

# Sixty years after she was meant to graduate, this Tenafly native finally has her diploma

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When Cornelia Farnum met up by Zoom in February with her former Tenafly High School classmates and lifelong friends Louise “Reddi” Ford and Colette Duerre, she thought it was just to catch up with each other.

She was pleasantly surprised when some other former classmates joined in on the call, but didn't think much of it.

Then, Tenafly High School Principal James Morrison appeared on the call, and that's when it became the moment that she did not have back in 1960 — Farnum was presented with an honorary diploma from her old high school.

"It was amazing. I think from that point on, I was just probably nonverbal," Farnum said with a laugh.

Without the diploma, Farnum still has led an accomplished life in the past 60 years.

The Tenafly native served for nearly 30 years as a professor at Cornell University teaching anatomy to veterinary medicine students, earned three degrees and served in the Peace Corps.

Farnum did not get her diploma because she chose to spend her senior year in Italy as an international exchange student and therefore was not able to do a driver's education class and physical education class needed to graduate.



She was supposed to receive the honor during the Class of 1960 reunion last fall but that was canceled due to the COVID pandemic.

However, through the efforts of Ford, Duerre, and another former classmate, Mike MacCracken, the diploma ended up arriving at her home in New York's Finger Lakes Region, which she shares with her partner Jack Booker, in advance of the Zoom ceremony and without her knowing.

"We wanted to invite a small circle of her Tenafly friends, each with stories to share," Ford said. "The diploma and overall presentation were a very special surprise."

During the ceremony featuring videos of recent graduating Tenafly students in caps and gowns marching to the traditional tune of "Pomp and Circumstance," Booker had the diploma in his possession and brought it out to Farnum.

Farnum was touched by her former classmates doing this for her.

"I just thought it was amazingly kind and fun," Farnum said. "And the fact that they carried through on this idea, it just makes you weep and it's very poignant."



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