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From the Hill

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From the Hill

Authors

Diana McQueen, Pat Sims, Ruth Jacobs, Stephen Collins, Sally Baker, Patrick Brancaccio, and Gerry Boyle

Q&A

LINCOLN PEIRCE '85 ON HIS COMIC-STRIP HERO, BIG NATE, LIFE AS A PROFESSIONAL ARTIST, HIS NEW BOOK SERIES, AND INSPIRATION FROM THE COLBY ART DEPARTMENT

DIANA MCQUEEN INTERVIEW

Lincoln Peirce '85, of Portland, Maine, is the creator of Big Nate*, a comic strip published in daily and Sunday newspapers nationwide since 1991. Peirce also is the author of a series of graphic novels for young adults starring an 11-year-old sixth grader with a good heart—and the record for school detentions.*

How did Nate first reveal himself to you?

I'd started trying to get a comic strip syndicated during my freshman year at Colby, and from that point on I submitted strip ideas to syndicates on a fairly regular basis. Most of those early efforts were pretty bad, honestly. But my work slowly improved, and the rejection letters grew more encouraging. Eventually an editor told me to write about what I knew best, and so I came up with a strip called *Neighborhood Comix*. It was loosely based on the neighborhood in New Hampshire where I grew up, and it featured a pretty unwieldy cast of characters. I got a letter back from the woman at United Media who eventually became my first editor, who liked the strip but thought there were too many characters. She suggested I pick one character to build the strip around. So I chose Nate.

What is your day-to-day life like as a professional artist?

It's solitary, because I work alone at home. I have an office next to our dining room, and that's where I spend nearly all my working time. The radio keeps me company. It's a fairly uncomplicated profession. I'm either trying to think up ideas or I'm drawing. But it's become a little more hectic over the last couple years, because now, in addition to the comic strip, I'm writing Big Nate chapter books for young readers. There's more to accomplish each day.

Did Colby help you as an artist?

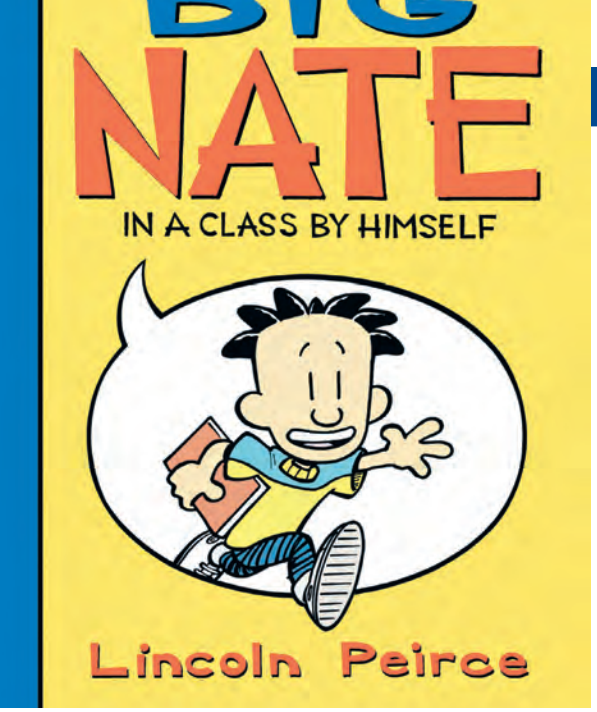
On my second day on campus, I found the *Echo* office and asked if I could do a comic strip for the paper. I'd read that Garry Trudeau, of *Doonesbury* fame, had done a strip called *Bull Tales* while an undergraduate at Yale, and so I thought maybe I could follow a similar path. I did a strip called *Third Floor*, and it was really the first time I'd ever seen my stuff in print. And having a deadline, even a relatively flexible weekly one, was good practice. But even more important to me was the Art Department at Colby. I was an art major, and I loved my teachers. They were very supportive. Harriett Matthews was my advisor for a Jan Plan independent study I did about comics. David Simon, Hugh Gourley, and Michael Marlais always went out of their way to say a kind word about my strip in the *Echo*. And Abbott Meader was my mentor, someone I deeply admired.

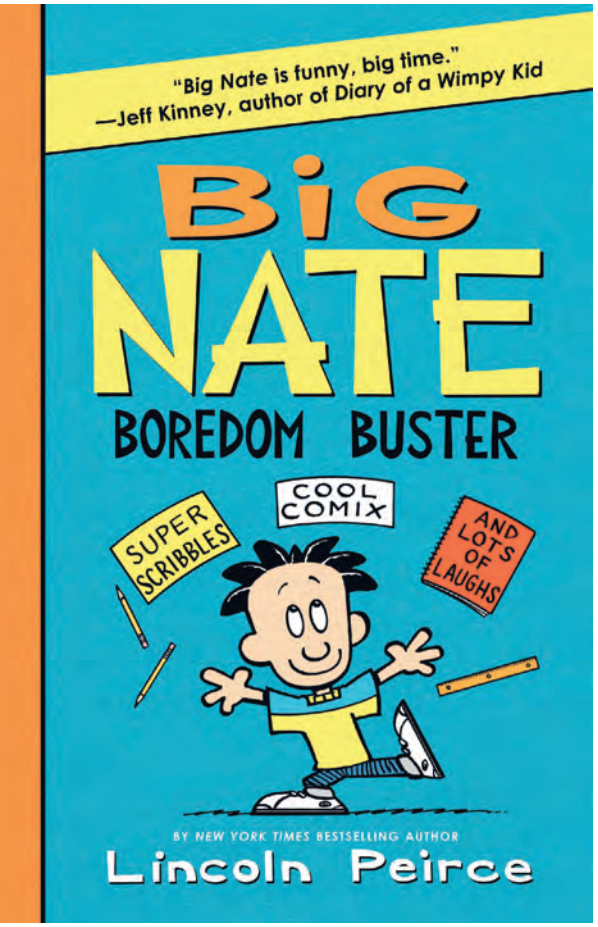
What moments or people really defined your Colby experience?

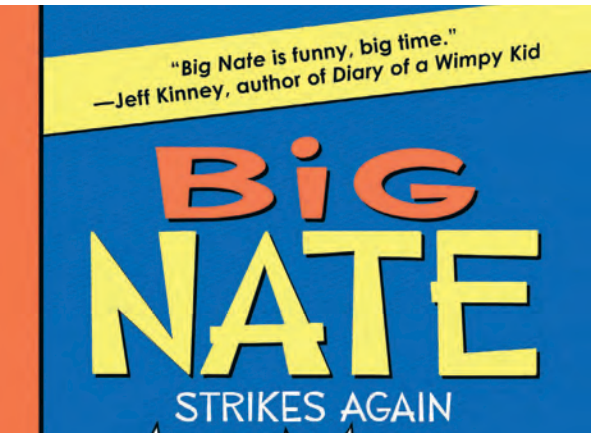
I saw the lives that my art teachers were leading—Abbott and Harriett were both on campus a couple days a week, and they had beautiful studios out in the country where they were creating their own work—and it really inspired me. I was never a great artist by any means, but with their help I began to think of myself as an artist with something to contribute, whether it was through drawing or painting or comics. And so I created a workspace for myself. There was an old printing room on the top floor of Bixler that wasn't being used, and I asked David Simon if I could clean it up and use it as a studio … and he said yes, so that's just what I did. I was given a key so that I had twenty-four-hour access, and Abbott and Harriett would come visit me there and critique my work. … It really fueled my aspiration to make a life in art for myself, somehow.

How long were you writing Nate before you made it to the papers?

I first drew Nate in 1988, and the comic strip debuted in newspapers in January of 1991. What followed was seventeen or eighteen years of very modest success. The strip had a loyal but relatively small readership, and it wasn't all that widely known, because it wasn't in very many major-market newspapers. But I always felt fortunate to be syndicated and to be making a living as a cartoonist, because it's a small fraternity.







How has Nate grown as a character since you created him?

Nate hasn't aged at all. In twenty-plus years, he hasn't progressed beyond sixth grade. And his personality—that of a wisecracking, trouble-making, but ultimately lovable eleven-year-old boy—has remained largely intact. But the strip itself has changed quite a bit. When it started, I imagined it as sort of a "domestic humor" strip, with the lion's share of the attention focusing on Nate, his single dad, and his older sister Ellen. But, maybe because I was working as a high school art teacher when I started developing the strip, I quickly realized that what I enjoyed most was writing jokes about school—Nate's classmates, his teachers, and so on. It wasn't long before the strip was almost entirely comprised of school jokes and themes.

Do you draw from your own experience as a child?

My short-term memory is terrible, but I've always had almost photographic recall of my own childhood, particularly middle school. Sixth grade seemed like the most eventful year imaginable. That's when you transition out of elementary school and everything changes. For the first time, you've got a different teacher for each subject. You've got a locker. You've got intramural sports. You go to dances. You experience soaring triumphs or crushing humiliations on an almost daily basis. When I created Nate, I made him a sixth grader largely because I thought, with a kid that age, I'd never run out of material. And, so far, I haven't.

Your graphic novels are in a perfect format for comic lovers.

We're living in the golden age of graphic novels. Fifteen or even ten years ago, it was difficult to convince schools and libraries to buy children's books that included comics, because comics weren't considered real reading. But that's changed, thankfully. The Captain Underpants books and the Wimpy Kid series were real eye-openers for publishers; suddenly they saw that hybrid books of this type were popular not only among kids who love to read but among the so-called reluctant readers. Comics are a great pathway to other kinds of books, and they're a fantastic teaching tool when you're trying to introduce young kids to the concept of storytelling. So publishers are very open to formats like this now. It wouldn't have occurred to me ten years ago to write a Big Nate chapter book; back then the goal for comic strip creators was to get a book deal for a compilation or a treasury of previously published strips. I'm happy that's changed.

What are your hopes for the series and future plans for Nate?

Well, I've signed on to do eight books. The third one went on sale in August, so that leaves me five more to write. That takes care of my future plans for the next three years or so. My most fervent hope is that I can keep coming up with ideas. I think the fear for any storyteller is that he wakes up one day and can't think of any more good stories to tell. But, so far, so good.

The Alchemist

SCULPTOR STEFANIE ROCKNAK TURNS WOOD INTO CAPTURED MOMENTS OF EXPRESSION

PAT SIMS STORY

For Stefanie Rocknak ’88, life combines the best parts of the cerebral and the expressive. Her day job is teaching philosophy at Hartwick College in Oneonta, N.Y. In her off hours she makes sculpture that burns with passion. “Initially I kept them totally separate,” she said, “but making representational art is a manifestation of my philosophical belief that all art doesn’t have to be conceptual.”

If she’s not focusing on Hume’s epistemology, Rocknak is probably performing her alchemy on wood. “It’s something I have to do and love to do,” she said. “Sometimes there are moments when it’s driving me crazy, and that’s incredibly frustrating, but I get a certain satisfaction about being able to capture expressions in three dimensions.”

At Colby Rocknak concentrated on painting, art history, and American studies, and, though she studied sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design Summer School and Tyler School of Art in Rome, she describes herself as self-taught. Apparently there was something about working with wood that had been percolating inside her all along. Her father, William Rocknak ’58, was an artist and cabinetmaker, and her mother, Lucinda Allerton Rocknak ’58, was an avid refinisher. (They now own and operate a boatyard in Rockport, Maine.) Rocknak was just a girl when she started trying her hand at carving.

After she earned her Ph.D. in philosophy from Boston University, a philosophy fellowship allowed her to observe a wealth of medieval wood carvings in Vienna and Germany, which left an indelible impression. Now, despite her admiration for such icons as Michelangelo, Bernini, and Donatello, Rocknak is most moved by “the nameless artists who created wooden pieces in cathedrals in Germany.”

By 1999 she began publicly displaying her work. Many of her life-size busts are characterized by an intense, haunted look, made more dramatic by the wood’s swirling grain. Her pieces are “cathartic, ways of externalizing emotions I have,” she said. “Sometimes I see someone with an expression that motivates a piece of work, certain microexpressions we might be uncomfortable with. You can freeze-frame those with a sculpture.”

Sculptor Stefanie Rocknak ’88 in her studio. A philosophy professor, Rocknak also is a serious artist, inspired by medieval wood carvings.

Besides being included in more than 40 shows (one of which, “Captive Passage,” was presented at the Smithsonian and New York’s South Street Seaport Museum), Rocknak’s work has appeared in numerous publications. She is a member of the Sculptors Guild, and, in March, she received the $10,000 Margo Harris Hammerschlag Biennial Direct Carving Award, given by the National Association of Women Artists.

> “Sometimes I see someone with an expression that motivates a piece of work, certain microexpressions we might be uncomfortable with. You can freeze-frame those with a sculpture.”
>
> —Stefanie Rocknak ’88

Along with teaching, Rocknak manages to devote a couple of hours a day to art, working in her heated garage, where she chips away at materials such as maple and basswood. Not only is the dense-fibered basswood good for carving, but Rocknak describes it as “the American cousin of the European lindenbaum,” a favorite of medieval sculptors. “It’s kind of nice to continue a tradition.”

She also constructed a model for minimalist sculptor Robert Morris, had work appear in a show at Saks Fifth Avenue in June, and recently learned she is a finalist for the Edgar Allen Poe Project in Boston. Also in the works is a “princess project,” she said, then hastened to clarify: “Not a traditional pink princess, but a feminist or maybe a falconer.”

Whatever she’s working on, her chosen materials keep her challenged. “The wood was alive, it has a certain warmth, and when you polish the grain it starts to speak to you in ways you hadn’t expected,” she said. “It’s not a rational argument; it’s a manifestation of a theory.”

Stefanie Rocknak’s work can be viewed at: www.sculptorsguild.org/rocknak.html

At left, three of Rocknak’s works, sculpted from basswood. Rocknak is most inspired by medieval wood carvings in Germany.

Trading Campfires for Barbecues

THERE'S MORE TO "COOKING COOT" THAN MIXING AND MASTICATING

RUTH JACOBS STORY **JEFF POULAND** PHOTOS

Spiders in the tent. Three days without a shower. Mac 'n' cheese on a camp stove. These are the things that make COOT COOT. Right?

Not necessarily. This year 12 first-year students feasted on homemade bowtie pasta and meatballs served with grilled vegetable and goat cheese galette. They stayed in a cabin, drank milkshakes for breakfast, and, yes, they bonded. "I don't think I could've bonded if I was in, like, a hurricane sitting around a campfire. I wouldn't want to talk to anyone, I'd just be sitting there mad," said Chykee-Jahbre Ward '15 of Bronx, New York. "But I mean, it was sunny outside, we had man time—it was just the guys and a couple of girls sitting around the grill, grilling bacon."

In year two of Cooking with Local, Sustainable Foods, COOTers from as close as York, Maine, and as far as Beijing, China, picked vegetables from Colby's organic garden, played with baby goats at a local cheesery, and got their hands dirty—with garlic and flour. Cooking COOT is among a handful of new trips added last year to address the changing population at Colby. "I think there was a time in Colby's history when the great majority of incoming students … had an interest in a traditional [wilderness] COOT experience," said Director of Campus Life Jed Wartman. "And as our student-body composition has changed, we've seen different interests, comfort levels, desires around the COOT experience."

New COOT options, which all have an outdoor component, include yoga, painting, photography, and meditation. But cooking COOT fills up quickly, according to Associate Director of Dining Services Joe Klaus, who leads a hands-on cooking class the first night. Its popularity doesn't surprise Klaus. "Cooking as a whole is gaining in popularity." One reason, he says, is food television.

If COOTer Ward is any indication, Klaus is right. "Pretty much all my cooking know-how and experience comes from watching cooking shows—a lot of Jacques Pépin, Alton Brown," Ward said. He rattles off the names of nearly a dozen shows, from *Good Eats* to *Simply Ming*. "Is that too much?"

Other students report watching *Top Chef* ("I've watched this so many times on *Top Chef*, I feel like I know how to do it," said Eric Collimore '15 as he embarked on rolling pasta) and *Iron Chef*, which inspired a competition on this trip with a very COOT secret ingredient: s'mores. The winning team swayed the judges, Klaus and the two COOT leaders, with a marshmallow milkshake garnished with chocolate ribbons and toasted marshmallow for dessert following baked sweet potatoes with marshmallows served on graham cracker "plates." Reported Catherine Sharp '15: "It was just so much fun—not only making it, but making it look really pretty and *Iron Chef* style."

For Sharp, cooking is more than fun. "It's just so fulfilling to … put so much effort into something and have it come out beautifully—and not only be beautiful but be something that really really tastes good," she said. The Bar Harbor native, who asked for and received a CSA (community supported agriculture) share as her high-school graduation present, also felt passionate about the local and sustainable element of the COOT. "I really think there's a difference between eating locally, which was what this COOT was about, and buying things from the supermarket, because at the supermarket everything's so detached from where it came from," she said. "Actually being able to see where something like the goat cheese came from—like there's the goats right there—you have this connection that makes what you're eating so much more meaningful."

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—Catherine Sharp '15

This understanding is part of what Klaus, a certified master gardener and the driving force behind Colby's garden, aims to instill in students. They know a lot about food, he said, but little about how it gets to them. "What they don't know is that carrots come from the ground, they don't know how potatoes grow. … To them, their food comes from the grocery store."

After tasting asparagus from the ground and grape tomatoes from the vine ("I normally hate tomatoes but these are really good," said Collimore) students broke into groups to cut lettuce, eggplant, squash—and dig potatoes. Enthusiasm was abundant: "Wow!" "Gorgeous!" "That's so cool, so weird!"

"It's like a scavenger hunt," said Ben Howard '15 of Wellesley, Mass., as he and Collimore pushed the potato digger into the ground. Later Collimore, of Fairfield, Conn., reflected. "Those potatoes—they were like finding nuggets of gold in the ground."

He may never see French fries in the same way.

Top: Eric Collimore '15 and Maria Madison '15 cut and pinch dough to make bowtie pasta; Bottom left: Jiayi Zhang '15 and Matthew D'Orazio '15 grill vegetables for the goat cheese galette. Bottom right: Making fresh pasta begins with creating a flour "volcano," students learned.

Empowered in Kabul

SULAIMAN NASSERI HELPS AFGHAN WOMEN GAIN INDEPENDENCE THROUGH EMBROIDERY

STEPHEN COLLINS '74 STORY **HEATHER PERRY '93** PORTRAIT

Seema and her husband, Abdul Karim, moved to Kabul from a rural, northern province of Afghanistan, taking their daughters to the city seeking a better life. Despite moving into a quasi slum called Charqala, with no water, electricity, or sewage disposal, their prospects improved when Karim got a job loading freight containers. But for Seema and her three girls the dream turned nightmare when he was killed after a cable snapped. An illiterate peasant housewife single-parenting three children in the mean streets of a war-torn patriarchal society became Seema's bleak predicament.

Sulaiman Nasseri '12 didn't have those details in mind last year when he applied for a Projects for Peace grant from the Davis Foundation, but the Afghan native knew the general scenario. "Empowering Afghan Women Through Embroidery," as his project is titled, was pitched as a way to make Afghan women less dependent on men and to provide them with a modest income to get their children off the streets and into schools, keeping them out of the child labor pool and making them less likely recruits for terrorist groups.

Nasseri, a Davis United World College scholar from Kabul, won one of the $10,000 Projects for Peace grants funded by Kathryn Wasserman Davis last spring. She has awarded 100 grants in each of the last five years.

So Nasseri completed his junior year and was in Kabul June 1 recruiting trainees for his project. His plan: to provide women with the training, equipment, and materials necessary to begin home-based embroidery microbusinesses with the goal of improving their status and increasing the literacy and educational attainment of their children. "I strongly believe that this project has the power to rehabilitate and empower families and communities, promoting peace throughout Afghanistan in the long run," his grant proposal stated.

He proposed three phases and executed all three this summer: market research to see what would sell and where to get materials; two weeks of practical training, using three local women to train six others each in the craft; then production, with each woman working in her own time and space to produce marketable garments. He worked with a local nongovernmental employment agency and tried to select the most eager, most promising, and neediest applicants. His NGO contact advocated for Seema to be one of the trainees.

Almost all of the women recruited outperformed Nasseri's expectations, he said. The precision of the minutely detailed hand stitching is impressive, and the demand for the embroidered traditional Afghan pirahan shirts is particularly high in Kabul, Nasseri reports. Thanks to the special skills of one trainer, some women also learned the more colorful, ancient Chinese chinaidosi stitching, in high demand on women's clothes and home furnishings often included in dowries, he said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sulaiman Nasseri '12 works with Afghan women in Kabul who are part of his Projects for Peace initiative. The pirihan shirt he wears (opposite) was embroidered by women in the program.

Seema was one of the success stories, but Nasseri said he didn't fully appreciate the impact of his project until the first payday. When he handed Seema the money she had earned, she broke down and wept. "I was scared at the beginning," Nasseri said, having feared the woman felt shortchanged or disappointed. But he misinterpreted the tears. Seema told him: "Now I feel like any other human being. Now, for the first time, I feel I'm worth something," he said.

Beyond the emotional empowerment, Nasseri points to some hard economic numbers—and he sees the economic piece as essential to Afghanistan's success. Twenty-one women are working to earn income. Eighty-four immediate family members have precious resources to help them climb out of poverty and vulnerability. Twenty-one Afghan children who would not have had the opportunity, including Seema's oldest daughter, are now in school. "They are not on the street." Nasseri said. "They are not child laborers. They will not be targets of bad guys or victims of violence."

Phil Geier, executive director of the Davis United World Scholars Program, which administers the Projects for Peace competition on 90 campuses, said, "There are a lot of dimensions of this project that fit the program beautifully." Not all Projects for Peace should or need to be in war-torn locales, but the fact that Nasseri comes from Kabul and is able to navigate the subtleties of doing business there gave his project proposal special resonance. And the level of initiative, drive, and focus that Nasseri displayed was impressive, Geier said.

Nasseri's initial success fits a pattern among Projects for Peace, Geier said. The grant serves as incubator capital for a small initiative that brings purpose, hope, and prospects for peace to people who desperately need all three. And, with continued commitment, Geier said, it can become a self-sustaining program helping more people as it grows.

Scaling up and sustaining the embroidery initiative are both goals for Nasseri. He intends to turn the project into a nonprofit organization that will offer training, microloans, and hope to additional needy Afghan women.

So, besides classes, homework, and studying for graduate school entrance exams, he's looking for legal help to get 501C3 status for his initiative, developing a website for the project, designing tags, and trying to sell the shirts on campus to help sustain the effort.

"If people know why we are doing this, they will support the cause," Nasseri said.

At Home on the Range

WILLARD WYMAN'S LATEST NOVEL EXPLORES THE TRANSITORY IDEAL OF THE OLD WEST

SALLY BAKER REVIEW

In the summer of 1944, Willard G. Wyman '56 was 13. His father, an Army cavalry officer, was in Europe, preparing to wade onto Omaha Beach. His mother, "undone" with fear and sickness, entered a psychiatric hospital in Washington, D.C. And young Bill Wyman went west—to a cabin of his own on the Spear-O ranch in Montana, to a summer of wrangling horses, baling hay, and mending fences, to country that captured his imagination, his life, and his soul.

Wyman tells the story of that summer in "The Way Home," an essay included in *West of 98: Living and Writing the New American West* (Lynn Stegner and Russell Rowland, editors; University of Texas Press, 2011). And he tells the continuing story of his West in *Blue Heaven* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), his second novel, whose action precedes that of 2006's *High Country*.

Wyman read from *Blue Heaven* during his 55th reunion in June and talked about his love of the West, which began not in the family's sometime home, San Francisco, but on the Spear-O. The ranch experience led him to a dual life—winters as a dean at Colby and Stanford and, finally, as the longtime headmaster of the Thacher School, summers leading mule-assisted trips into Montana's Bob Marshall Wilderness and the High Sierras of California.

For Wyman, the West is both a physical place and a myth, and in his writing, fiction and nonfiction, the tension between the two is profound. This is a writer saying goodbye to something he loves, not because he feels the pull of age and reflection, but because the West he knows is almost gone. "I can't seem to leave the land, even as it seems to be leaving us," he writes in "The Way Home." "It's stuck in me like a first love, holding on even as I watch it pillaged, its waters diverted, its mountains torn open, its solitude violated—all of us using it up because we can't teach ourselves what the Sioux and the Cheyenne knew in their hearts: we belong to the West more than the West belongs to us."

Blue Heaven
Willard G. Wyman '56
University of Oklahoma Press (2011)

The characters in *Blue Heaven* belong to the West as well. The action in this novel begins in 1902 and ends a few years before the story told in *High Country* begins. The young mule packer Ty Hardin and his friend and fellow mountain guide Special Hands, who are central to *High Country*, are here, too, but this novel's core is Fenton Pardee. An adopted son of the Swan Range, Fenton finds his blue heaven in his work—leading hunters and other dudes into the high country at the back of strings of pack mules and horses—and in Cody Jo, a young woman trying to recover from deep troubles in her past who falls in love with Fenton and, as he says, "completes" him the way the country is complete.

The title is important. The Swan Range is Fenton's heaven, where he and Cody Jo are bruised saints and Ty is all but their immaculately conceived Son, a denizen so preternaturally at home that he seems made of the same stuff as the mountains. But, like Wyman, Fenton is urgently, angrily, aware that his West, his heaven, cannot be saved.

Wyman says people tell him he should write a memoir, and "The Way Home" gives a taste of how magnificent that book could be. In his novels and in the essay, Wyman's writing is spare when it should be, honed and clean and perfectly formed. He tried to write his life's story as a memoir, he said in June, but it didn't work. "The minute I invented characters I found a higher truth," he said. "I could write about how people discover the West."

And how they grieve over its passing.

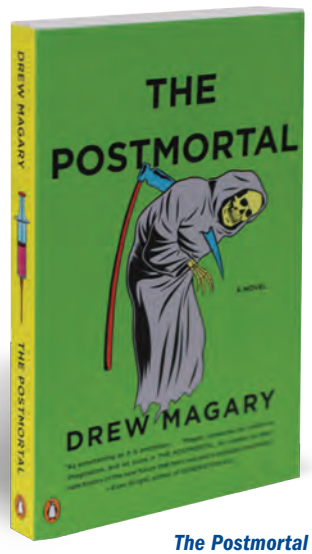
> "I can't seem to leave the land, even as it seems to be leaving us. ... I watch it pillaged, its waters diverted, its mountains torn open, its solitude violated–all of us using it up because we can't teach ourselves what the Sioux and the Cheyenne knew in their hearts..."
>
> —Willard G. Wyman '56

Be Careful What You Wish For

We live in an overcrowded, contentious world, one in which children starve, soldiers die, and the globe is warming. But wait—it could get worse. That's the frightening punch packed by Drew Magary '98 in his story of a dystopian future. Yet he keeps this debut novel from becoming a predictable slog by weaving bits of humor into the mix and examining all the ripple effects—from prosaic to profound—of artificially extended life.

It's 2019, and those with disposable income are rushing to take the cure. True, the treatment is expensive and consists of a series of painful shots, but the reward seems worth it: it stops the aging process. While the cure doesn't promise eternal life—it's still possible to succumb to disease or be killed—it seems to guarantee bonus time on earth. And that's enough for 29-year-old Manhattan lawyer John Farrell, who quickly realizes he wants it "more than I had ever wanted anything."

Not everyone is so gung ho. The Pope has weighed in against it, groups are posting signs warning "Immortality Will Kill Us All," and as the cure spreads worldwide, so do the riots against it.



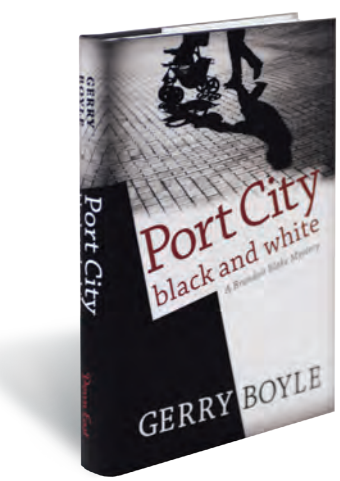
The Postmortal
Drew Magary '98
Penguin (2011)

Despite the nagging clamor, things initially seem good for those who have taken the cure. Life stretches out before them, promising the opportunity to travel the world for years at a time, marry repeatedly, indulge without guilt. Like his cure compatriots, Farrell gains in experience as the years go by while never showing his true age.

Still, the negatives of the cure become increasingly obvious. Populations begin to soar and stockpiling is widespread. Bad judgment abounds (a woman infatuated with the charms of babyhood gives her daughter the cure at the age of eight months), and so do disappointments (Farrell's father gets the cure, but soon regrets it, saying, "I'm old and I'm tired and I hate waking up to that reality every day"). News flashes sprinkled throughout the book report on other cure downsides: an actress has been murdered by her understudy, "who was apparently uninterested in an eternal apprenticeship," and "sales of adult incontinence undergarments ... have fallen 46 percent since 2016."

By the end of this cautionary tale, Farrell has come to terms with his integrity, his loyalty, and exactly how far he will go to help his fellow man. And for readers, the idea of everlasting life—even with an unlined face—may not be so appealing anymore. *—Pat Sims*

For This Rookie Cop, All the Streets Are Mean



Port City Black and White
Gerry Boyle '78
Down East (2011)

The American hard-boiled school of the noir novel, with its evocative sense of setting and its wisecracking, antiheroic protagonists willing to cut procedural corners, goes back almost 100 years and has spawned subgenres in the Mediterranean, Scandinavia, and elsewhere.

Author Gerry Boyle '78, the editor of this magazine, who seasoned his art in the noir tradition with a group of excellent detective novels in his Jack McMorrow series, published the second installment of his Brandon Blake police novel series, *Port City Black and White*, this summer.

Brandon Blake, in his twenties, was abandoned by his mother at the age of 4 and left in the care of a guilt-ridden, alcoholic grandmother, Nessa. As did the first Blake novel, *Port City Shakedown*, *Port City Black and White* portrays a Portland, Maine, stripped of the glamour of the Old Port shops, *New York Times*-recommended restaurants, and enthusiastic cruise-ship shoppers. It is a working port city with ferries, fishing boats, and giant floating hotels.

Boyle uses the layout of the city as a structural grid for the plot. There is precise use of the geography of Casco Bay and its many islands, and the streets of Portland—Congress and Commercial, Exchange and the Eastern Promenade—provide not only realism but a richly suggestive texture of the social scene. Blake, now a rookie with the Portland police, is developing a more complex relationship with his girlfriend, Mia, but still suffering from the pains of childhood abandonment.

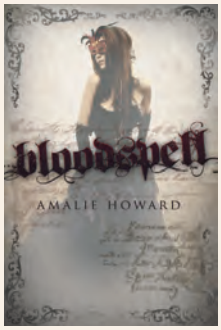
These demons come flooding back when he investigates the disappearance of a six-month-old boy whose young mother lost track of the baby at a crack party. On patrol Blake partners with Kat, a gay triathlete who tries to control his impulse to ignore procedures in a department trying to build relationships in the community.

As the title suggests, the neophyte Blake sees issues in black and white and recognizes no line between on-duty and off-duty time. His obsessive search for the missing child strains his relationship with Mia, brings cautions from Kat, and threatens his career almost before it begins. His discomfort with Mia's trust-funded friend Lily and her Barbadian restaurateur partner, Winston, turns out to be more than class resentment and feeds the plot with violent action.

Brandon's search for the missing child leads him to the back streets and to the water, and he navigates both expertly. The novel will please boaters as well as admirers of tough, pithy dialogue and fast-paced action. In Brandon Blake, Boyle has created an interesting new protagonist who has a lot to learn as a policeman and as a man—as well as prospects for another long and fine series.

—Patrick Brancaccio, Zacamy Professor of English, Emeritus

RECENT RELEASES



Bloodspell
Amalie (Gosine) Howard '97
Langdon Street Press (2011)

Victoria Warrick is a witch. Not just any witch, but one with superior witch powers, which she discovers on her 17th birthday. The heroine of this young adult novel may be able to read minds and teleport herself, but she also faces the same trials and tribulations as any teenager—the need to fit in versus the need to be true to herself. Life becomes even more difficult when Victoria falls in love with a handsome young vampire and a forbidden relationship blossoms.

Howard, who lives in Larchmont, N.Y., and is a native of Trinidad, turned a short story into her first novel. It's a good start, as *Bloodspell* was recommended as a "summer beach read" by *CosmoGirl* magazine.

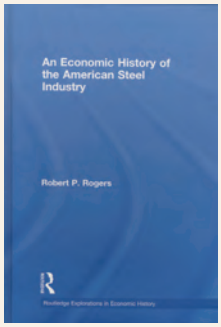
The Winter Travelers: A Christmas Fable
Don J. Snyder '72
Down East (2011)

Don Snyder's latest novel is a time-bending story that uses World War II as a prism through which to view the recent financial recession. Charlie Andrews is a young financial baron on the brink of suicide after a spectacular business failure. He is saved by a mysterious homeless woman who leads him on an odyssey of discovery that includes traveling back in time to join a trainload of troops returning from war in 1945. On the journey Andrews learns—like Dickens's Scrooge—what really counts in life.

Snyder's admiring view of the Greatest Generation is familiar and is a lament for its inexorable passing. Left ambiguous is whether Snyder believes that those who have come after, and who are made of far less stern and rock-solid stuff, have irremediably destroyed the world their parents and grandparents saved.

The Thefts of the Mona Lisa
Noah Charney '03
ARCA Publications (2011)

Art-theft expert Charney has aimed his considerable research and storytelling skills at yet another remarkable art heist (following his 2010 book, *Stealing the Mystic Lamb*). This time it's the century-old theft of the Mona Lisa, a true story that involves skullduggery in the Louvre, misplaced political loyalties, and even Picasso and Apollinaire. Charney uses primary materials to recreate the shock that roiled France after the iconic painting disappeared and to describe the unlikely thief who pulled off this remarkable and, thank goodness, reversible crime. Proceeds from sale of the book benefit ARCA (Association for Research into Crimes against Art), which Charney founded.



An Economic History of the American Steel Industry
Robert P. Rogers '65
Routledge (2010)

It's hard to overstate the role of the steel industry in the development of the United States. Steel was the backbone of the country's infrastructure, the skeleton of its booming cities. It propelled development of the auto industry and armed the nation for two world wars. Demand for workers for the country's steel mills shaped migration from Europe to America. The coal industry grew in large part because of demand for steel production.

Yet that steel boom was followed by a bust of sorts, as increased efficiency and international competition led to a downsizing of the industry. This evolution involved technology, innovation, organization of labor, and government regulation.

Writing a comprehensive and concise history of the U.S. steel industry would seem a daunting task, but Rogers, a professor of economics at Ashland University, does it with care and precision.

Beginning with the industry in its infancy in 1860, Rogers traces its path from cornerstone of the U.S. economy to its decline to its reemergence in a globalized market. (The biggest steel company in the United States is owned by an Indian tycoon.) While the book is part of a series of works on economic history, anyone with an interest in the forces that have shaped our country, culture, and world will find it a reflective work backed by exhaustive research. *—Gerry Boyle '78*

Jack the Cuddly Dog—Jack Goes West
Doug Morrione '93
Hello Baby Productions (2010)

From fields to the forest, Central Park to San Francisco, Jack the Cuddly Dog—a yellow cartoon canine with a cute smile—takes toddlers on a cross-country adventure designed to stimulate the senses. Created by Doug Morrione '93 and Max Reynal, Jack, in the title, goes west in pursuit of his elusive red ball. Real-life footage of roaming buffalo and aerial views of the Grand Canyon are made kid-friendly by a child's narration and the energetic main character who travels by plane, train, and hot-air balloon from New York to California, where he retrieves his favorite toy and watches the sun set over the Pacific.

Economy Remains Cool?

COLBY CAREER CENTER LOOKS TO "WARM MARKET"

GERRY BOYLE '78 STORY **SAM ADAMS** PHOTO

Last October Jen Mason Drolet '97 and Alex Ridder '05 made the trip to Mayflower Hill from Denver, where their company, a national market research firm called iModerate, is located. With the company growing quickly, Drolet, vice president for client and moderating services, and Ridder, a business analyst, had decided the time was right to tap Colby as a source of new talent.

Was it ever.

The pair gave an informational presentation, interviewed nine students, and eventually landed two Jan Plan interns. "We were both really impressed with the candidates who came across our desk," Drolet said. "I felt that they interviewed well, better than what I see come across my plate day in and day out."

Added Ridder, "They blew our minds, actually. … There wasn't anybody who wasn't great."

Getting that message out to alumni and Colby parents and friends "is going to become increasingly critical," said Career Center Director Roger Woolsey. "This is the model we're going to have to really endorse and create programming around." Why? An anemic economy that doesn't show signs of turning around soon. Woolsey said he's hearing that some companies won't be recruiting at Maine colleges this year because they've cut back on hiring and that other firms are going to be hiring fewer new graduates.

Woolsey sees internships as the catalyst that sets the process in motion. Colby has brought back academic credit for internships (students can get one credit each for up to three internships), offers internship funding, and has seen an increase in mock interviews. Woolsey says these are symptoms of an upsurge in students preparing for the job market. "Once that intern steps into that organization and does a phenomenal job, they say, 'Wow. Are all Colby students like that?'"

Woolsey, not surprisingly, is bullish on Colby students and their skill sets, including academic preparation, writing and analytic skills, and work ethic. The iModerate recruiters echoed that, saying students were engaged, asked good questions, and favorably impressed the non-Colby members of the hiring team. "People were surprised that somebody coming out of college—or who hadn't graduated, in the case of the Jan Plan interns—was as polished as they were and ready to be in the workforce," Drolet said.

Alex Ridder '05, Jen Mason Drolet '97, and Emma Harrington '11 in the offices of iModerate, a market research firm. Drolet and Ridder have tapped Colby for new hires and interns.

One former Jan Plan intern, Emma Harrington '11, joined iModerate as a junior project manager in August. Two weeks later she was helping manage multiple projects. "It's just keeping up the communications between the internal factions, what we need to do to keep the product rolling and on time," Harrington said.

Drolet and Ridder said the challenge in hiring Harrington was choosing from a field of excellent candidates. And when another position opened up months later, "Everyone said, 'Can we hire that [Colby] guy?'" Ridder said. (That senior had taken another job.)

According to Ridder, the company gets 200 to 300 résumés for every job advertised. While there are strong candidates in that pile, finding them is time-consuming and costly, he said. A pipeline to a college like Colby is a tremendous benefit in terms of cost and efficiency.

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>
> —Alex Ridder '05

"I think, as we grow, having a process for recruiting smart people—people who can think critically, can be taught, novices who are teachable—is really what we can get out of a process at Colby," Ridder said. "They can write well, they think analytically, they're critical thinkers. It really streamlines the process."

Woolsey said his office is seeing a steady increase in the numbers of "alumni ambassadors"—alumni and parents interested in serving as a conduit to their employer or companies with which they are associated. While finance has traditionally used the ambassador model, similar connections are being made with international consulting firms, commercial real estate companies, advertising, and nonprofits.

Drolet and Ridder, meanwhile, were planning their second visit, with the intention of hiring one Colby student and perhaps more.

"I couldn't have gone to Colby without the significant financial aid that I received," Drolet said. "It was always my goal to be able to come back. I remember as a senior having Colby grads come to campus and recruit for their organizations. It was always something I wanted to do."