



# **The Old Familiar Places: The Life and Letters of Frederic E. Fox, the Spirit of Princeton, Volume One**

*Donald H Fox*

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This is a two-volume biography, a "Life and Letters" of Frederic E. Fox, the "Keeper of Princetoniana" at Princeton University. Fox graduated from Princeton in 1939. He returned twenty-five years later to the campus he loved. He served Princeton University at a pivotal period of its history: when it changed from an all-male, relatively homogeneous school to the co-educational, diverse institution it is today. He was a tireless champion of the idea of the university. He was often called "Mr. Princeton" but he knew he had counterparts among hundreds of thousands of students across the world who feel a loyalty, an old-fashioned devotion to their alma mater. The "Old Familiar Places" of this biography are mostly all in and around Princeton, New Jersey but they celebrate something universal -- the connection between the place where we were educated and our emotional lives. He once wrote to a student who had mixed feelings about graduating in this way: "No one can forget this place, the various brothers and sisters we met here. (Also the various aunts and uncles.) Those of us who don't move on, we who hang around the place and try to keep it going, we too have a feeling for it. While our household sometimes erupts in one way or another, fights in the kitchen, skeletons in the closet, we're grateful that it still goes on. The ties are fragile, as fragile as memory and promise, but I prefer it that way. In the long run, I think it is stronger than any ironbound community. Show me a better place on this earth." The second theme of this "Life and Letters" is Fox's love for his family. He is an example of someone who achieved a rare balance between his professional life and his personal life. This balance -- it could be called "happiness" -- makes Fox an interesting and helpful character to learn about. He has something to share, perhaps to teach, about the popular, though elusive subject of happiness. During the three years that Fox's oldest son was in the Peace Corps, Fox wrote him every week. During almost every week of the academic year, Fox wrote a column for Princeton's weekly alumni magazine. This column was a chronicle of the life and times of his classmates. This "Life and Letters" paints a vivid portrait of Fox over the last six years of his life and as it does, it also documents the "Life and Times" of America from 1975 to 1981. David Remnick, the Editor of The New Yorker magazine, captured the essence of Fox when he concluded an article he wrote about Princeton for the Washington Post in this way: "In my senior year at Princeton, a funny old man named Freddie Fox died. He was the official Keeper of Princetoniana. Everyone knew Freddie. At opening ceremonies he used to teach incoming Freshmen the school song. He used to ride a black bicycle around campus wearing a straw boater with a black and orange band and a tiger-stripe sport jacket. He wore tiger-striped ties, Princeton pins and Princeton socks. Freddie loved that place. Sometimes his love, his outfits, his innocent dedication to an institution so rich and powerful seemed a little queer. But there it was. Try it for yourself. Make a trip to Princeton. If you catch it on the right day, with the smell of autumn in the wind and the heft of wisdom in the walls, you might discover a campus worth loving. A fantasy. Freddie Fox's Princeton." The "Life and Letters" recreates the reality behind "Freddie Fox's Princeton." Try it for yourselves.

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