

Remarks by Jacquelyn Thomas
2021 Founders' Day Award

I am pleased and truly honored today, and I want to express my thanks to the members of the Awards Committee of the General Alumni Association, Principal Rawson and all those who recognized me today. I am pleased to be counted among the distinguished and devoted member of the Exeter Community who have been past recipients of the Founders Day Award, not the least of whom was my husband David Thomas.

The citation outlined some of the highpoints of my years at Exeter and I would like to fill in some details of a few of those more "memorable moments", of which there were many.

One of my earliest memories of my time at Exeter was when I was a new part time employee at the Davis Library. Shortly after I began, the Kahn Library opened and every one of the books had to be transferred from the Davis Library to their new home. This was an amazing "all hands on deck" effort with members of the campus community, faculty, staff and students standing shoulder to shoulder and handing books down the line from one building to another. It was especially memorable because, to my knowledge, it was the first time in the school's history that classes were called off. Many years later, I initiated another very different transfer of knowledge, the first digital project on campus, the computerization of the library.

The Library Proctor program was cited. I established the program after my daughter Hilary, a senior day student, told me that I "wasn't doing a good enough job" in the library for the day students who had carrels there. I asked her if she could do better and she said that, if she had the authority, she could. Thus, the library proctor program was born. As an aside, the author Dan Brown was one of the first students to serve as a library proctor.

Family members have helped me out in other ways. As a prank for Exeter/Andover Weekend, Andover students let loose in the library a mischief of blue mice (a group of mice is aptly, especially in this instance, called a mischief.) MaCavity, the family cat, and I spent the weekend prowling all floors clearing the place of the rodents.

Over the years, the Academy has provided a home for all of our family. From our first one bedroom apartment on the top floor of Wheelwright where the baby slept in a crib in the bath room and we cooked there on a hot plate when the dining hall was closed, to the Thomas House across the street from the library.

The Library was, of course, at the heart of my work at Exeter. As the largest secondary school library in the world both in size and volume, it attracted visitors from all over the world. Architects and architectural students have flocked to the celebrated Louis Kahn structure. In 1997, it was given the Twenty-Five Year Award by the American Institute of Architects and in 2005 the USPS issued a stamp naming it one of 12 masterworks of American Architecture.

But to me, the people and programs inside the building have been what has made the library special. The citation mentioned the Lamont Poetry Series which started in 1983 and up to this day had brought to our campus world renowned poets, each of whom has left an autographed work, often with a note. These artifacts have resided in a special room on the 4th floor of the building.

This program and so many other events could not have been possible without the Friends of the Library. Started in 1930 the Friends provided me with the financial support and encouragement to enable the library to grow and flourish during my time there. During my years at Exeter, I was often invited to speak at library conventions or on panels and I invariably credited the Friends for their generosity and involvement.

What makes the Exeter experience unique is the relationship fostered between teachers and students around the Harkness Table. I was especially pleased to have placed a Harkness table in the Atrium of Rockefeller Hall in recognition of that experience. Additionally, I believe the Junior Studies Program which was based in the library, and introduced new students to Harkness teaching and learning was an important step in helping preps become comfortable with the practice and philosophy.

Of course, one of the seminal events during my time at Exeter was the advent of coeducation. As the first woman to head the Library and the first faculty spouse to become a faculty member. I was delighted to welcome women and girls to the campus and was, as the citation stated, a founding member of the Committee to Enhance the Status of Women (CESW). There has been much written about this time during the 50th Anniversary commemoration.

In recognition of my work with the CESW, I was given a small gold medallion with the initials CESW engraved on it. I have worn day and night since I received it. It is emblematic of what to me was an important time in my life and the life of Exeter.

Over the years, my life and Exeter's have been intertwined. My husband and my children, my work and my home have been at the Academy. A young woman from a small town in central, PA, who knew nothing of private schools, became the James H. Ottaway Jr. '55 Professor at Phillips Exeter Academy. I am eternally grateful to the institution and especially the people who made that life and that work possible for me. Thank you.