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From the Editor's Desk/Letters

Gerry Boyle

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From the Editor's Desk

Working for an upcoming issue of Colby on a story about Colby alumni who work in the magazine publishing industry, I recently interviewed an editor who works in New York for a fashion magazine. When I asked what was hot for fall, she looked a bit surprised by leagues within earshot. "Men's wear," they said. "Plaids." "The schoolgirl look."

"And they're bringing the eighties' stuff back," she said. "Nobody will remember!"

That said, I'll take a chance and say you're holding a new incarnation of Colby—one that allows the magazine to reflect, explore and showcase the Colby community better. Revamped by art director Brian Speer, this magazine contains some obvious and some almost invisible changes. The pages are larger, the cover is fresh, the departments are more flexible. There's a new "Q&A" feature to better capture the voices of Colby, and short glimpses of alumni lives augment customary profiles. With more elements we hope we've made the magazine more informative and lively.

We've found that Colby folks don't fit into neat little boxes. Savas Zembillas '79, for example—a Greek Orthodox priest, ex-punk rocker, gifted actor and voracious reader/scholar. If his story is as fascinating to you as it was to us, you might want a refresher on how the Greek and Roman churches evolved. (We needed one.)

That's the package we have put together. We hope you find it more inviting, more lively, more informative. Entirely new? No. But it should incorporate the best of the past (more and better class notes than anyone else in the business) with some new elements, too—fashion tips among them.

Remember, plaids are back. You read it here, first.

Gerry Boyle '78 Managing Editor

Letters

Reactions to A Turbulent Time

I read with interest and with emotion Gerry Boyle’s article (spring 2000) entitled “A Turbulent Time.”

I happened to be one of the “chino and white button-down shirt” crowd that Boyle references. I also happened to be one of over 70 Colby alumni (by my informal count) who served in Vietnam. I am not sure how many of those returned in one piece—or if they returned at all.

As a matter of fact, I remember sitting at a table in the Officer’s Club at Ton Son Nhat Air Base (the main base in Saigon) with six or seven other Colby alumni. We were fraternity guys in those days and the talk was Colby and home. During day-to-day operations “in-country,” as it was called, I ran into many Colby alumni, making it seem Colby sent more than its fair share.

It’s funny how little is written about the Colby alumni who served. Maybe reading about burning the ROTC facility, seizing the administration building, running-off to Canada or even pressuring the administration for better grades so struggling students wouldn’t get drafted makes for more interesting reading.

Thousands of volumes and insightful analysis has been written and spoken of the tumultuous 1960s, maybe even as much as the tumultuous 1860s, so anyone can empathize with the frustration of The War and the government’s seemingly unresponsiveness to stopping it.

But where do you draw the line? Is the dissolution of the Bill of Rights acceptable in making your point? Is insurrection acceptable? Is a felony acceptable? Is murder acceptable? Of course the “silent majority” had a different point of view, they just voted and didn’t scream.

In any case, most of the returning Colby Vietnam vets that I have kept in touch with (about 10) went on to grad school, didn’t really get involved in the anti-war scene and have lived productive and happy lives ever since. They simply put that military portion of their lives behind them.

We stopped hearing about the anti-war radicals when the war ended. They quickly became “main stream” and now drive BMWs to their kid’s soccer practice. It’s a shame that they didn’t put the same amount of energy and zeal into saving the tens of thousands of innocent South Vietnamese people who lost their freedom or were summarily murdered because they believed in America.

Why not write about the Colby men who served their country? They may have learned something too.

John Brassem ’64
Bedford, N.Y.

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I read with interest your recent (spring 2000) article on the Vietnam years at Colby. While the piece was fair, I felt that it gave an impression that we only acted locally, and often relatively impotently. In fact, one of my most treasured memories of my time at Colby is a trip to the Maine State Democratic Convention in Portland, where a number of students made the rounds lobbying for the inclusion of an anti-war plank in the Democratic Party platform.

The highlight of this trip was a meeting with Edmund Muskie, who was then at the height of his popularity. He spent a half-hour with about 15-20 of us, explaining his views on why the Senate supported the war, and listening to our concerns. Our great triumph came later in the convention when Muskie and other party members mentioned their concerns about the war during major speeches. In the end, his career was sabotaged by dirty tricks and our efforts did not win the day, but I do not believe that they were in vain. Speaking as someone who has always been a loner politically, this was an irreplaceable experience that reinforced my faith in a system that clearly has flaws, but that has enormous strengths as well.

Bill Earnshaw '72
Edinburgh, Scotland

As I read the Colby article on the Vietnam War, I felt dismayed and sad.

It was a one-sided presentation. Only two alumni who served in Vietnam were quoted, one against the war. Otherwise the article showcased the dissenting consciences of those who opposed the war. If Colby had a normal share of patriotic young American men among its students, and an Air Force ROTC unit as well, there were dozens of alumni who fought in the war. Surely a few have different views on the war than those expressed in the article.

The article was, moreover, shallow. It recycled all the old anti-war platitudes. There's no hint of the new scholarship that challenges the pieties of the anti-war left. I missed reference to the systematic murder of upright local officials by the Viet Cong, the executions in Hue, the exodus of the boat people, the killing fields, the gulag of reeducation camps. If it was the North Vietnamese government that better served the needs of its people and better expressed the nationalist will of the Vietnamese, why did so many people flee its rule? Finally, who can still say that the defeat of the United States and South Vietnam opened the door to a better future for the Vietnamese?

Donald M. Bishop '79
Beijing

Jack Foner's Legacy

I was saddened to hear of Professor Jack Foner's passing. As a student in his African-American history seminar in 1973, I had the opportunity to study Reconstruction in Mississippi. In 1978 I moved to Natchez, Mississippi, to continue my media career. I've spent the last 22 years reading and writing about African-American history in Mississippi, especially the Civil War and Reconstruction period. Most of my articles have appeared in the newspaper I own. I credit Jack Foner for helping me discover an interest in Mississippi history.

It was an accident that I moved to Mississippi. But it was no accident that Foner's talent and enthusiasm for his subject gave me more than a bit of inspiration. I have often thought of him and the help and guidance he gave me. I still refer to some of his suggested readings for background and to refresh my memory. He'd probably be surprised that one of his students carried his passion so far. But the end result is that thousands of Mississippi readers of my newspaper, Miss Lou, learn a little bit more about their history.

I would imagine that Foner's son, Eric, would also be surprised to discover that his dad had an indirect impact on learning in Mississippi. It's a pleasant legacy. And I'll always remember Jack Foner's kindness, quiet manner and depth of knowledge.

Peter Rinaldi '75
Natchez, Miss.

Foreign-study Foray

The article about Colby-Bates-Bowdoin connections in London, Quito and Cape Town in the spring issue of Colby brought back memories of what may have been Colby's first non-junior-year-abroad foray into international study more than 30 years ago.

In the fall of 1966, Colby English Professor Eileen Curran obtained the College's approval to take six of us to London for a Jan Plan studying British theatre. We genuinely appreciated that she was off-duty that Jan Plan, which made her sponsorship of this expedition far, far beyond the call of Colby duty. In late December, we boarded a plane for five weeks' immersion: Miss Curran, Janet Karcz '67, Rick Samson '68, and Moses Silverman, Anne York, Barbara Botwinick and myself, all '69.

In a parallel setting to the current, tony CBB digs, we rented a Knightsbridge row house (from a Polish countess, no less). It had velvet wall hangings and one feature that was unusual for London even in the 1960s: central heat! Our next-door neighbor produced James Bond movies; it was that kind of neighborhood.

We reveled in London's best theatre, even if we sat in the cheapest seats. After each play, we retired to a nearby public house to discuss the performance (the legal drinking age in England was 18, which, please note, made us all of age). I should also note that Miss Curran was very good at reminding us that we were over there for academic purposes, so the play discussions were lively and productive. It made for great evenings.

During the day, while Miss Curran (an internationally recognized Victorian literature scholar) was busy doing research, we students toured all over London and the surrounding countryside, gathering at dinner to discuss what we had learned. For several days, Mark Edelstein and Bruce Kidman, both '68, joined us during their travels, so we had some Colby connecting as well as some fresh perspective.

If the CBB students studying in London these days have half as valuable a time as we did that January, then they are fortunate indeed.

Gene Brown '69
Lincoln, Mass.