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## Campus Kids: Faculty residents' children enjoy and contribute to college life

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# CAMPUS KIDS

Faculty residents' children enjoy and contribute to college life

by Alexandra Desaulniers '11

**IN** Dana dining hall during midterms last semester, students huddled over meals, notes, and textbooks. At one table, a more relaxed diner had no books at all—and was pretending his French fries were high divers plunging into a pool of ketchup.

said Abby Crocker '13 of her dinner companion, Anton Behuniak, 4, "Dinner is so much more interesting with little kids at the table."



*Upper left: Ursula Johnson is shown at the door to her family's apartment in Mary Low. Upper right: Michaelina Deneka '13 plays with Anton Behuniak in the moon bounce at the Dana Olympics during spring Loudness. Lower left: Maya Long enjoys lunch in Roberts. Lower right: Anna Behuniak helps decorate cupcakes that were later donated to the homeless shelter.*





*Left: Heidi and Jason Long walk across campus with their children, Lucy, in stroller, and Maya. Right: Assistant Professor Jim Behuniak and his son, Anton, participate in a Harry Potter-themed dinner in Foss dining hall last October.*

Last year seven Colby professors lived in apartments in various dorms as part of the College's faculty resident program. The idea, said Vice President for Student Affairs James Terhune, is to give students and faculty more opportunities to interact outside the classroom. And if some of those professors have young families? "I think it's a nice byproduct of it," Terhune said.

Nice for all concerned, say faculty members—including Assistant Professor of Philosophy Jim Behuniak and his wife, Connie Zhu, (with children Anton, and Anna, 6) and Assistant Professor of Economics Jason Long and his wife, Heidi, (with Maya, 3, and Lucy, 1)—who have decided that Mayflower Hill, while occasionally inconvenient, is the perfect place to raise a family.

"It's like having a four-hundred-acre backyard with a thousand playmates," Jason Long said. "What more could a kid want?"

For faculty living on campus, Mayflower Hill gives their children the opportunity to eat in the dining halls, play kickball on the quad with students, attend student music and drama productions, and enjoy an endless supply of babysitters. Campus kids, like Colby students, are exposed to a diverse student body and find friends from all over the world.

"If I'm on campus, even if I don't see them, I hear, 'Jean Jacques! Jean Jacques! What are you doing?'" said Jean Jacques Ndayisenga '13 of Rwanda. In the dining halls, Ndayisenga said, Anton and Anna Behuniak come running. "Sometimes they escape from their parents and come to sit with me," he said, chuckling.

Said Jim Behuniak, "Anna and Anton seem to know more students than I do."

Anna, who attended the George J. Mitchell School in Waterville, became close friends with some of the Colby Cares About Kids mentors who volunteered at her school. Seeing those volunteers back on campus bridged the gap between learning at school and learning at home, her parents said.

And when your home is a college, there is a lot of learning going on.

As the Behuniaks were taking up residence on campus, Associate Professor of Biology and Department Chair Russell Johnson, his wife, Michele Hébert, and their daughter, Ursula, 13, were leaving campus quarters after five years as faculty residents.

For the Johnsons the biggest challenge even early on was keeping a regular bedtime for Ursula. "With so many activities and campus running on a typical college night-owl schedule, it was always difficult to get Ursula to bed on time," Johnson said. Ursula frequently attended on-campus events in the theater or music departments or other department lectures, many of which were scheduled in the evening. But the range and quality of offerings just a short walk away presented opportunities too good to pass up.

"We wouldn't have driven to campus for an event before, but, because we were on campus, Ursula grew up with plays, lectures, and all the other events just across campus," Johnson said.

A lot of learning was going on right at home, too.

Faculty who live on campus are required to be hosts for dorm events. From apple picking to backyard barbecues to hot cocoa and game nights, chances to take a break from studying and to socialize with professors and their families are embraced by students.

The Long family had students over every week to watch the television drama *Lost*. The Johnsons opened their apartment in Mary





*Left: Colby students hang out with Ursula Johnson. Right: Anna and Anton Behuniak on stage with Katelyn Xu '12 and Jasmine Qin '12 during the fashion show portion of this spring's International Extravaganza.*

Low every Thursday for what they called Politics and Pie. Students from Coburn and Mary Low could enjoy an evening snack while watching *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*, discussing politics, or playing cards and other games with Ursula.

"I got to know the college students really well, especially when they were over every week," Ursula said of the Thursday tradition. "It was like having tons of big brothers and sisters all around."

And the benefit isn't just one way.

**S**tudents say there's nothing like a little kid to put the pressures of college life in perspective. "If I'm stressed out, when I'm with them I'm going to pretend I'm happy and carefree," said Jasmine Qin '12. "And after I'm with them a while, I don't have to pretend."

Qin, who is from Hunan Province in China, was an additional source of Chinese culture for Connie Zhu (mother of Anton and Anna Behuniak), who is from Shanghai. Qin invited the two children to take part in a fashion show at the annual International Extravaganza where, alongside Colby students, they modeled traditional Chinese clothing. And Anna and Anton remembered well participating in the Moon Festival sponsored by the East Asian Studies Department last fall. "It was fun, [and] there was yummy food," Anna said.

Spending so much time with college students has an impact on children early on, professors say. The Longs, who have lived on campus for five years, said growing up in college dormitories has made their daughter Maya very comfortable around adults. "She's not as shy as other three-year-olds I know," Jason Long said. "I'm

sure that has a lot to do with the fact that she's constantly meeting new students and learning confidence from the older role models she has in the students in the dorm and on campus."

The Longs said their daughter, Lucy, 1, is already taking advantage of her life on campus. "Lucy and Maya both love running around on the quad in front of Miller," Long said, "or meeting new people every day."

But college students are still college students. And for the Longs and other faculty residents, there were early questions about some aspects of dorm life. "We thought being in the dorms would be loud, especially with newborns," Long said, "but the students have always been respectful and considerate of party noise and late nights."

Terhune said seeing children in a dorm can be a reality check, a break from a living situation that, while it has its advantages, doesn't mirror what students will experience anywhere else. "Not everybody in the world is eighteen to twenty-two and going to Colby," he said.

The worst part of being on campus for the veteran Johnsons? "The fire alarms," Russell Johnson said.

But Johnson said he has no regrets about his family's time on campus. In fact, much of what Colby hopes to teach students is also imparted to kids who have yet to set foot in a classroom.

Long said he hopes Maya will remember some of her formative years on Mayflower Hill, or at least the effect of them. "She's had quite the three years," her father said, "and I think she will at the very least continue to hang on to the strong self-confidence that she's fostered here." **C**