

# Colby



## Colby Magazine

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Volume 87  
Issue 1 *Winter 1998*

Article 2

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January 1998

## Front Matter

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### Recommended Citation

(1998) "Front Matter," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 87 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

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# THE FIFTY PERCENT SOLUTION

## Chapter 2: Watt's Up, Doc?

Had it not been for Dean Ernie's disappearance, the senior staff would have spent the morning discussing a variety of portentous issues, as usual.

Rob Teflyn had hoped to report the long-awaited outcome of the lawsuit by a tenured professor who had been relieved of his duties on the basis of improper conduct, dismissed by the Maine courts thanks to the overwhelming evidence he had gathered attesting to the man's certifiable lunacy.

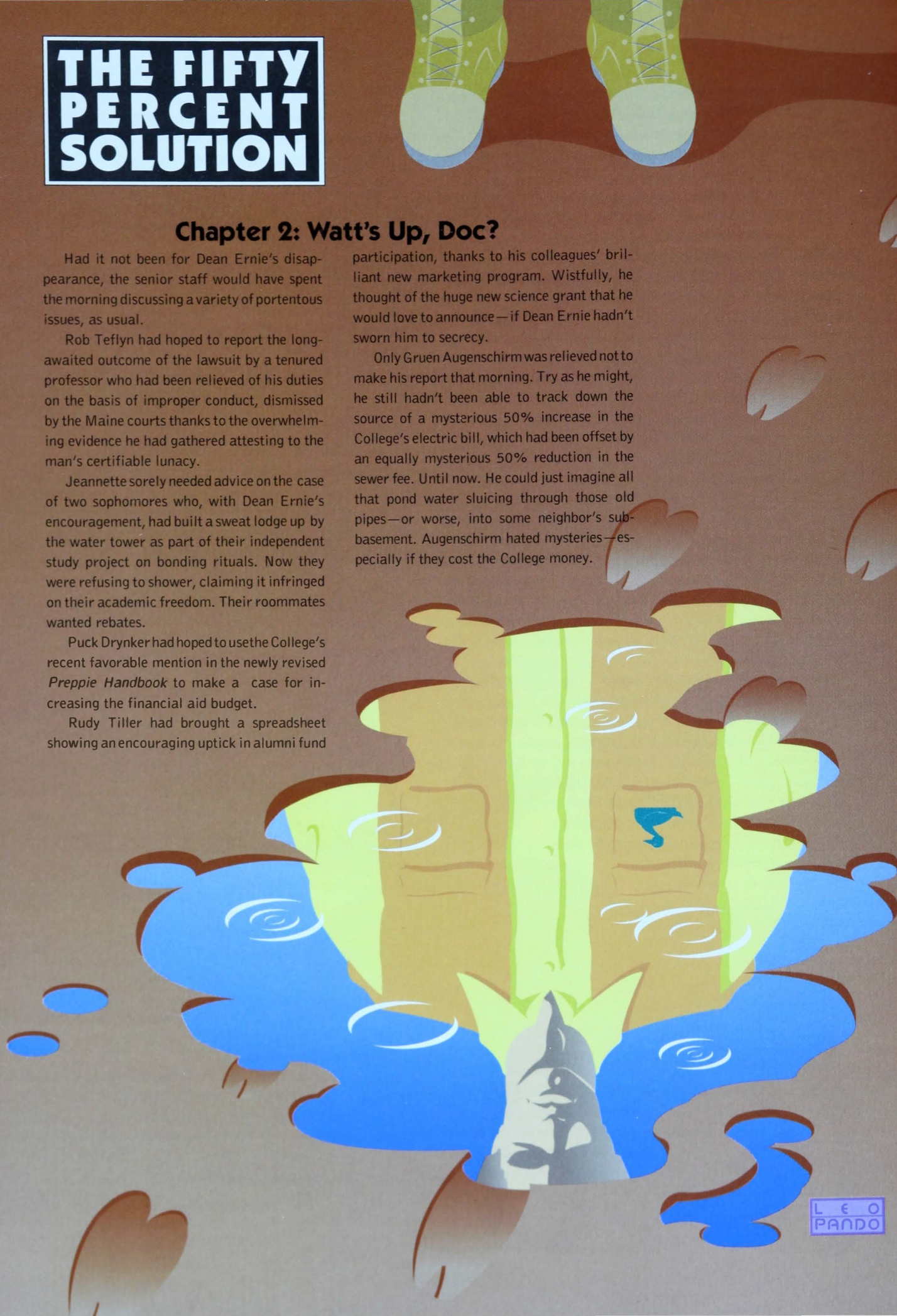
Jeannette sorely needed advice on the case of two sophomores who, with Dean Ernie's encouragement, had built a sweat lodge up by the water tower as part of their independent study project on bonding rituals. Now they were refusing to shower, claiming it infringed on their academic freedom. Their roommates wanted rebates.

Puck Drynker had hoped to use the College's recent favorable mention in the newly revised *Preppie Handbook* to make a case for increasing the financial aid budget.

Rudy Tiller had brought a spreadsheet showing an encouraging uptick in alumni fund

participation, thanks to his colleagues' brilliant new marketing program. Wistfully, he thought of the huge new science grant that he would love to announce—if Dean Ernie hadn't sworn him to secrecy.

Only Gruen Augenschirm was relieved not to make his report that morning. Try as he might, he still hadn't been able to track down the source of a mysterious 50% increase in the College's electric bill, which had been offset by an equally mysterious 50% reduction in the sewer fee. Until now. He could just imagine all that pond water sluicing through those old pipes—or worse, into some neighbor's sub-basement. Augenschirm hated mysteries—especially if they cost the College money.





Now everyone's attention was further distracted by a discreet tap on the door. The president's unflappable assistant, Carolyn Lights, stuck her head in. "Excuse me, Bull," she said, "but I just thought you would want to know that Professor Beagle has chained himself to the soccer goals again."

There was a general groan from the senior staff. Charlie "Hounddog" Beagle, Toadsworth Family Endowed Chair of Elvis Studies, was paranoid when it came to the welfare of his beloved soccer team. Doubtless he perceived the pond's disappearance as the latest outrage in Dean Ernie's plan to annex large chunks of campus and put up even more brick buildings, foremost among them one named Smythe Hall.

Cutler rapped the table. "Never mind that now. Hounddog will have to unchain himself before this afternoon's Bates game—unless he wants to play goalie. Let's stay focused on the real issue, which is to find Ernie. Since he's the dean in charge of the pond, it's a twofer."

"Hey, Bull," Rob Teflyn said, stretching languidly, "why not just call the police, put out an APB, or whatever they call it?"

"Brilliant idea, Rob," Tiller exploded, "the alumni will just love the publicity!"

Drynker was, characteristically, more restrained but equally opposed. "Jeezum, if parents think we can't even keep track of our deans, let alone our pond water, they might have second thoughts about entrusting their kids to us."

Augenschirm sat quietly, shaking his head and mopping his brow. Jeannette jumped onto her size fours, but before she could say anything, President Cutler cut in. "Quiet down, all of you. Of course none of this can get out. Obviously we need a private—as in P-R-I-V-A-T-E—detective. Ideas, anyone?"

"Someone connected with the College—" suggested Teflyn.

"With no police record—" Jeannette chimed in.

"Who can be counted on to be discreet—" said Drynker.

"And cheap," added Augenschirm hopefully.

"I know just the person!" exclaimed Rudy Tiller. "He's a retired cop," Tiller continued. "Vietnam vet, Class of '73. He lives right in town." Tiller glanced at Augenschirm. "And judging by his annual giving record, he should be relatively cheap. His name is Miranda."

"What?" said President Cutler.

"That's right, Watt Miranda. So you've heard of him, too!" said Tiller. "Great! I'll give him a call right now!"

↑ ↑ ↑ ↑

"No fraternities anymore, huh?" Miranda asked, standing at the edge of the placid pool of muck, watching the gulls poke their beaks down into the goo. A bunch of guys with buckets. . .

"Nope," Lew Allyn said.

"And there's no plug? I mean, this isn't like one of those golf-course ponds where they let all the water out to pick up the balls?"

"No way," Allyn said. "That stuff? We don't want to know. Not with Homecoming Weekend coming up."

Miranda nodded. He could understand that. From the bank, he could see six shopping carts, a *Morning Sentinel* box, a refrigerator with a beer tap sticking out of the door, a bald mannequin and a yellow 1970s-vintage Chrysler New Yorker. Slime covered its Connecticut gaps.

They walked the perimeter of the crime scene.

On the road side of the pond, near the soccer field, Miranda looked at an old white van and smiled. He walked over and Allyn followed. Miranda went to the driver's door and rapped on the window. A pudgy man raised himself from the seat. On the seat where he'd been resting his head was a *Norton Anthology*, volume II.

"Still going to college, Davey?" Miranda said.

"I'm a non-traditional student," the guy said.

"Yeah, I can see that. Quite a dashboard you've got for yourself there," Watt said, peering inside the van. "Does it surf the net? All knowledge still your province and all that?"

Davey just sneered.

Miranda turned to Allyn. "They used to call him the chameleon. Same class as me, but he started at 16, a real prodigy. Never graduated, though, did you?" He nodded at the unkempt figure in the van. "Davey here once represented a guy in district court on an assault charge. Pretended he was a lawyer. Almost pulled it off, too."

"I woulda got him off, Miranda, you hadn't opened your big mouth."

"Right, Davey. Let me know if you open a surgical practice. I'll send you your first patient—from my list of enemies. Now, tell me, you here all night?"

"I'm always here. But I tell ya, with that big new dorm over there, I may have to start parking down by the Bob-In where it's nice and quiet."

"So tell me what you saw last night."

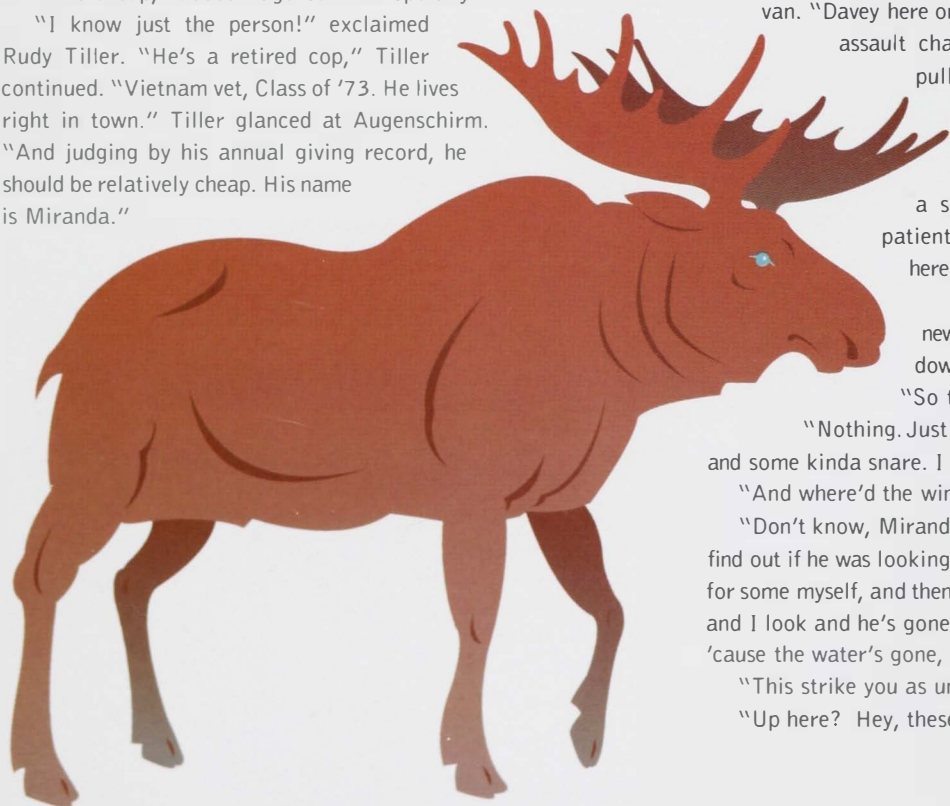
"Nothing. Just some wingnut out there in a boat with a light and some kinda snare. I mean, what's he fishing for? Leeches?"

"And where'd the wingnut go?"

"Don't know, Miranda. I'm waiting for him to land, I was gonna find out if he was looking for coins or something, maybe rake around for some myself, and then I fell asleep and when I woke up, it's 6 a.m. and I look and he's gone. The boat's gone. Probably no need for it, 'cause the water's gone, too."

"This strike you as unusual?"

"Up here? Hey, these college people? You kidding? They think



up all kinds of weird stuff. I figured it for the morning flush. Now how's about letting a guy get a little rest?"

They left him in the van, and walked on, padding along like the gulls on the newly created mud flat. In the cattails at the south end of what had been the pond, a heron stood. Miranda could see the heron's splay-toed tracks. The smaller tracks of the gulls. The tracks of...

A moose.  
"You see that?" Miranda said.  
"Yeah," Allyn said. "We get 'em on campus, especially in fall. Rutting season."  
"This moose was in a rut, all right. Look at that. Right across the pond, like he was marching. And then back he comes, right up the bank into the puckerbrush there."

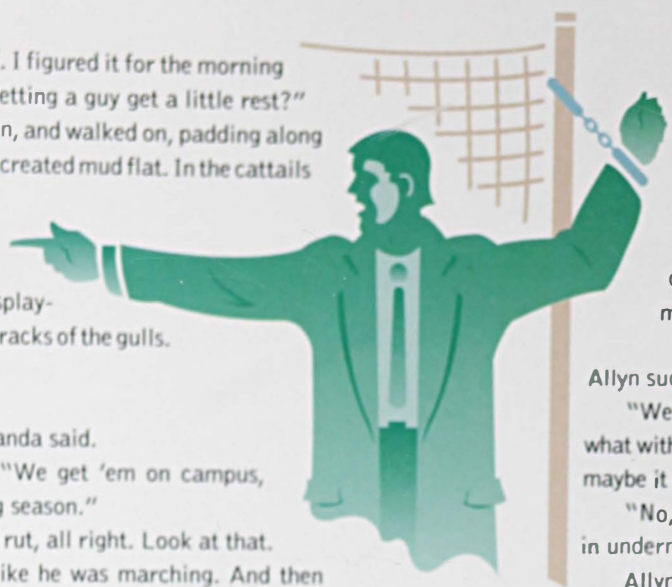
They looked at the tracks, out and back, straight as the lines on a highway, going both ways.  
"A moose with a purpose," Miranda said.  
"Well, it is —"  
"I know," Miranda said. "Rutting season."  
Suddenly there was a loud yell from the vicinity of the soccer field. They looked up to see Professor Beagle waving frantically at them. "Hey, you guys! Come over here a minute."

They walked up the field to where Beagle had chained himself to the nearest soccer goal. Watt stole a glance at Lew to see what he made of this, but Lew seemed to be taking it all in stride.  
"Listen, you two, it's the weirdest thing. I was on my way over here when I spotted this huge moose just standing in the woods over by the picnic area as if it were frozen stiff. But before I could say 'Boo!' this guy came running up with a little gadget in his hand, clicking on it like crazy, as if he wanted the moose to change channels or something. He never even saw me, just charged right up behind that moose and gave it a massive kick in the rump. And darned if the poor beast didn't just give a jerk and amble off as though nothing had happened! Last I saw, it was headed for the loading dock over by the new dorms. It could be hurt. Hey, promise me you'll check it out for me—okay, guys? I'm here for the duration. Anybody tries to mess with this field, they'll have me and old Mr. Yale here to contend with." He extended his tongue; there was a bright brass padlock key resting on it.

Lew turned to Watt. "Maybe we should go after it—a hurt moose on the loose rampagin' all over campus—I could put it out of its misery..." he suggested hopefully.

"Naw," Watt muttered. "He's long gone." They bid Beagle farewell, promising to look for the guy who had kicked the moose, and walked back down the hill.

More gulls had arrived, probably mistaking the former pond for the



mud flats at Wiscasset, and were now squabbling over the few dead carp that had been stranded like tiny beached whales. Miranda considered the surface of the mud, the giant crater. Moose tracks. Gull tracks. Heron tracks. No dean tracks.

There was something funny about it, but he didn't know exactly what. Miranda mulled some more as they continued along the bank.

"What's lower than this?" Miranda asked Allyn suddenly.

"Well, I don't know," Allyn said. "It is pretty nasty, what with the alumni coming back and all, but I'm thinkin' maybe it could just be some geological thing, or—"

"No, I mean, what on campus is lower than this, as in underneath."

Allyn thought a moment.

"Well, there's the tunnels."

"What tunnels? I never heard about tunnels."

"Well, Watt, we don't usually talk about 'em. For safety reasons. You know how kids are at this age. Show 'em a hole, tell 'em to stay away, they dive into it head first."

"So who knows? Faculty?"

"Heck, no. Some of them are as bad as the kids. This is a need-to-know matter. Certain technical staff. Level one administration."

"Like the dean?"

"Ernie? Why, 'course he does. Ernie knows where all the bodies're buried round here."

Miranda looked at him sharply.

"Figger of speech, Watt."

"Right," Miranda said. "And where do these tunnels go?"

"They connect the central heating plant with the other buildings on campus. They're for general utilities, too. Power. Fiber optics for computers. You know these kids have the Internet in their rooms, e-mail, connect to the campus system."

"When I was a student here, I mean downtown, four of us guys shared a manual typewriter," Miranda said. "Ate all our meals at The Pie Plate."

"Times change, Watt," Allyn said. "You oughta see what it takes to keep all this running."

"I'd like to," Miranda said. "Let's start with the tunnels. You have time?"

"Time? I've got a direct order from the president's mouth. 'Fix this problem.' And that's what I'm gonna do. With your help, of course. You wanna see tunnels? Let's go get the blueprints."

With a last glance at the shimmering putrescence, they started back up the bank. And then Miranda turned back.

"Hey, Lew," he said, his eyes narrowing. "What happened to the ducks?" to be continued...

The Fifty Percent Solution is the latest chapter in Colby's Alumni Fund participation challenge (announced in a special mailing to alumni and parents in the fall). Achieving 50 percent participation in the Alumni Fund is a crucial Colby goal. If you didn't give last year, your gift will generate a \$100 contribution for Colby's endowment from the challenge fund. If you did give last year, give again to help us reach this year's 49 percent benchmark—generating an additional \$75,000 endowment contribution. Donors will automatically receive the missing chapter of *The Fifty Percent Solution*. Participate and help solve the mystery! For more information about *The Fifty Percent Solution*, visit us on the web at <http://www.colby.edu/alumni/50percent.html> or contact us via e-mail at [cjfuller@colby.edu](mailto:cjfuller@colby.edu).

