

# Colby



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### From the Editor

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*Colby College*

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One of the odd things about coming back to work at your college is that professors you once regarded from a respectful distance become your colleagues. This new familiarity can be awkward (I remember how the first name of a certain renowned professor of Shakespeare first caught in my throat).

But not with Bob Gillespie.

Blue-jeaned and pony-tailed when he taught me contemporary poetry in 1976, he was Bob way back then. Calmly soft-spoken, unfailingly gentle, unswerving in his devotion to language and writing, he was both mentor and friend. And when we became colleagues at *Colby*, back in 1999, Bob continued to serve in both roles.

He died in April, while on vacation in Costa Rica. It all seems unreal still, despite the heartfelt memorial service in Lorimer Chapel, attended by friends, Bob's colleagues from Colby and beyond, and even Bob's dog Zeus, the latest in a long line of Gillespie sled dogs. I'm sure Zeus is unsettled by Bob's absence, and so are we. I still expect him to saunter into the office on his creaky runner's knees (35,000 miles-plus, by his meticulous accounting), ease down into a chair, and chat.

About books. Baseball. His woods in Benton. The farmer down the road. My son's budding running career. Zeus or one of his predecessors. A story in the magazine. "I liked that," Bob would say. "That was pretty good."

This was no small praise, not from Bob. A poet, he savored words like a musician savors notes. To Bob, sentences were complex chords. A paragraph had a melody, an article needed balance and harmony. ("Okay," Bob would say right about now. "I think you may be belaboring the music metaphor.")

Bob's love of language never wavered, and it made him a bit of an anachronism. In a world of Guitar Hero (music again. Sorry, Bob), he was Segovia, or at least Chet Atkins. In a time when correct punctuation, like etiquette, is seen more and more as a quaint formality, Bob pondered every apostrophe, mulled the sometimes-complex relationships between subject and verb, object and modifier. As was recounted at the memorial service, a grammar question sent Bob's way usually prompted a short treatise in response. Like a Supreme Court justice, he would expound on both sides of the question and then issue his ruling.

But I'd like to tell you about more than Bob's love of language—though readers of *Colby* magazine reaped the benefits of that for years. Love of words was just part of his general love of life, especially the simple things that brought him contentment. Running. His diaries. Mystery novels. His friends, to whom he was steadfastly loyal and reliably generous.

Bob was 69 but he was truly young at heart—an irony, since it was his heart that proved to be his downfall at the end. But he managed to evade the cynicism and world-weariness that are for some of us maladies of age.

*Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing Boy,*

*But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy;*

Wordsworth wrote that, and I thought of it as Bob's friends spoke of him at the Lorimer Chapel service and in the reception that followed. The prison-house never closed in on Bob, and that was a blessing—for him and for all of us who knew him.



Gerry Boyle '78, P'06  
Managing Editor

# Colby

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