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From the Editor

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This story really began a year ago when Qiam Amiry '09, a student from Kabul, was lying on his bed in Coburn Hall. "I was thinking of how things are going in Afghanistan. I was thinking, 'What are *you* doing? You got this scholarship. You're the privileged one. What is *your* contribution?'"

Amiry came to Colby from the Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong through a Davis United World College scholarship. A former translator for British special forces and child carpet weaver, he is a member of the Hazara ethnic group, the least privileged in Afghanistan.

Amiry beat the odds. And he decided to help someone else do the same.

His single-minded and, at times, daring effort created opportunities for two high school students from Kabul, Sikander Ahmadi and Meetra Sroush, to receive full two-year scholarships to attend Gould Academy, a private college-preparatory school in Bethel, Maine, beginning in fall of 2008.

Amiry doesn't know the students, or as he calls them, "our scholars." He does know that they are among the thousands of Afghans "who do not have the voice and do not have the power to get it."

But Amiry showed them that power isn't always measured in the strength of political connections. It can come from steadfastly standing by your principles.

That's what Amiry ultimately did, wending his way along the tortuous path that began in his dorm room. His first stop was at the office of Steve Thomas, Colby's director of admissions. Amiry sketched out his idea and Thomas said, sure, it could be done. Next stop was Joe Feeley, Colby's staff architect and Amiry's international-student host dad. Feeley's son went to Gould. Feeley is a friend of Dan Kunkle, Gould's head of school. "It was a hopeful shot in the dark," Feeley said.

A phone call and a car ride later, Amiry was sitting with Leslie Nesbitt, Gould's associate admissions director. He pitched his plan and then they just talked. For hours. "It was like this was a long-lost friend," Nesbitt said.

Gould was in. Not only that, Nesbitt connected with an official in the Embassy of Afghanistan in Washington. Per that official's instructions, she gave Amiry an official letter naming him Gould Academy's admissions representative for Afghanistan. With this credential, and his own not-inconsiderable negotiating skills, Amiry went home to Kabul for the summer.

"I now had two scholarships in my hand," he said. "How do I do it?"

Amiry did it by bicycling around Kabul visiting government offices. He hit it off with the Columbia-educated deputy minister of education, who assured him that nepotism and corruption no longer ruled Afghanistan. But then Amiry hit a wall of bureaucratic resistance and manipulation.

The officials tried to wrest the selection process from him. They appointed one of their own to score exams. One demanded that a politically connected student make the first cut. A woman called and asked that her daughter be considered, saying, "If it's about money ..."

Amiry hung up. He warned the officials that Gould could withdraw its offer. "They were all the time trying to undermine my authority," he said. And when the girl didn't make the cut?

"[The official] said, 'You can't do that.' I said, 'Yes, I can.'" Amiry took out his cell phone. He said, "The deputy minister told me the time of nepotism is gone. ... Either he lied or there is something wrong in this room."

Amiry didn't have the deputy's minister's number, but he started to punch keys. The official backed down. Amiry won. Or, should I say, fairness and justice won. The scholarships were awarded on merit. Later, Amiry called the recipients, to give them the good news.

The shocked silence on the other end of the phone spoke volumes.

For more on Qiam Amiry's project, go to www.colby.edu/mag



Standing, Qiam Amiry '09, with Gould Academy scholarship recipients Meetra Sroush, left, and Sikander Ahmadi, right, and members of their families in Kabul, Afghanistan.

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