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Introduction: Frank L. Boyden was a role model's role model in preparatory school education

Frank L. Boyden: Deerfield Academy's headmaster from 1902 through 1968, infused his personality into Deerfield's DNA, making the school his baby, rescuing it from near bankruptcy and leading it to national and international acclaim as a school noted for high academic and ethical standards.

Dear Client:

One morning in the summer of 1902, Frank L. Boyden, freshly graduated from Amherst College (Amherst, Massachusetts) arrived on the campus of Deerfield Academy (Deerfield, Massachusetts), seventeen miles from Amherst's quadrangle, to interview for Deerfield's headmaster position.

Boyden faced no competition. Deerfield Academy was in deep trouble. Its enrollment had fallen to ten students (all boys), its plant and its equipment were in bad shape, and its trustees, poring over the school's financial statements, were contemplating bankruptcy, hoping to buy some time, conserve some cash, and avoid liquidation of the school's assets and the closing of the school, which had opened its doors in 1797.

Reflective of the dispirited mood and unruly nature of the school's student body was the trauma suffered by the headmaster who had tendered his resignation a few weeks before Boyden's interview. Boyden's predecessor could never establish authority over an unruly, truculent student body. The last straw came when this besieged educator, frustrated with the lack of commitment to learning, had attempted to instill discipline on a very primitive level, insisting that, contrary to Deerfield's then current practice, the students turn in homework in complete form and always on time. In response to the headmaster's demands, a clique comprised of the school's most contumacious and maladjusted students threatened to throw the headmaster out of a classroom window on the second floor of the school building.

When Boyden, on that hot day in the summer of 1902, entered the house on Main Street (Main Street is now officially titled Boyden Lane) where the school's board of trustees had gathered to interview him, he encountered a group of men deeply ambivalent about the school's future. They wanted to keep the school open but reality told them that to do so would be a long struggle with an uncertain outcome. The trustees made no attempt to discount the severity of the school's condition, not promising anything more than a salary and certainly not expending any intense energy on a sales effort to convince Boyden to take the job. It was almost as if they were just going through the motions. Boyden could have the job if he wanted it. But that was all that they promised and that was all that they could deliver.

It would take the most demanding critic, the most practiced of perfectionists not to be amazed at what Frank L. Boyden accomplished in his next sixty-six years at Deerfield. He became the world's most efficient turn-around specialist thanks to his firm but benevolent leadership. Two forces explain much of his supernatural achievements. First, he and his wife, Helen Childs Boyden, who for decades was admired as a wonderful chemistry teacher at the Academy and in many ways acted as the unofficial chief operating officer for the school, enjoyed a marriage filled with much affection and respect. Second, Boyden had an inexhaustible work ethic, often toiling fourteen to sixteen hours a day, with his stamina no doubt reinforced by the school's reputation that grew stronger almost every year. In the next few decades, starting with virtually nothing in 1902, Frank L. Boyden brought Deerfield into an elite educational circle, a circle comprised of Phillips Academy Andover, Phillips Exeter Academy, Choate Rosemary Hall, the Lawrenceville School, and St. Paul's School, college preparatory schools known for their high standards of academic achievement, ethical behavior, and the success of their graduates, whether actors, attorneys, doctors, educators, investment bankers, investment managers, or veterinarians.

I have enclosed with this letter an article that I wrote for the Spring edition of *Deerfield Magazine*, titled “First Person: Deerfield’s High Standards—Then and Now”. Like many college and prep school publications, *Deerfield Magazine* features the achievements of graduates, photographs of important events in the lives of the school’s alumnae and alumni, and announcements of engagements, pictures of weddings, and reviews of books written by graduates.

“First Person: Deerfield’s High Standards—Then and Now” chronicles my experience at **Deerfield**, from my interview with **Frank L. Boyden** in his house at the center of the Academy’s campus on a Sunday in March 1957 through my graduation in 1961. In my First Person article in *Deerfield Magazine*, I attempt to convey the values of **Frank L. Boyden**, the influence he had in shaping the personality, the culture, and the international reputation of the school, and I try to show that these intangible but powerful forces—such as hard work, respect for the ideas, the intellect, and the unique personalities of other people, ambition tempered by humility and an understanding that there is always someone richer and smarter than you are—shaped my expectations, my values, and created the intellectual and ethical bedrock of our investment management firm. Most especially I believe that **Boyden’s** managerial style has helped me and my colleagues create a culture in which our clients—who are affluent, productive, and successful by every measure—know that whatever imperfections we have, we nevertheless try to do our best every day and that we view our friendships with our clients as one of our greatest rewards for coming to work every day.

No method of teaching is perfect. As a student at **Deerfield**, I had trouble reconciling the emphasis on certain subjects such as the history of England and the study of Latin with the demands of the modern world. Likewise, I thought that the emphasis on studying the French language could have been replaced by emphasis on Spanish and Chinese. **Deerfield’s** leadership has corrected those shortcomings, retaining many old-world virtues but marrying these virtues with modernity, a flexibility reflected in the school’s present curriculum.

Today the **Deerfield** curriculum is much more demanding, sophisticated, and worldly than it was when I was a student, as evidenced by this statement from the school’s website:

Deerfield students study science, technology, engineering, and math through an inquiry-based curriculum. Problem solving drives many classes to cross disciplinary boundaries—combining physics with computer science, or biology with finite element analysis.
(From <https://deerfield.edu/stem/>)

A sampling of the course offerings for the 2018-2019 academic year in the **Deerfield** catalog include American Freedom, Architectural Design, Honors United States History, AP Seminar: Global Food Systems, Economics, Chinese IV, Honors Precalculus, AP Statistics, and Multivariable Calculus and Differential Equations, the description for which reads: “This course covers the major topics of Multivariable Calculus, including optimization problems and vector calculus, and concludes with an introduction to ordinary differential equations. Mathematica, the symbolic mathematics software, is used extensively in the course for displaying 3D graphs, performing advanced numerical analysis, and analyzing nonlinear differential equations and systems of such equations. A licensed copy of the software is provided to all students.”

The four years I spent at **Deerfield** must have been a long time ago, as it is difficult to recall many specific events unless they were emotionally charged with the flavor of happiness and satisfaction, the sort of events that our memories make every effort to retain. One of my best memories was an admission acceptance letter from **Swarthmore College** in my senior year at **Deerfield**.

Equally gratifying was acceptance to write for the *Deerfield Scroll*. When I began publishing, at nine years old, the *Peter Cooper Weekly* in 1953 in New York City (where I attended public elementary, middle, and junior high schools before going to **Deerfield**), I knew that I would never have to pay **The Nielsen Company** (NYSE: **NLSN**) or any service that measured newspaper or any type of media readership or viewership to determine who read what, who viewed what, was it before dinner or after dinner and did they watch the show only after

Johnny Carson came on or was the show preceding Carson so captivating that it stood on its own merits. Such expensive research was way beyond the budget of a newspaper with a weekly circulation of less than five hundred copies. My paper chronicled the athletic contests of middle and junior high school students who participated in sports leagues managed by the recreation staff of the landlord, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. I knew that the parochial nature of the paper's stories would consign it to a tiny market, mostly comprised of the parents of children who played in the apartment complex's sports leagues.

Today, when a publicly traded company such as [Fred's \(NASDAQ: FRED\)](#) (Memphis, Tennessee) has a tiny market share, in this case in the discount retail industry¹ dominated by two companies, [Dollar General \(NYSE: DG\)](#) and [Dollar Tree \(NASDAQ: DLTR\)](#) ([Dollar Tree](#) acquired [Family Dollar \(NYSE: FDO\)](#) in 2015) it is termed to be a niche player, a wonderfully imaginative euphemistic term that means very small, not a threat to the dominant players, a competitor not worth worrying about. (Oops, I just ended a sentence with a preposition.) When I began publishing the *Peter Cooper Weekly* I knew that the Sulzberger family, the family that controlled the *New York Times* (NYSE: NYT) would never regard my paper as a competitive threat. The *Peter Cooper Weekly* would always be a niche player. I would not be sued by a company claiming that I exerted monopolistic power, as happened with [Alphabet Inc. \(NASDAQ: GOOG\)](#). Because of its size and status as the maker of Android, the number-one smartphone operating system in the world, [Alphabet](#), the parent company of [Google](#), became a convenient target for the European Union, which claimed that [Google](#) had forced smartphone makers to pre-install [Google](#) apps such as Chrome and Search on its Android phones, thus stifling competition.

My father had written for the *New York Daily News* and in the 1950's was working for the *New York World Telegram & Sun*, writing a column that covered the advertising business in New York City (a business whose pathological out-of-control drinking, sexual exploitation, infighting, and institutionalized backstabbing was captured brilliantly in an AMC television series called *Mad Men*).

In 1956 the public relations department of [Merrill Lynch & Co.](#) persuaded my father to interview [Charlie Merrill](#), the founder and chief executive officer of the company. [Merrill Lynch](#) promised my father a readable story delivered by a charismatic personality. [Merrill](#) and my father scheduled an interview and developed a good rapport. Wishing to elaborate on some points of discussion but with deadlines pressing on both men, they agreed to continue their interview ten days after the first meeting.

Scheduling a second interview was fortuitous. My parents and I had a meeting, two days after my dad's first interview with [Charlie Merrill](#), with a woman who billed herself as an educational consultant. The consultant was a preparatory school version of an executive recruiter, personnel placement specialist, or headhunter, someone who knows an industry and knows what employers in that industry are looking for, except that, unlike executive recruiting or headhunting, in which the company pays a fee to recruit an executive, in my case my parents paid her fee, which included no role as broker between any school and my parents. In executive recruiting, a brokerage arrangement exists between an executive and a company; it is often the case that the executive recruiter must do a lot of work, looking into the background of many prospects, interviewing these prospective employees, and matching the correct background with the requirements of the job.

In my case things were much different. As soon as we were settled in her office, and her assistant had offered some drinks, the consultant smiled at me, listened to my parents' exaggerated analysis of my abilities and achievements, then shrewdly, as a seasoned psychologist plays to the egos of her clients, opened Sargent's Handbook of Private Schools, and made four recommendations, four schools that were considered in a small group of elite schools: [Phillips Andover](#), [Phillips Exeter](#), [Deerfield](#), and [Taft](#).

¹ A discount store or discount shop is a retail shop which sells products at prices that are lower than the typical market price.

There was virtually no research, no examination of any transcripts. The consultant did not ask for any references, an exercise of the most superficial nature, but a superficiality that is repeated thousands of times every day in the human resource departments of many corporations.

At the second interview with [Charlie Merrill](#), my dad, having done more homework, and knowing that [Merrill](#) was an entrepreneur with a solid formal education—he had attended [Amherst College](#) and the [University of Michigan](#) law school—guessed that because of the circles in which [Merrill](#) traveled he probably had his own thoughts about top tier prep schools, and it was likely that he enjoyed some connections at some of the schools. The conversation moved from [Merrill Lynch's](#) advertising theme that stressed the brokerage's bullish stance on America to the subject of children. My dad noted that neither he nor my mother had gone to college but they understood the social and economic advantages that a college degree could confer. I was a good student, my father emphasized, but I was not being pushed. I could benefit from some constructive competition. My dad told [Merrill](#) of the meeting we had with the Park Avenue consultant, telling him about the four schools that the consultant recommended as suitable. My father then asked [Merrill](#) what he thought.

[Merrill](#) responded, saying he thought that [Deerfield Academy](#) might be a good place for me. He noted that to get accepted was difficult, with intense national and international competition, but then he offered: "I have some connections at [Deerfield](#), he said, and I can make a phone call and see what I can do. I was roommate of [Deerfield's](#) headmaster when we were at [Amherst](#), and I do support the school financially. Before I make a phone call however, can you assure me that your son, if accepted at the school, will work hard and honor my support and not compromise my deep friendship with [Frank L. Boyden](#)?" He added that he would do his best to help me gain acceptance but there was no guarantee that his effort would be fruitful. My dad assured him that I would work hard if accepted and that such an opportunity would be of utmost importance to him, and that he would be grateful for anything that [Merrill](#) could do.

About a week later, [John Boyden](#), one of [Frank L. Boyden's](#) children and the School's Director of Admissions, sent a telegram asking us to come to the school for an interview with [Frank L. Boyden](#) at the school.

So it was that on a Sunday morning in March 1957 my parents and I boarded a train operated by the Boston and Maine Railroad (this railroad, its passenger service under intense threats from the booming development of the country's interstate highway system², increasing rates of automobile ownership, and the public acceptance of the airplane as the preferred method of travel, filed for bankruptcy in December 1970) at Grand Central Station in Manhattan. Our destination was the one room station at Deerfield, Massachusetts, where a taxi would meet us and take us one and a quarter mile to the school's campus.

Sitting on the train, I could not have been more excited and nervous. I was about to meet a legend, the dean of secondary school education. [Frank L. Boyden](#) had now been headmaster for fifty-five years. In 1902 the school wanted to have a football team, but there were only ten students. So [Boyden](#) volunteered to be the eleventh player. By 1957 it had close to five hundred students, with a graduating class of one hundred fifty-five students and more than half the class accepted at [Harvard](#), [Yale](#), or [Princeton](#). [Boyden](#) had been headmaster for fifty-five years, and there was no doubt that his drive and personality had been a vital force in the school's rise to international acclaim.

Meeting [Frank L. Boyden](#) was a great privilege. We sat in his living room after the taxi had let us off at his house. A few minutes later, he walked into the room and said, "I am [Frank Boyden](#), Mr. and Mrs. Russell. [Charlie Merrill](#) has said some nice things about your son and I told [Charlie](#) that if you wanted to come to the school I would be happy to meet you and spend a few minutes with you." He then thanked us for coming, invited us to the traditional Sunday tea that the school had for visitors, and promised that he would make sure

² The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, popularly known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act (Public Law 84-627), was enacted on June 29, 1956, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the bill into law.

that my application for admission would get to the right person. I was overwhelmed. To think that a man of his reputation would interrupt his Sunday—even for just a few minutes—was an impressively generous and gracious gesture. This was the famous [Boyden](#) personal touch. He had been hailed for many years as one of the greatest headmasters in history, standing together with “a skein of magnanimous despots who—no matter whether they had actually founded the places or not—created enduring schools through their own individual energies, maintained them under their own absolute rule, and left them forever imprinted with their own personalities” ([McPhee, John](#). *The Headmaster*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966, page seven).

About two weeks after the interview [John Boyden](#) sent a telegram notifying me that I had been accepted at the school for the next academic year. That morning was probably one of the most ecstatic in my life.

Last summer, wishing to escape from the Oklahoma heat and wanting a vacation in a beautiful setting, with little noise, but with a great swimming pool in the Koch Natatorium and access to the Boyden Library and the Koch Science Center, [Deerfield](#) was the answer. So one morning I prechecked through airport security, flew into O’Hare, changed planes and landed at Bradley International Airport in Hartford, Connecticut, secured my Hertz car, and took Interstate 91, then Massachusetts 5, passing many wooden frame houses and one shopping center on my right, housing the usual symbols of the global fast food presence, [McDonald’s \(NYSE: MCD\)](#) and [Wendy’s \(NASDAQ: WEN\)](#), along with, predictably, representatives of the global discount chains—[Walmart Inc. \(NYSE: WMT\)](#), [Dollar Tree](#), [Dollar General](#), and [Target Corporation \(NYSE: TGT\)](#). Soon, I would be in Old Deerfield on Boyden Lane, driving down a street with beautiful old homes, many owned by the Deerfield Historical Society, virtually all in architectural harmony.

As I turned onto Boyden Lane, I now had the same feeling of tranquility and order that [John McPhee](#) ([Deerfield](#) 1949) had when he wrote *The Headmaster* in 1966.

The Deerfield street is still the same quiet mile and a quarter it was in 1902. Farmers still live along it. On the site of the old, sunless schoolhouse is the main building of the academy, and around and beyond it are nineteen other buildings—classrooms, dormitories, laboratories, gymnasiums, dining hall, hockey rink, infirmary, theatre, art gallery. The academy is on a kind of peninsular plateau that was formed when the Deerfield River, which flows through the valley, shifted its course in another age. On three sides, steep banks slope to a lower level, where there are perhaps seventy-five acres of athletic fields. Hills rise to the east and west, and there are long views of farmland and tobacco barns to the north and south. It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful setting for a school or a more attractive school in the setting. What seems incredible, though, is that all of it—both the visible substance and the invisible essence of it—was developed by one man ([McPhee, John](#). *The Headmaster*, 1966, page nine).

This description is from 1966, but I found during my visit in 2017 that very little had changed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a yellow rectangular background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Fred".

with editorial and research assistance from Bruce Clemens, Katie Michaels-Johnson, and Ying Qi.