

# Colby



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### From the Editor

Gerry Boyle  
*Colby College*

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## Colby

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Occasionally Colby brings news of the passing of someone who had such an impact that our standard obituary notice is insufficient. This magazine reports two such deaths: former President Robert E.L. Strider II and Emeritus Professor of English and American Studies Charles W. Bassett. In different ways, Strider and Bassett shaped the Colby experience.

I knew both men when I was a student, but not well. I took a couple of Bassett courses and enjoyed them and him immensely. I knew President Strider as an imposing figure, a paternal president who, it seemed in my time, didn't know what to make of his suddenly upstart children. I would say he was distant but, just as much, it was my group of Grateful Dead- and Beat poet-loving friends that distanced itself from him.

Years later I saw both Bassett and Strider from a different perspective. Before I came to Colby as editor, I was hired to profile Bassett on the occasion of his retirement. I sat in Lovejoy 100 and watched him work the room like a Vegas headliner, darting from stage to aisle, calling out students in that faux gruff voice. And then I spent time with him backstage and saw that being Bassett wasn't an act. In public and private, Charlie genuinely loved Colby students and, as the extraordinary farewell letters collected here (P. 10) show, Colby students loved him, too.

The Bassett phenomenon entailed a public display of affection that I doubt President Strider (P. 5) could have considered. Formal and erudite, the scholar president with the operatic baritone was widely admired by students early on. Then the country was stretched by the civil rights movement and shaken by the Vietnam War. Strider, an Adlai Stevenson liberal who personally supported the former and opposed the latter, found himself seen as a symbol of authority, someone for this momentous movement to challenge.

In recent years I had occasion to chat with Bob Strider. He was gracious and charming, articulate and learned. I recall asking him about his administration, which, in addition to enduring the upheaval of the late 1960s, introduced innovations like Jan Plan and interdisciplinary study. He said he was deeply honored to have been president of Colby.

Bassett uniquely embodied the faculty-student relationship for which Colby is famous. Strider shaped this place and the experience it offers in other profound ways and probably didn't get due recognition in the shadow of the protests. Both men left indelible marks on Colby, and that should not be forgotten.



Gerry Boyle '78, P'06  
Managing Editor

## CONTRIBUTORS

## Laura Meader ("The Girls



Are Alright" P. 14) is a staff writer for Colby. She's also a serious gardener

and is a yoga instructor at the College. In warmer months she commutes to Colby by bicycle from her home in Fairfield, Maine.

## David McKay Wilson '76



("Obama's Right Hand" P. 20) is a New York-based journalist who writes

regularly for magazines at colleges around the country, including Colby, Dartmouth, Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, and others.

## Margie Weiner '12 ("At



Colby, A Special Boy" P. 60) is a science, technology, and society

major with minors in environmental education and Jewish studies. She recently studied child-headed households in post-conflict Uganda.