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From the Editor

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For all of the members of the Class of 2005, the stroll across the stage at commencement represented a victory of sorts. But for Shareen Abbasy, first alphabetically, those last few steps of her undergraduate career represented a triumph over adversity that few Colby students can imagine and even fewer have experienced.

A pleasant young woman with short dark hair and a mature, forthright manner, Abbasy completed not only requirements for her major (French studies) but also 40 weeks of chemotherapy. She underwent a life-saving bone marrow transplant (her brother was a rare perfect match) and months of hospitalization in stints two years apart. Abbasy lost a year of school (she

was originally a member of the Class of 2004)—and the sense of immortality that most 20-year-olds take for granted.

“It’s kind of hard at an age when everybody else is invincible,” said Abbasy, who is from Longmeadow, Mass.

In April of her first year at Colby, Abbasy was diagnosed with Ewing’s sarcoma, a malignant bone cancer that showed up in her case as a tumor on her kidney. She left school, underwent surgery in Boston, and spent the next 10 months in treatment. When she wasn’t too sick—and sometimes when she was—she was in touch with her Colby friends, who called and e-mailed her every day, keeping her a part of their lives. “Without them, I couldn’t have made it,” Abbasy said. “I felt like I was here.”

Her professors, including Terry Arendell (sociology), sent her books to read. Janice Kassman, vice president for student affairs and dean of students, was in constant touch with Abbasy’s mother, Diana. “She was so nice,” Abbasy said of Kassman. “She gave my mom so much hope and support.”

With her Colby friends—and no small amount of her own tenacity—Abbasy made it through the intensive chemo. She came back to school, went on with her life, changed as it was, the illness now part of her identity. She was frank when people asked about her experience. She thought it was behind her—though cancer patients know that the disease, even if cured, is never quite fully in the past.

And then last year in Paris, where she was studying in her junior year, Abbasy felt weak. She came home at the end of the spring semester to find that she needed a bone marrow transplant, that without a donor match she could expect to live only two more years.

More chemo. More radiation. More uncertainty. And then it was found that her older brother, Jamil, was a perfect match. “It was really like a miracle,” Abbasy said.

All of last summer she was in the hospital. The month of September she stayed in a Ronald McDonald House in Boston. She came back to Colby with her second new lease on life. And as you might expect, she’s a changed person. “I like the person I am now,” Abbasy said. “And the friendships I’ve formed are really worth it.”

Worth all that she’s gone through? Now that *is* a friendship.

And there’s more. Abbasy’s ordeal has made her appreciative of every day she’s given. In fact, unlike many of us, she doesn’t look past the days and weeks ahead just to focus on some distant goal. That lesson she was more than willing to pass on.

She said she came to Colby with the idea that she’d go into medicine. Now her post-graduation plans extend as far as learning Arabic this summer. “You should have known me before,” she said, smiling. “I was planned down to the last minute. Now I don’t have any idea and I kind of like that. If I can graduate having had cancer twice, things will work out. . . . I want to get out there and live.”



Shareen Abbasy '05

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