

# Colby



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## From the Editor

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Working at a place like Colby, you often cross paths with students who are remarkable in one way or another. These are the students you wish everyone could meet.

Well, meet Nick Currey '09. As inspiring young people go, he's a doozy.

Currey first came to Colby as a high school junior from Ridgewood, N.J. An Eagle Scout and skier, baseball player and poet, he fell in love with Mayflower Hill. Colby liked him, too.

On the eve of his departure for his first semester in Dijon, France, Currey complained of an odd lump on his side. Probably a pulled muscle, his doctor said, but best to check it out. An X-ray showed a tumor protruding from Currey's rib cage and pressing against his lungs. In the turn of a moment, Dijon was replaced by Tomorrow's Children's Institute, a center for pediatric cancer and blood disorders in Hackensack. Currey, who had leukemia as a toddler, had been there before. He hadn't expected to be going back.

It was an aggressive cancer in the family of Ewing's Sarcoma, and Currey had a bad case.

He endured weeks of radiation, months of chemotherapy. At the hospital, he wore a Colby baseball hat and sweatshirt, sent down by Janice Kassman, vice president of student affairs. He toted Ybloc, a stuffed Colby mule. "A nurse told me, during that whole year of treatment, that was really the goal. To get him to Colby," said Ralph Currey, Nick's dad.

In anticipation, Currey picked courses: pop culture, Latin American history, beginning Spanish. But then his bone marrow showed cancer. Doctors recommended a stem-cell transplant; Colby was postponed again, this time until January 2006.

The transplant was performed in September and October. But, in one of many disappointments, it didn't work out.

Currey developed terrible sores in his mouth and esophagus. He was on morphine, had trouble breathing. And you know what people remember about him most? "His smile," his dad said. "One of the women down at the hospital told me today she just remembers his million-dollar smile."

But there was more to Nick Currey than that. Susan Cohen, supervisor of child-life specialists at the center, spent many hours with him over the course of a year. "He would sit in my office and . . . just talk very freely. What's important? How do I connect with other people when my experience is so different?"

Later, in the intensive care unit, with the Colby sweatshirt hung on the wall, Currey continued to ponder. "He spoke about life existentially," she said. "Who gets remembered in this world and why. . . . We spoke about love and we spoke about what it means in terms of continuity. Helping him put a sense of meaning in his own life."

Which, as you probably have figured out, ended short of his goal of coming to Mayflower Hill.

Nick Currey died November 3. His family—his dad, mother Nancy, sister Mary Kate, 15, and brother, Ben, 10—had gathered around him before he was to be sedated and put on a respirator. "They said, 'I love you. It's gonna be okay,'" Cohen recounted. "'You're our hero.'"

Hers, too. This was a guy who sang karaoke ("Werewolves of London") at a hospital party and unabashedly did needlepoint with his mom (the Colby seal). Dressed up as his doctor, with big round glasses. Had so many friends at the institute that Cohen described him as "the mayor." Nearly a thousand people came to his memorial service. "He was stellar," Cohen said, choking back tears. "He always found something positive."

Even in a place where children die regularly, where attachments are strong and grief is commonplace, Currey stood out.

His mother said Nick grew a great deal in the last year of his life. "At first, of course it was a major disappointment, and then he said, 'You know, Mom, I'm glad I had this year because I really learned a lot about myself.'" Some of that can be passed on.

"I think one thing is just how precious life is," Nancy Currey said, "and how a lot of times we take so much for granted. He wasn't able to do that, and a lot of people said that was the great gift that he gave to them—to see that you live life to the fullest."

It's a gift that, once truly received, keeps on giving.



Nick Currey '08

Gerry Boyle '78, P'06  
Managing Editor

# Colby

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