



## Chad Rigsby's Tribute to Deena Barber

Although Deena was kind to me—as she was to everyone—from the moment I met her, it took me a few months of my first year at Saint George's to really get to know her. I knew about her, of course. She was famous. She possessed her own brand of historic significance. I knew she'd been sick and survived. I knew the seniors were dedicating the yearbook to her. Still, it was senior night at the end of the basketball season that first year, when I learned that graduating seniors bought roses and gave them to people who'd mattered to their careers. Most kids gave roses to their parents or their grandparents, brothers, sisters, and sweethearts. But on this first night, I noticed that everyone kept giving roses to Deena. They showered her with them. I remember wondering, what is it about this lady that they keep piling roses in front of her? Was it because she'd been sick, and recovered? I figured it must be some kind of freak occurrence. But it wasn't, of course. For ten years, I watched tearful students carry roses to Deena above all others, because they knew without a doubt she loved them nearly as much as their own mothers and fathers did.

This love was obvious, by the way. She was everybody's mother. She had more advisees than anybody else, more people begging their way into her AP class than anybody else, and she baked way more brownies than anybody else, too. Whenever some kid's name came up during the faculty meeting, she would say, "He's a dear child," and shake her head. Or she would drop some bit of information that nobody else knew, such as, "Her? She's an organic farmer." How she knew that the quietest girl in school was an organic farmer always mystified me, especially because she knew something like that about everyone. It took effort, I know, to pry that information out of that quiet girl, but Deena never quit. She stuck up with monumental resolve for every underdog of a high school kid. God help the teacher who doubted a kid could succeed! One wrong word, and you were in for a long teacher's meeting.

During Spirit Week, too, she was a force to be reckoned with. Deena would organize the uninspired faculty—like me—to take part. First, she would sign me up for the Tricycle Race behind my back, and then send me emails: GET READY FOR THE TRICYCLE RACE. THE TRICYCLE RACE IS COMING. QUIT SMIRKING AND DO THE TRICYCLE RACE. Then she would pin that silly green TR badge to her chest and walk around on Hero Day saying that she was Teddy Roosevelt, her favorite. She was also responsible for my disastrous

Elvis impersonation eight years ago, the time when the sideburns fell off. It was brutal, but it showed she cared about us all.

It's hard now, too, because somebody told me that Deena was the person you'd go to for comfort when something like this happened. So we miss her doubly. We need her to comfort us about losing her.

I went to Deena for comfort one time, in particular. Four years ago, when doctors misdiagnosed me with liver cancer, I went to Deena and I asked, "What do I do? How can I keep my spirits up?" She said that when she was sick, it was simple: her love for Rhiannon and Danae kept her going. She focused on them, and then she lived. I always remembered that, because as much as she loved every single kid who ever walked the halls at Saint George's, it was the idea of her daughters that fought off sickness ten years ago. And I know, now, that I tend towards outrage when I think about the deal the universe gave Deena, but I doubt that Deena would feel that way about it. I doubt she'd entirely agree. Because the truth is that Deena fought off disease one time long enough to see her daughters grow into women she loved and admired, and she would go on and on about Rhiannon's science degrees and Danae's theatrics and song, and about how proud she was of both of them. I know that even though Deena was sorry to go, she was glad that her love for her girls kept her in the world as long as it did, and that she had seen them grow up, and that they had known her as a friend and mother both. I'm glad, too, because if her love for her daughters hadn't sustained her for those ten years, then many, many of us would never have met her at all.

I like to think that Deena is up in heaven with Tim Russert right now, handicapping the presidential election. They both have their dry-erase boards out, and they're gleefully arguing their heads off. But I know that heaven is more complicated than that, just as life and sorrow are more complicated, too. Still, that's not all there is. Deena's dedication to the school was uncomplicated. Her laughter echoing through the auditorium during any given musical was uncomplicated. Finally, too, her love for her daughters was entirely without complication, as was her fascination with history, which teaches—just as literature does—that all complexity is only ultimately a matter of nearsightedness, because sooner or later, sadness inevitably gives way to hope, empires fall off and new ones rise out of the rubble, comedy replaces tragedy, and because there wouldn't be any history at all if the sun didn't rise every morning to help us count the days.

**Chad Rigsby,**

*Upper School English Teacher*

## Forrest Orme's Tribute to Deena Barber

I recently heard about the passage of Deena Barber and wish that I could be there for the ceremony to show my gratitude, respect, admiration, and love for one of the more influential people in my life. I am already back in Middlebury and am scheduled to lead eight freshmen in the woods for three days and cannot make it, but will consider myself there in spirit.

Deena was one of the more amazing people in the world. She was full of intellect, curiosity, joy, love, and passion that she shared, I am sure with her colleagues, but more importantly with her students. She made history come alive mostly through her own passion and curiosity for the subject. From a purely academic standpoint I learned almost more from Deena Barber than I learned in some of my classes at Middlebury, and her lessons about history, its function, its power, have stuck with me throughout my career at Middlebury and are some of, if not all, the reasons that I chose to be a History major.

More importantly though, Deena was an inspiration to me. Even after high school and in college Deena was one of the first people that I wanted and needed to see once I returned home. We were so close and I valued our relationship to the utmost degree. I would come to her house, sit down, drink tea when it was cold, lemonade when it was hot and we would talk. Our conversations moved from academic, to political, to personal and finally I would look at my watch and realize that I had been there for more than four hours. As I drove home down Five Mile Prairie to the South Hill, I realized that Deena was more than an incredible teacher, she was an incredible person. She cared about all of her students, not solely as students but as people. She was as involved in our academic careers as she was in our athletic, and personal lives. She had a wise, and caring insight when I confronted her with problems and I would often seek her out for counseling and advice. And she always came through.

I met her a week before her death when I had been told by others that she became tired after talking for a few minutes. I told her that she should kick me out when she was tired and that I could come back another day. But we managed to have another four hour talk which we covered our entire range of subjects. I consider myself one of the luckier people in the world to have gotten a chance to speak with Deena when I did. Those are four hours which I will never forget and which I shall cherish for the rest of my life.

Deena was a remarkable woman. To use a history metaphor: Deena was the person on the hill. The beacon to which all people should look up to, in order to examine their lives. She was the model of integrity, passion, vibrance, joy and love. If only we could all live our lives with as much passion and compassion as she lived hers, then we could all have fuller lives.

My love to Deena's family, friends, and the entire Saint George's community,

**Forrest Seamount Orme '05**

## Bob Tyllia's Tribute to Deena Barber

I guess I was unlucky that I graduated in June 1994, and as a consequence did not take any classes from Deena. From what I have heard and read about what others said Deena must have been a force of nature in the classroom, much like her hero Theodore Roosevelt. But I am not surprised since Deena injected herself in every aspect of life on campus. She was instrumental in the burgeoning drama program, and she always found time to help out the athletic program whether it simply be with her voice urging her charges on, or in doing the book for Varsity Basketball these last 6 years.

Deena was also someone who you converse with on a whole host of topics outside the classroom. Of course it helped that she was one of my dad's colleagues, and in that way she was part of my extended family. I always ended up taking my deeper questions to Deena, and her answers left me with more wisdom, than I had before. Perhaps it is these precious conversations that I will miss most.

Tragedy had been few and far between at St. George's until these last few years. Now we have been struck with three passings before their allotted time. I have been searching for words which might give some meaning to us. I think these words from the "Ode of Remembrance" written by Laurence Binyon in 1914 during The Great War are appropriate:

"They went with songs to the battle, they were young,  
Straight of limb, true of eyes, steady and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them."

**Bob Tyllia, Class of 1994**

## Catherine Col Manguson's Tribute to Deena Barber

Deena was one of my favorite teachers and a "mom" figure to me at SG. She made me want to learn history and inspired me to be a History minor in college. I will never forget how 4 years ago, we visited the campus for the first time in years and she took her lunch break to show us around campus and talk with us. She was a person that made you feel special no matter who you were. Deena, you will be greatly missed, and Danae and Rhiannon, my thoughts are with you.

**Catherine Col Manguson, Class of 1995**

## Sue Kerschen's Tribute to Deena Barber

Although I was not a personal friend of Deena's, I did have a personal relationship with her because she was my children's teacher, and that is very personal to me, as it was for Deena. She was one of the finest educators I've known and I'm fairly picky.

She had all the qualities that define an outstanding educator. The quality I admired and enjoyed the most was Deena's excited love and passion for her favorite subject, History. When she spoke about history, her students' study of history and its relevance, or a new book on history she was reading, Deena spoke with such wisdom and passion that everyone wanted to be in her class, even the parents.

Another outstanding quality of Deena's that everyone valued was her genuine respect for the students, their abilities, and even their parents. She was compassionate while being honest and authentic with students' and parents' needs. Deena did not need a government program to ensure "No child was left behind", especially that no freshman would leave 9th grade without a good quality history paper. Another unique quality Deena shared with students and parents was her enthusiastic love of, support for, and commitment to the school community as a whole. She truly enjoyed being a SGS Dragon in her heart and her spirit.

I wonder...Who will assure the incoming freshman parents that their children are in the very best place and will be well educated and most of all, cared for? Who will make sure every freshman can write and turn in a high quality history paper (and later get high scores on AP US History)? And who is going to cue me when to laugh at all the school plays?

Yes, Deena Barber has left a large hole in the SGS community. But, I believe that if we remember and reflect on the spirit, examples, and legacy that Deena gave us, we can live our lives and teach our children with:

- A little more passion,
- A little more compassion,
- A little more commitment,
- And a lot more laughter.

And then we can fill this hole she left behind. I plan to laugh a little louder and a little longer at this year's theater productions. I hope I don't miss any cues.

With respect and gratitude to the memory of a wonderful lady and an outstanding educator,

**Sue Kerschen,**

**Parent of Current Student & Alumni**

## Olivette Orme's Tribute to Deena Barber

Deena Barber was a huge person in the life of everyone I know whose path crossed hers. Certainly that is true for me and my family. Forrest always sought her out whenever he came home and Wyatt's great pleasure was to "go to Deena's and weed," knowing it meant Deena's famous brownies and the chance to talk. When you talked with Deena, she would zero in on you with a deep, penetrating look that let you know she was genuinely listening. Her questions were so open, so direct, and so respectful, and they conveyed such genuine caring and such an intuitive understanding, you came away confident you could take on any challenge, large or small, the world might throw at your feet.

As I her watched last fall... and winter... and spring...and this last, discouraging summer, I came to admire Deena as much as any fellow human being I have ever met. Her courage in the face of her slowly declining health and her determination to overcome every obstacle and every disappointment she faced will forever be an inspiration to me and, I am sure, to everyone who knew her. For me, the reason her death was so shocking is that she remained so positive that "her" lungs would come, that her transplant would be a success, and that she would soon resume all her normal activities that it was impossible to be around her and not believe it, too. She never stopped living life, she never lost her interest or passion for the world and the people in it, and above all, she never stopped loving.

In her dying, as in her living, Deena modeled grace and hope. She faced her death with the strength of goddesses and the hearts of heroes. In the spirit of "paying it forward," I hope I might one day have the opportunity to give to just one person the same caring and understanding that Deena gave so generously to so many.

**Olivette Orme,  
Parent of Current Student & Alumni,  
Past President of Parents Association**