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## The Last Page: Sometimes It Takes a Posse--and a Community-- To Forge an Identity

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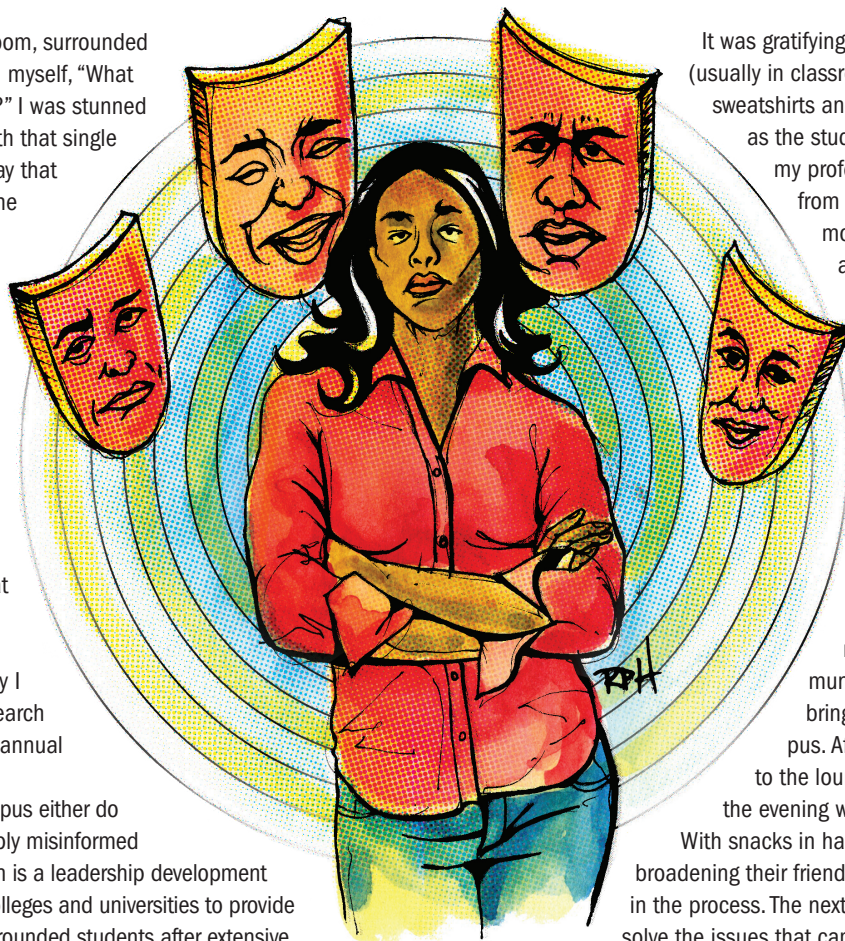
# SOMETIMES IT TAKES A POSSE—AND A COMMUNITY—TO FORGE AN IDENTITY

**T**wo weeks ago in my dorm room, surrounded by my own thoughts, I asked myself, “What was your best college experience?” I was stunned to find that I couldn’t come up with that single event that moved me in such a way that I could cherish it and place it in the memento space of my mind.

I then began to think about what identities I had chosen at Colby, and once again I was stumped. In terms of identity, I am many things: a woman, a person of color, a poet, a musician. But all of these things are identities that I was either born into or talents I have always had. I struggled to find an identity I choose to embody, an identity that I negotiate and inhabit by preference. How could I find this event when I couldn’t think of an identity I could be proud of adopting? In search of something more, I went on the annual Posse Plus retreat in February.

Sadly many people on my campus either do not know what Posse is or are simply misinformed about Posse. The Posse Foundation is a leadership development program that teams up with top colleges and universities to provide full four-year scholarships for well-rounded students after extensive leadership training. The 10 students chosen form “a posse” to act as a support system for each other while acting as integral members of student life on campus. As a Posse school, Colby hosts an off-campus retreat each year for Posse scholars and guests (hence Posse Plus) for meaningful connections and conversations. Each year the Posse Plus retreat provokes a myriad of feelings: hope, sadness, love, and enlightenment. The retreat also stokes the fires of students who are interested in making Colby the most welcoming place for students of all walks of life.

This year the topic was “My Generation: The Millennials.” It seemed we would only discuss the latest iPod and the newest apps on Facebook. Instead I found myself discussing social responsibility, campus climate, and the trials and tribulations of my generation. In three days I felt more connected to everyone in the room. I was able to speak candidly about my views, opinions, and beliefs, and I broadened them as I spoke to other students about theirs. The Posse Plus retreat allowed all Colby students to connect without feeling afraid or awkward meeting someone new. One of the rules of the retreat was that you had to step outside of your comfort zone and meet a new friend—or two or 80. I saw each student break out of his/her shell to truly enjoy the experience.



It was gratifying to see many of my professors (usually in classroom attire) wearing jeans and Colby sweatshirts and enjoying the retreat just as much as the students. For the first time, I sat next to my professors in a conversation, not across from them at a lecture or seminar. As we moved through the weekend, students and even a dean performed at the talent show with comfort, their fears packed away in a suitcase. During a comedy routine, a sophomore I had just met leaned over to me and said, “This is the first time I’ve felt family outside of my home.”

I grabbed her hand and replied “We are your family. You are Posse plus.” She smiled and I knew I had made a long-time friend.

One weekend, just two days and nights, and we built a sense of community that each student promised to bring back, nourish, and share on campus. After the talent show most people went to the lounge to continue conversations from the evening workshops instead of heading to bed.

With snacks in hand we linked up with the intention of broadening their friend circle, all the while supporting others in the process. The next morning we discussed how we could solve the issues that came up on the retreat. With action

plans in hand, each student came away with small things they could do to make their communities better. (My group decided to make the Waterville community better by volunteering and by buying locally on Main Street.) The whole room gleamed with smiles—and the belief that in one weekend we all could make Colby, and eventually the country, a much more supportive place to live.

Towards the end everyone on the retreat linked arms, and the facilitators of the retreat called up my posse. After a brief group hug, I found myself in tears.

My posse is the first at Colby to graduate all together, with no one taking a leave of absence. For the 11 members of my posse, the collegiate journey was not always the easiest, but we made it through because of the posse support system. Colby is not always what you want, but it is always what you need. At Colby I found resilience, coping skills, passion, and an inner strength I never knew I had.

I find I now proudly share two identities: I am a Colby student and I am a Posse scholar.

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