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Yale University, despite its current reputation, was once one of the world centers of magical education. It remained as such until shortly after my own daughter's departure in the late eighties. There are myriad reasons why its magical education program has declined since then, but that would be fodder for a Times Op-Ed piece, not my personal memoir.

In 1947, Yale's magic was at its peak. Of course no institution shall ever surpass the historical distinction of the University of Athens, but there have always been several that have proven to be competent rivals. In the late forties and early fifties, St. Petersburg State University, Lamb's College at Cambridge, and the University of Lima all had strong programs. Here in the US, the places to be were Northwestern and Yale.

Northwestern University was known for its degree in Magical Therapy; the healers and "wise women" congregated there. It had also grown into its own as an incubator for magical performers and other "non-essential" majors. "The summer camp on the lake," it was called derisively by the critics of the magic world.

Yale, on the other hand, was where the magical theorists found themselves. The serious practitioners traveled from all over the country to study with the respected faculty in New Haven, Connecticut. This was the post-secondary education in which my older brother partook. He was graduating with a Bachelor of Commatatus in Magical Performance, which you may think odd after I have just said that Northwestern was where he should have gone to study the

“touchy-feely” magic. The reason behind this odd decision lay in the still-muscular gentleman who walked beside me through the New England campus.

Father’s eyes glistened as he looked up at the light-brown buildings around us. He pointed to a grove of trees and chuckled to himself. He nodded soberly as he passed a gated entrance to a dormitory. This was his Alma Mater. He earned both his BC in Political Magic and his MC in Magic of International Governance on these self-same grounds.

“Addy, remember the semi-formal on that quad over there?” He pointed to a large, stone-laid area between the buildings.

Mother grinned. “Of course I do. For Mu Pi, wasn’t it? That was the night Sam Sellers proposed to Tabitha Macklin.”

Father reached back and took his wife’s hand. “He tried to steal you away from me, you know. When I went to Cairo. Said you’d be his by the time I came back.” He laughed. “Didn’t work too well, eh?”

Mother nodded and folded her arm through his. “I could never throw away such a handsome Maegus.”

Father’s chest swelled. And he wasn’t bad-looking, I noticed, as we walked with the throng of families headed to the ceremony. His tall, boxy frame and chiseled jaw had to have made the girls gooey when he was younger. No wonder Mother stuck by him, even in the face of Sam Sellers, whomever he was.

It's important that young girls find their fathers attractive. This is the mold through which they will pour the soft substance of their suitors. If all goes well, they'll harden into something that looks like the first man of their life, the first love of their life, the first heartbreak of their life. There is nothing worse than a woman who had an unattractive father, for then she has no model by which to select a mate. Unfortunately, I ended up a very unattractive father as time went on.

On that day, however, he was still a greying Adonis. As we walked, the crowd grew thicker until we found ourselves in front of a small, square building. "Yale School of Magic" the stonework façade proclaimed. One by one, hundreds of parents were squeezing their way through the tiny portal. The college's coat of arms was etched on one side – a griffin holding a branch in its beak with two crossed serpents below. We secured a place in the queue and waddled our way forward.

"Everyone won't fit in there," I observed, taking into account the number of people in the line and the size of the building itself.

"Don't worry," Father said. "We'll fit." He passed a ticket to both me and Mother. It was dark green with silver lettering. The coat of arms appeared in the top-left corner. It read simply:

*YALE SCHOOL OF MAGIC*

*COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY*

*CLASS OF 1947*

“Don’t lose that,” he warned. “Or it won’t let you in.”

I frowned. “It?”

He didn’t answer me.

We finally reached the doorway and ducked into the blackness beyond. I followed my parents down a dim corridor, lit only by lanterns that lined the wall every ten feet or so. There were only a few doors on either side of us, all barred shut. We continued filing behind those in front of us, eventually making it to an even smaller door at the far end.

Everyone had to squat down to pass through this portal, which caused no small amount of grumbling from some of the elderly family members. My mother also took issue with the small opening, almost falling as she went through to the other side.

I was almost blinded by the brightness of the next room. We were suddenly in a huge indoor amphitheater, obviously modeled after the ancient Greek model. Ionic columns lined the space, supporting risers that looked like they could hold upwards of a thousand people. The domed ceiling, which I was certain was not rounded on the outside of the building, had painted on it an elaborate depiction of the heavens, which spun and tilted and moved even as I stood there and watched. The sun gave off such a magnificent light that it hurt my eyes to look for too long. True to ancient theory of geocentrism, it revolved in a perfect circle around the portrait of Earth.

Once my eyesight had adjusted, I made out my parents on the other side of a large stone archway, beckoning me forward. Those who were once behind me were shuffling past through

this piece of architecture beside the bare stage. Aware that I was lagging behind, I quickly made my way under the arch.

Before I could pass through, however, a terrible screech echoed through the amphitheater. I froze with fear as a piece of stone broke free from the top of the arch. Shaped like a griffin, it flapped its wings, flying in a wide circle before halting in front of my face. Its beak opened and it gave another loud screech, whereupon I let out my own cry of surprise. I took a step backward.

“It wants your ticket,” someone behind me muttered, annoyed. It was then that I noticed it – a small opening in the side of the arch, over which was carved “TICKETS.”

Acutely aware that the magicked griffin statue was monitoring my tiniest movement, I slowly deposited my ticket into the slot. Swiftly, the griffin flew back to its perch and melded into the archway once more, as lifeless as normal, non-magicked stone.

Red-faced, I mumbled an apology for holding up those behind me in line. I rejoined my parents. Mother was wearing a straight-lipped expression, but Father was grinning like a little boy. “I told you to hang onto it,” he said.

I had seen magicked items before, of course. Everyone had. Most Piggly Wiggly stores had Mr. Pig beside their door, beckoning people in to shop and making conversation with the wives as they entered. General Motors developed a steering wheel that wouldn’t let anyone’s hand on it but its owners. Most suburban homes had Bounce-Back fences to keep out intruders and vermin. But I can honestly say I was not expecting a stone griffin to scream in my face.

I was impressed.