

## **How Seminal 90s Movie “Dead Poets Society” Would Have Changed had it Been Written from the Perspective of Other Key Characters**

**By Ted Kluck**

As you probably know, “Dead Poets Society” is not only Peter Weir’s worst movie, it is the quintessential faux-deep 90s exploration of things like passion and creativity and non-conformity and New England boys’ schools. The story is told with unconventional poetry professor John Keating as the protagonist, but I wondered how the movie would change if written from the perspective of other key characters.

*Super Obvious Note/Disclaimer: This is meant to be funny (sort of). I ran into problems with this – lack of transparency about how an article is simply meant to be funny/entertaining – in my Medina-related open letter. Lesson learned.*

### **Chet Danbury – Public School Quarterback**

Chet Danbury was dating the girl (Gloria) that the Knox Overstreet character inexplicably stole from him. I say “inexplicably” because Chet Danbury, as far as we know, was a handsome, successful public school student athlete (football), and an attentive boyfriend, given the fact that he gave Overstreet a beating when Overstreet was creepily touching his passed-out girlfriend. Also, here’s all we know about Overstreet: he creepily touched her while she was drunk, and then he showed up at her school and embarrassed her – motivated, no doubt, by the questionable “teaching” of Keating. He also stole a sandwich from the cafeteria as he was jauntily exiting the school. Not cool.

Also, Danbury was every bit as WASPy and wealthy as Overstreet, given the opulence of his home.

Here’s something you can take to the bank: You’re not failing in life if your name is “Chet Danbury.” A DPS reboot with Chet at the center is a lighthearted romp through public high school in the 1950s, featuring Chet in some half-hearted classroom scenes, succeeding on the football field, still giving Knox Overstreet a beating, marrying Gloria, and then becoming a successful (choose one: doctor, lawyer, investment banker).

### **Mr. Nolan – Administrator**

If you pay any attention to DPS at all, it’s hard not to agree with the following: John Keating is a really bad teacher. Here’s what we know about Keating: he played a lot of poetry kickball, he shamed introvert Todd Anderson in the classroom a whole bunch, he manhandled a bunch of other students, and he totally disrupted class when he had to return to the room to grab his “personal effects.” Yeah, right. He totally knew they’d be having class then.

I’d love to make a movie celebrating the hardworking and underappreciated administrators who really make tony, upscale New England boys’ schools go: The Mr. Nolans of the world.

Did Mr. Nolan have his problems? Sure. He probably didn't need to bend his students over a desk and spank them. That seems a bit extreme. But he was otherwise a devoted lifelong administrator of a very successful private school who momentarily had his life ruined by a rogue teacher.

By dealing decisively with the Keating problem and mitigating against the PR issues that inevitably followed, Nolan is the real hero here.

### **Gerald Pitts – The Tall Guy with the Flat Top**

I really liked this character. As he told the girls in the cave, "I'm either going to Yale...or I'm not." The burning question, for me, is: does Pitts actually end up at Yale? Does he ever find love? Maybe with one of the girls in the cave? The movie would have really flown had it focused on Pitts and not on the snively over-dramatic Neil Perry or the mopey introvert Todd Anderson.

A word on names: I'm of the opinion that a person's name does a great deal to determine the outcome of their life. The chief problem facing Todd Anderson and Neil Perry is that they didn't have WASPily-awesome names like Knox Overstreet or Chet Danbury.

### **The Desk Set That Was Flung Into the River by Neil Perry**

The real heroes in DPS were the handsome, leather bound desk sets and blotters that appeared all over this film. Men really knew how to set up a desk in New England in the 1950s. My DPS reboot would be a celebration of these desk sets. Where are they produced? Why are they shrink-wrapped? Was that (shrink wrap) even a thing in the 1950s?

We went off the rails as a culture the moment the rebellious, ungrateful Perry flung Anderson's desk set into the river. It was a moment in time that signaled a paradigm shift away from handsome oak desks, appointed with love and intentionality, and a shift toward the sorts of mediocre formica monstrosities inhabited by cubicle-dwellers around the world, reclaimed barn doors used by hipsters, and our current sign of the apocalypse: standing desks.

Neil Perry ruined desks, and I hate him for it.

### **Gloria**

Why would she follow a strange guy into a cave?

### **Neil Perry's Father, Mr. Perry**

I see an action-oriented revenge picture entitled "Dead Poets Society Two: Dead Poet" in which Mr. Perry hunts John Keating through the picturesque New England countryside, bent on avenging his son's death (which was probably Keating's fault).

### **Dr. Hager**

Dr. Hager was the awesome colleague who often stared down at Keating from a (literal) tower of ivory. Hager was the one who waved knowingly when Keating left campus – it (the wave) was full of both smugness (good) and compassion (also good).

Here's the thing: Dr. Hager is a good educator. I want a movie exploring his pedagogy and classroom management. It may not be as flashy as DPS, but I bet we'd all learn something.