



# 'Just One of the Guys'

## Gregory Peck, 1916-2003



### Gregory Peck Recalls His Days on Berkeley's Rowing Team

by D. Lyn Hunter, Berkeleyan | 21 February, 1996

*Peck (2nd from right) reunites with buddies from the 1939 UC Berkeley rowing team at a 1996 Cal Performances Director's Dinner (David Allen photo)*

As the stately figure slowly walked onto the stage, the capacity crowd at Zellerbach Hall jumped to its feet in applause. When the thunder finally died, Gregory Peck said simply, "I'm so happy to be back home."

Peck, a member of the Class of '39, was on campus Sunday, Feb. 11, for "A Conversation with Gregory Peck." He shared film clips, Hollywood anecdotes and memories of his days at Berkeley.

As the star-struck audience soaked up every word the Academy Award-winning actor spoke, it was hard to imagine his humble beginnings as the son of a druggist in the small Southern California beach town of La Jolla. Even his college career had an unmemorable start. He explained that he had to spend a year and a half at San Diego State to improve his grades before being admitted to Berkeley, his first choice.

Peck credits his years at Berkeley for creating an important foundation for his future. "It was a very special experience for me and three of the greatest years of my life. It woke me up and made me a human being," said Peck.

A member of the rowing team, Peck attributed the skills he had to master as a rower--rhythm, harmony and balance--to the success he achieved in his personal and professional life.

At a fund-raising dinner following the talk, Jack Collins, who rowed with Peck in 1937 and '38, said he was just one of the guys. "There are no stars in crew, we all had to work together," said Collins, who added that Peck was known in those days by his given name, Eldred.

Even though Peck's Berkeley fees were only \$26 a year, he had to struggle to make ends meet. He worked as a "hasher" for the Alpha Gamma Delta sorority house on Haste Street in exchange

for meals.

Now, after a prosperous 50-year career in the movies, Peck is giving back to the university. He has been a generous supporter and has recently pledged \$25,000 for an endowment in honor of his crew coach, Ky Ebright, for the men's rowing team.

At the Zellerbach event, Peck showed clips from some of his most memorable films, including "Roman Holiday," "The Guns of Navarone," "The Boys from Brazil," and the moving, final courtroom scene from "To Kill a Mockingbird," which left the audience in momentary silence.

Peck also shared some stories from his years as a Hollywood insider. When filming started for "The Gunfighter," Peck said he was outfitted with a bad fake mustache. When the director, who had been out of town, saw the early scenes he was horrified at the sight of the ridiculous prop. "You're supposed to be a sex symbol, we'll have to re-shoot everything," demanded the director. Not wanting to re-do two weeks worth of work, Peck said he convinced the film's accountant to inflate the cost of re-filming the scenes. When told how expensive it would be, the director backed down and Peck wore the mustache for the remainder of the film.

Peck concluded the presentation by taking questions from the audience. He answered such questions as "why didn't you play more bad guys?" He said he didn't know why except that he was always seen as the hero leading man type.

An engineering student temporarily stumped Peck when he asked for advice on "what should I do with my life?" After a pause, the resourceful Peck told the student that his brother was an engineer working on the problem-plagued mass transit system in Los Angeles. Head down there, he told the student, and you should have a job for life.

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