

January 2011

The Last Page: He's a Boy and, Yes, He's Special

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Recommended Citation

Weiner, Margie (2011) "The Last Page: He's a Boy and, Yes, He's Special," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 99 : Iss. 4 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol99/iss4/12>

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HE'S A BOY AND, YES, HE'S SPECIAL

When people ask me if I've met a special boy up at Colby, my answer—without hesitation—is yes.

His name is Lucas. He really likes construction vehicles and has just started adding two-digit numbers. Lucas is 7. During my first semester at Colby, I joined about 400 other Colby students who act as mentors in the Colby Cares About Kids program. It was one of the best decisions I've made during college—for both of us.

When I met Lucas, he was a 5-year-old kindergartener who rarely went two consecutive days without being sent to the principal's office. More often than not, when I visited him, he was in time out. My mentee showed nominal interest in my presence while his classmates were bursting to tell me what "bad" things Lucas had done that day. During snack time Lucas would pull my hair or sit under the table and refuse to come out, looking at me with a cute, devilish smile. Then the teacher would come over and reprimand him, often leaving me at the snack table with the other students because Lucas had to "think about appropriate behavior."

I think in some ways Lucas was testing me. Most of the adults in his world were not very supportive. What was he supposed to make of this messy-haired college girl who kept showing up? But I quickly picked up on Lucas's challenge and accepted it. Though we had been playing cars and trucks twice a week for almost two months, he would claim to not know my name or would run away when I tried to say goodbye.

Eventually, Lucas started to greet me and save me a seat at the lunch table. One day another boy asked him, "Who's that girl sitting next to you?" He aggressively responded, "That's my mentor! And she's not a girl!" A bit confused, I turned to Lucas and said, "I am a girl. What did you think I was?" He looked back at me, as puzzled as I was. "But, you're too cool to be a girl."

At that moment, I realized this was going to work.

After almost four months, I was asked to meet with the school counselor and the director of CCAK to discuss whether Lucas was suitable for the mentoring program. Lucas's behavior was still very poor, his academics slow, his attendance inconsistent. They asked me if I

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would like a different mentee, but I didn't even consider it. Lucas was my mentee. I was going to be someone in his life who showed up every week and didn't skip out when it wasn't perfect.

Two years later a lot has changed. Though I look pretty much the same, Lucas is almost six inches taller, has switched from Velcro sneakers to laces, and just started wearing glasses with a strap around the back to keep them safe. His home life is a little more consistent, and his behavior is worlds better. Some things have not

changed. We still play with cars, trucks, and construction vehicles. If you ever need clarification on the difference between a bucket loader and an excavator, just let me know.

Hanging out twice a week has probably helped Lucas, but I know it has helped me. On the surface, it's a reason to get out of my sweatpants and be on time (things that don't always seem like necessities in the college world). More substantially, Lucas has helped me stay grounded and focused while I'm in college.

It's easy to get wrapped up in yourself when you live in a world of 18- to 22-year-olds. Dining halls, paper extensions, and three-day weekends foster an "all about me" mindset that's very easy to slip

into. But for about three hours a week, I get to be all about Lucas. I have to put exams and term papers out of my mind and recall instead playground games and that there is no talking in the hallways. With Lucas, I know I'm doing something important that is directly benefiting someone else. Being a mentor helps me feel valuable off paper—away from test scores, GPAs, and class rankings.

I'm abroad this fall and I won't see Lucas until February. Last spring I showed Lucas where I was going on a globe and reminded him that I wouldn't be able to see him for a while. When it came time to actually say goodbye, I was so sad. I hugged him and told him not to worry, that I'd write him letters, and I promised I'd be back.

He looked back at me and confidently replied, "I know you will. You always come back. When you're looking for me, I'll be in second grade."

Margie Weiner '12 is a science, technology, and society major. This essay originally appeared in insideColby magazine and on insidecolby.com.

