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A Very Few Degrees of Separation

Among the items I dealt with in my first month as president, July 1960, was a letter from Tom Mboya, a senior political leader in Kenya, one of a wide array of letters mailed to presidents of American universities and colleges. Mr. Mboya explained that funds from the Kennedy Foundation had been made available to pay airfare for a number of Kenyan students hoping to enroll in American institutions. This enterprise came to be known informally at the Kennedy Airlift.

As I understand it, the Eisenhower Administration had been approached but was not all that interested. John F. Kennedy, still U.S. Senator and not yet president-elect, was in favor of the program. The idea appealed strongly to me, and after consulting the Admissions Office I informed Mr. Mboya that Colby would participate. The Kenyan government sent two students for enrollment in the Class of 1964, Charles Angwenyi and Eric Levi. Both graduated and returned to Kenya. Charles became head of the National Bank of Kenya, and Eric took an engineering degree at Columbia and has practiced engineering in Kenya ever since. Charles was awarded a Colby honorary degree in 1988, but he died in middle life. One of his sons, Peter, graduated from Colby in 2000. A first cousin of Charles Angwenyi, Bill Mayaka, decided to follow along to Colby. He graduated in 1973, returned to Kenya, and entered the civil service, attaining the post of permanent secretary (a career rather than political appointment) in two cabinet ministries. One of his sons, Christopher, graduated from Colby in 1999.

In 1959, as part of a kind of vanguard of the Kennedy Airlift, a Kenyan student, Barack Obama Sr., enrolled at the University of Hawaii. On his return to Kenya it is my understanding that Bill Mayaka became acquainted with him and knew him well at the time of

his untimely death. As Tolstoy observed, history emerges from small fragments accumulated over time.

*Robert E.L. Strider II, president emeritus
Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts*



Robot's Place is in the Home

Regarding the interview with Computer Science Chair Bruce Maxwell (Q&A, winter 2009 *Colby*), I am a 1972 Colby grad who is just finishing nursing school after another career. I was very interested in your article since I have a long-standing interest in public health nursing.

I can definitely see a role for robots to supplement home health care such as monitoring vital signs, lab results, medication compliance, and patient safety. More and more patients want to remain in their homes—even if they are ill and alone. It will be interesting to see the applications that robotics provides.

The big question will be costs. If nurses and home health-care aides are being cut back, who will be able to afford robots?

Still, I believe robotic telemetry has a future in our health-care system. Keep up the good work.

*Amy Becker '72
Reston, Virginia*

Parenting Means Sacrifice, Compromise

I was confused by the article "Double Duty" (winter 2009 *Colby*). Was the point to say that these women would be having an easier time if their husbands took on more domestic responsibilities, or was it a celebration of what these

women are achieving in business?

I found it depressing. Every educated, two-career couple must make hard decisions when they bring a child into the world. That child arrives with a need for 24-hour-a-day care. Two parents with two full-time jobs suddenly have three full-time jobs, one of which comes with strong emotional needs. Every family must decide what will work for all of them as individuals and as a unit, and usually both parents need to make sacrifices and compromises.

The careers these high-powered women have chosen typically do not allow time for family, a condition that was at one time reserved for men. I'm not saying women should not pursue these careers, but I believe that families find more balance when one or both members of the couple put the brakes on their careers for a while when they have kids at home. Choosing to push careers forward full-throttle at a time when kids need you the most is not taking their needs into consideration.

Where people spend their limited time is a reflection of their values, whether it's at work, the gym, volunteering at the homeless shelter, or at the tanning salon. And mothers and fathers who volunteer at school and attend sporting events are there because they value time with their children. Families that spend time together benefit by having a strong bond, shared memories, and a connection to their community. People who view parenting as taking turns relieving the nanny and taking a child to school once a month may never experience those bonds.

I know many women (and men) who are proud to be strong role models for their children by bucking society's obsession with status, money, and egocentrism, and performing one of the most undervalued jobs in our country: raising our kids.

*Christine Tuccille Merry '91
Frederick, Maryland*



Many Forms of “Double Duty”

I was very pleased to read the article, “Double Duty,” (winter 2009 *Colby*) about Colby alumnae mothers who are masterfully handling both corporate and family responsibilities. Their dedication is both admirable and inspiring. That being said, I think it’s important to note that the women portrayed are a mere subset of those considered working mothers. The *Colby* subjects are at top levels of their respective organizations and, in several cases, have the means necessary to hire nannies. While I laud their courage and hope to one day successfully combine career and family, I believe the term “double duty” is far more complex. It includes those parents, both married and single, who can’t afford nannies or childcare. Also included are women (and men) who work because they don’t have a choice.

It is encouraging to know that Colby women rise to top levels of organizations and simultaneously negotiate keeping a family together. But the media seem to direct our expectations toward the idealized working mother, one with an executive-level job and the drive to conquer the corporate world akin to that of her male counterparts. Whether a parent is a single mother working two blue-collar jobs or a father staying home while his wife is deployed overseas, “double duty” can be done well through a broad variety of means.

Lauren R. Schaad '01
Glendale, Arizona

Where Were the Republicans?

As the parent of a proud Colby grad I enjoy reading *Colby*. This issue (winter 2009) was quite disappointing in reporting on campaign/inauguration news. Two opposing sides ran and Colby students worked on both sides—not just for Obama. You missed a wonderful opportunity to discuss how both sides reacted to the election and to the inauguration, and how important both sides are to our process. Although you likely reflect the liberal view on campus, the conservative minority deserves representation for the good of all.

Linda C. Johnson P'05
Loch Lloyd, Missouri

Editor’s note: Colby contacted several students involved in the McCain campaign. Only one, the student quoted in the winter issue, chose to comment.

Bring Obama to Campus

Regarding the article, “Racial Controversy on Campus,” (winter 2009 *Colby*), the potential for racial conflict is surprising at this point in time when our country has elected the first person of color as president of the United States and has received international acclaim from countries all over the world. Our country has gained stature because of the intellect, poise, and gentility of Barack Obama. Perhaps inviting him to speak to the students would enable students and faculty to expand their racial tolerance and their capacity for mutual respect.

Patricia A. Atherton, Ph.D.
Chicago, Illinois

On Cultural Insensitivity

I was dismayed to read about racial and cultural insensitivity on the Colby campus. A luau-themed party? A Cinco de Mayo celebration? When will it end? In solidarity with those who demonstrated, I will boycott Saint Patrick’s Day parties because green beer is an affront to my

husband’s cultural heritage, and I will no longer buy Kaiser rolls because they are offensive to my German lineage.

Susanna Hofmann McShea '71
Basking Ridge, New Jersey

A Healthy Response

Although I was dismayed to see an article titled “Racial Controversy on Campus,” (winter 2009 *Colby*) I perceive the decision to run the story and not suppress it as a hopeful sign of a healthy campus response to the events that were reported.

On a not-very-racially-diverse campus populated with many students and faculty members who hail from not-very-diverse communities, it’s not surprising that hurtful racial insults and incivility occur, whether or not they are intentional. Some young people, in particular, haven’t had much opportunity in their lives to learn about living side-by-side with others in a society composed of diverse cultures, religions, races, sexual orientations, physical abilities, etc.

More important than offensive incidents, however, is how one reacts to them. Colby is fortunate to have a program called Campus Conversations on Race and I hope the College will consider ways to offer the experience to more students, faculty, and staff. Engaging in face-to-face dialogue can help participants challenge their assumptions and build understanding, trust, and friendships across racial and ethnic lines. Good facilitators keep the dialogue respectful and real, allowing everyone to gain insight.

Besides being a civil thing to do, acquiring the skills to recognize stereotypes and build new relationships across old barriers is an element of preparing oneself for living, working, and contributing successfully in an ever-changing world community. As such, it is entirely consistent with Colby’s enduring mission.

Jeff Stone '73
Milton, Massachusetts