Winters were the worst times. The atmosphere really gets stifling then. I remember one English class where we were all sitting around having a hot discussion about a book and all of a sudden all this pent-up energy exploded and I started to maul one of the guys I was arguing with. We were at each other's throats over one minute literary point. But that's what happens when you have to put your emotions down all of the time. You just flip out.

"At Exeter you get the feeling you are constantly being come down upon. You feel everyone is out to get you. I was only disciplined twice. Once, for smoking downtown, I was turned in by Mr. Sadler [Paul Sadler, Exeter Public Relations man who plays the Naval Recruiting Officer in the movie]. He was a faculty member and felt obliged to report me. Typical Exeter spirit.

"The second time I was disciplined is unmentionable, it was so bad." Heyl pauses a moment, smiles his unconsciously winning smile, runs his hand through his long Prince Valiant-styled hair and then suddenly decides to reveal the unmentionable. "I was one of the first persons at Exeter to be disciplined for using drugs," he says with a bit of hesitation. "When I was there, drugs

were just starting to come in. A fellow I knew from Washington, D.C.—his father is a high government official — was dealing in hard drugs. He was breaking into everything all over campus and unfortunately I had talked with him a few times. When he finally got caught and was expelled, he gave the dean a list of 30 names and mine was one of them. Each of us had to go into the Dean's office and either admit or deny we had ever used drugs. Only two of the group admitted experimenting with drugs, and I was one of the two.

"At first, deciding to admit the fact that I had used pot was a great trauma, then telling the truth turned out

to be the greatest emotional release of all time. It was the best thing that ever happened to me and my parents. It united us. The whole dishonesty thing really messes up relationships between parents and kids. The funny thing was my parents knew all the time. All that hiding had just complicated communication between us.

"At my age you should be able to tell your parents things and not keep everything a secret. You should be able to lay it on the line and say, 'Yes, I smoke pot,' or 'Yes, I'm balling this chick every night.' Parents have to get used to talking it straight and learning to discuss these things."

Knowles

went to Exeter when I was 15 years old from a small, easy-going Southern town in West Virginia," he says, taking off his ever-present aviator sunglasses and looking healthily tanned after spending a season in the sun at his year-round Southampton residence "My first term at Exeter was very lonely. Those first few months away from home were the longest period in my entire life. I was desperately unhappy until my second term, when I started to get involved with the swimming team and various student activities.

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"My fondest memories of Exeter were the two summers I spent there—'43 and '44. The country is so beautiful up there during that time of year. I've always had a tremendous love of the outdoors. There is something very spontaneous about living in the country; it instills a sort of pagan response to life. Experiences become so intense — the sensuous smell of the trees.

"While I was at Exeter, most of the faculty was over 50 and there was not too much rapport between teachers and students. For the most part, we were left pretty much on our own. The faculty plays no role in 'A Separate Peace' because they really had no roles in our lives outside of the classroom. One of the reasons Gene and Finney were so close was they had no older people to relate to.

"I found the competition at Exeter very stimulating and I don't know how I would have survived at Yale without it. I was a good student, not as good as Gene, but I think I could have been if I had been more interested in my studies. All I ever wanted was to get good enough grades to keep me out of the Dean's office. The worst thing in the world that could have happened to you was to get kicked out of school for breaking a rule or cheating on a test. They were uncompromising on those things. Discipline and self-discipline were the rules of the game. In my day life on campus was pretty isolated and in many ways monastic. Drugs hadn't even entered the picture. There was a little gambling and drinking, but that was about the extent of it. Life was much less am-

"The war was probably my most vivid memory. At first it was very remote, then it started getting closer and closer until there was no reality on campus except for the war. One's mind was at war before we left campus. Hardly anyone questioned it, you just went. All everyone thought of was Hitler must be stopped. The situation was altogether different from the current operations in Vietnam."

Knowles is delighted with the success of his book and very pleased with the film version, even though the movie critics have been divided in their opinions. "The book seems to have struck some kind of a chord in millions of people," he says. "Did you know busloads of school children visit the Exeter campus every year to retrace Gene and Finney's wanderings? One thing that bothers me is that teachers give the book such a going over with their symbol hunting. I don't think that's very fair. First they should let students just read it as a story of two boys at prep school and how they relate to one another. After they've digested that, then they can go into the symbols of the tree and the river of life, etc."

Lately, more sophisticated snoops have been pelting Knowles with unsymbolic questions like just who is really who in his highly autobiographical work. "When I used to get asked questions like that, I would answer, 'I am "A Separate Peace" and a part of me is in every character.' My real point was not to admit that any of the

characters in the book were based on particular people. Then the book became a success and people started taking it apart again. So instead of beating around the bush," he says, his hands nervously fingering his sunglasses, "I'll tell you that I based Gene on myself, Finney on David Hackett, member of the 1948 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team and a good friend of Bobby Kennedy in the Justice Department who is still very much alive and working in the education field in Washington, D.C."