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Colby Mourns

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MURDER OF DAWN ROSSIGNOL '04 STUNS COLBY, REGION

As campus grieves, Utah parolee charged in “an act of random violence”

The abduction and murder of Dawn Rossignol '04 in September devastated the Colby community.

Rossignol, 21, a biology major from Medway, Maine, was abducted after leaving her room in Anthony-Mitchell-Schupf on the morning of Tuesday, Sept. 16, police said. Her body was found the next day in a stream in a wooded area off Rice Rips Road in Oakland, about a mile from campus. An intensive investigation culminated in the arrest six days later of a parolee from Utah, Edward J. Hackett, 47. He was charged with kidnapping and murder in what police said was “an act of random violence.” Hackett had no connection to Colby, police said.

The tragedy began to unfold with a report that Rossignol had failed to keep a 9 a.m. doctor's appointment in Bangor that Tuesday after leaving her room at 7:20. A search began with police tracing the route from campus to Bangor. It ended at about 10:30 a.m. Wednesday, when Rossignol's Mercury Sable was spotted parked off the road in Oakland. Her body was found about 300 yards away. The next day authorities reported that her death was a homicide.

Reaction at Colby was one of shock and fear as the news spread through a campus perceived as a sanctuary from crime and violence. “There is a sense of astonishment and disbelief that this could happen here,” President William D. Adams told *The Boston Globe*.

Shock turned to anguish as the campus grieved for Rossignol, a pre-med Dean's List student who was a member of the Colby Christian Fellowship and reader last year at the Festival of Carols and Lights in Lorimer Chapel. More than 700 students attended an emotional campus gathering in the chapel Wednesday evening, just hours after Rossignol's body was found. And even as they grieved, students were hyper-aware that a murderer still was at large.

“A lot of girls, even seniors who I've always thought of as being really self-sufficient, have asked me or other people to walk them home,” said Tim Smith '04, head resident in Foss Hall. “It's a powerful wake-up call for all of us.”

Campus security was beefed up with a mobile State Police command post parked in the Hillside parking lot and added Colby officers and Waterville police patrolling the campus in cars and on foot.

Adams, senior administrators and others met up to three times each day to discuss the crisis and the College's response. Adams sent several



Dawn Rossignol '04

e-mail messages a day to all students, faculty and staff updating them on the case. Parents and alumni also received information from the president. Colby Security handed out whistles to students and issued e-mail advisories urging students to use the buddy system when walking or jogging on campus and to report suspicious activity. Security provided more than 500 escorts on the weekend of Sept. 20, up from fewer than a half dozen on a typical weekend.

“When we go to the library, we go with friends, which we wouldn't have even considered thinking about a few weeks ago,” said Emma Carlson '07.

The campus community remained anxious as the police investigation proceeded all out. The area where Rossignol's body was found was searched by a massive contingent of police, game wardens, sheriff's deputies

and police cadets. Students, staff and faculty were interviewed by detectives searching for clues that might lead them to Rossignol's killer. But, in the end, it was information from corrections officials that led investigators to Hackett, police said.

According to State Police Lt. Timothy Doyle, investigators checked to see if anyone in central Maine had a history of crimes like this one. Corrections reported that Hackett was living with his parents in Vassalboro. He was paroled from a Utah prison in March after serving a sentence for kidnapping and robbery.

Hackett was arrested in Vassalboro for a parole violation, then charged with kidnapping and murder in Rossignol's death. Further details were not divulged. The arrest was announced at a police press conference September 23 outside the trophy room in the Harold Alfond Athletic Center, as students, staff and faculty joined the assembled media.

While there was a measure of relief, there also was the sense that Colby had changed. Even as the College started to return to normal, it was clear that “normal won't be the same as it was before this tragedy,” as Director of Communications Stephen Collins '74 told a reporter from the Bangor ABC television affiliate.

“What came rushing in there [after police named the alleged perpetrator] was another level of realization of what this loss is all about,” Collins said days later, still visibly shaken. “Regardless of whether they caught the guy or they made Colby and Waterville safer again, I know that for some of the people involved, the time to cry came then.” —Gerry Boyle '78, with Abigail Wheeler '04

Intelligent, Curious, Conscientious—She Made a Difference

By all accounts, Dawn Rossignol was the girl most families wish they had living next door.

She grew up in Medway, Maine, population about 300 fewer than Colby's student body. She was a bright, motivated young woman remembered as consummately conscientious and utterly dependable. A babysitter for neighborhood families, she was as popular with the kids as with their parents. She played clarinet in the Schenck High School band, was a lector at St. Peter Catholic Church and visited nursing home residents with the church youth group.

Her intelligence and academic ambition propelled her into the National Honor Society, and she graduated first in Schenck's Class of 2000. A prestigious George Mitchell Scholarship helped make it possible for her to attend Colby. "We look for people who would make a difference," Colleen Quint, executive director of the Mitchell Institute, told the *Katahdin Times*. "Dawn really captured that."

Colby also designated her an L.L. Bean scholar in her first year.

Moving from a northern Maine mill town to a campus community that takes pride in its international reach and high academic standards didn't faze Dawn. She continued to excel in the classroom, earning Dean's List honors almost every semester. In the winters she would take her Colby friends to East Millinocket to watch her brother, Michael (now a first-year student at the University of New England in Biddeford) play basketball for Schenck, a family friend told the *Maine Sunday Telegram*.

Her academic advisor, Associate Professor of Biology Russell Johnson, described her as "the type of student we like to get; the type of student professors love to teach." Dawn was bright, curious and very motivated, he said.

As a biology major she tackled the hard science courses, but she also embraced the liberal arts ideal of a broad foundation, taking courses in classics, New England history and film appreciation, among others.



Dawn Rossignol '04, center, with Christine Jones '04, left, and Laura Olenick '04.

"She was quiet, but she wasn't shy," Clare Boothe Luce Assistant Professor of Biology Catherine Bevier said softly, walking down the hill from Lorimer Chapel the night that news of Dawn's death spread through the campus. Bevier remembers Dawn as a quiet but confident presence—a capable and fun student to have in class.

Students and professors say Dawn took her studies very seriously, but they also remember her sense of humor and sense of adventure. While studying in Australia last year she tried skydiving.

Dawn had applied to graduate school to study pharmacology; when she was killed she was waiting to hear if she would be accepted.

The daughter of Emilio Rossignol, a former paper mill-worker who is now a contractor in the Millinocket area, and Charleen Rossignol, secretary of St. Peter Catholic Church, Dawn was the first person in her family to attend college. After her death the Rossignols asked that gifts in her memory be directed to Colby for a memorial scholarship. Scholarship money enabled Dawn to attend Colby, where she was very happy, the Rossignols told Dean of Students Janice Kassman, and they thought it fitting that a scholarship in her memory to benefit Maine students might extend that same opportunity to others.

—Stephen Collins '74



Father Philip Tracy shares thoughts with students in front of the library during a candlelight vigil held on September 22 in memory of Dawn Rossignol '04.