

# Colby



## Colby Magazine

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Volume 102  
Issue 1 *Spring 2013*

Article 4

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July 2013

## Letters

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### Recommended Citation

(2013) "Letters," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 102 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol102/iss1/4>

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**On Mackenzie's Portrait of the War in Vietnam**

Regarding Professor Cal Mackenzie's photo essay, ("Vietnam: Then and Now," winter 2013 *Colby*), I remember asking Cal something along the lines of "What was Vietnam like?" during my senior year in 1978, and was struck by his response: "It's a beautiful country with too many holes."

Of course, he meant bomb craters. We never discussed much more about his Vietnam experience, although I recall an anecdote or two about the incomprehensible bureaucracy of the Army. Like so many young men, he went to fight a war he did not support, against a people he did not hate, for a "cause" that was never fully explained, if it was explained at all. Our nation's "goal" in Vietnam was never so much about Vietnam as it was about China and the Soviet Union, and the domino effect of Communism in Southeast Asia. That a free-market democracy like ours believed that the only effective way to stem the alleged "tide" of communism was with guns, bombs and lives—instead of with the strength of our ideas, trade, and good will—remains, to me, one of the great tragedies in our lives.

It's remarkable to witness what even a limited free market and trade have done to Vietnam and our other "enemies" of the time. I'm not sure we've learned

our lessons from this awful time; too often I've seen the use of force trump the strength of ideas and dialogue. I am grateful to Cal for his service in Vietnam, but more grateful for his service to our college and his country as a teacher. I hope by his return to Vietnam, and what he learned about himself, and us, we as a country will have learned a bit more, and will think hard about how we can and must engage with other peoples around the world. I note that the vast majority of his pictures from Vietnam are of its beautiful and resourceful people. It's people that matter more than places. If we see other people in the light in which we view ourselves, perhaps we can reshape the world in positive ways.

*Bob Kinney '79*  
Doylestown, Penn.

I read with interest Professor Cal Mackenzie's essay, "Vietnam: Then and Now."

For the purpose of full disclosure, my Colby graduating class (1964) was in the perfect "sweet spot" for Vietnam duty. The class—according to my unofficial count—had a very high Vietnam participation rate. Sixty percent of the male graduates were directly or indirectly involved in the war—me included.

I have been in touch with many of these Colby guys, along with a bunch of non-Colby Vietnam veterans. Most

of these vets were military officers who had, in one way or another, volunteered for Vietnam.

One fellow is more or less typical. He volunteered for three combat tours and was wounded three times. He laughs at my combat experience, such as it was; huddling in sandbagged bunkers while the base was being shelled or infiltrated. I was, after all, a U.S. Air Force 1st Lieutenant stationed at the key ground support base of Pleiku AB in the strategic Central Highlands of Vietnam. I often felt like I was being watched by a vulture, sitting on a rail waiting for dinner.

On my way home ink was thrown on my uniform. My parents were spat upon. By now, that kind of stuff is just old news. That's all changed.

As Max Cleland, decorated and severely wounded Vietnam hero and former U.S. senator, wrote: "Within the soul of each Vietnam veteran there is probably something that says, 'Bad war, good soldier.'"

After reading Professor Mackenzie's piece, I was not sure of his point. He writes that he didn't meet a "single person who had gone to war because he believed in the administration's policy."

In all fairness to the professor, his Bien Hoa tour in Vietnam (1970-71), was during a "withdrawal phase" (70,000 veterans were ready to be sent home). "Scraping the bottom of the soldier-barrel" is an apt description.

But here's the rub. Does Professor Mackenzie feel that, through his conversations with fellow draftees, we, along with all American Vietnam veterans, were misinformed or misled? (2.75 million served.) Is he disparaging American servicemen and women, even those killed (58,000), wounded (303,700), or awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor (245)? Is he ashamed of what he did in Vietnam? Is he ashamed of all Vietnam vets? Is he ashamed of the United States?

The professor writes eloquently about the "ingenuity and endurance" of the Vietnamese people. Let's be clear on this. As a professor of international business, I've had about 150 Vietnamese



students. Through my teaching, research, and discussions with Vietnamese citizens, I've concluded that the southern population—around Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon)—is, in general, honest and diligent.

Conversely, I learned the people from northern Vietnam—around Hanoi—have proven to be corrupt, operating under a socialist, foreign exchange-driven (primarily U.S. dollars) economic system.

In fact, after the war the Hanoi government orchestrated severe reprisals against former U.S. allies in Saigon. Those who did not escape via boat (85,000 out of more than 200,000 “Boat People” settled in the U.S.) were sent to “re-education camps”—released decades later or never heard from again.

So what's the upshot of all of this? When all is said and done, the Vietnamese people are wonderful, but that depends where you look.

And lastly, no one is arguing with the professor that Vietnam is now a beautiful country. Professor Mackenzie's keen photographic eye captures much of that. Most countries in that region, of course (Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong/China, Korea) are beautiful, too. As a matter of fact, Bali, part of Indonesia, is one of the most beautiful spots on earth.

*John Brassem '64*  
Torrington, Conn.

### With Colby in Spirit

I was very pleased to read Dean Kurt Nelson's essay (“The Spiritual Life of Colby College: Then, Now, Next,” winter 2013 *Colby*). I was glad to have the summary and attention given to this incredibly basic human need and expression. Anyone involved in ministry knows that there are many “new normals” and yet there are still basic, continuing universal needs, themes, and spiritual principles.

Lorimer Chapel was busy when I attended Colby and it actually sounds even more thriving now. That is good, healthy, and brings balance to any community.

I have fond memories of my four years on Mayflower Hill. I received my call to

*The Spiritual Life of Colby College: Then, now, next*  
By Kurt E. Niessens



**1** In 1975 when I took on this job in college chaplaincy, I found with surprising promptness the presence of a vibrant and varied religious life at Colby. I expected much of the religious and spiritual life to be in the hands of the Protestant community, but I was surprised to find a rich and diverse religious life. I was also surprised to find that the religious life was not limited to the Protestant community. I was also surprised to find that the religious life was not limited to the Protestant community. I was also surprised to find that the religious life was not limited to the Protestant community.

**2** The religious life at Colby College has evolved from a focus on the Protestant community to a more inclusive and diverse religious life. This evolution has been driven by the needs and interests of the students, faculty, and staff. The religious life at Colby College is now a vibrant and diverse community that includes members of many different faith traditions.

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ministry in November 1977 (after I had delivered a student sermon) at the end of a morning Protestant worship service in Lorimer Chapel. The freedom and choices we students were given were empowering and the Chapel Service Committee, the student preaching, the many conversations and classes with sage Chaplain Roland Thorwaldsen (“Thor”) as well as the attention and mentoring from the Religion Department professors meant that I was getting the support, training, and pre-professional feedback that would impact the rest of my life and ministry.

Not only was I empowered as a Colby student, I was well prepared as a woman entering into ministry! I received a great deal of caring from that segment of the College that is spiritual and am heartily glad that the vehicles are set up so that others may further their spiritual journeys as well. By the way, being in the minority just made me stronger.

Keep up the good work.  
*Rev. Jane E. Dibden '80*  
Johnson, Vermont

### Remembering Miss Runnals

I read with great interest the article about Samantha Eddy '13 and her research on Dean Ninetta Runnals 1908 (“Discovering Miss Runnals,” Winter 2013 *Colby*). Dean Runnals was responsible for my going to Colby, thus changing



**Samantha Eddy '13 holds a photo of Ninetta Runnals, Class of 1908, who as student, professor, administrator, and trustee championed women's equality.**

my life.

I visited my sister Jean [MacDonald Peterson '51] who was attending Colby during my senior year of high school, class of 1948. I enjoyed myself immensely and decided to attend to visit Dean Runnals. I had pretty much decided to attend another college, but she changed my mind. I remember her as energetic and



devoted to Colby. After listening to me, she thought I should apply. Obviously, I did, and had four wonderful years there, the perfect college for me. Dean Runnalls retired the next year so I was lucky to have met her. I attended Colby, Class of 1952, during an historic transitional time, two years on the old campus and two on Mayflower Hill. I am now a GOLDEN MULE and plan to attend the 200th birthday reunion in June.

Perhaps this note would interest Samantha and I'd appreciate you forwarding it to her. I'm living history!

*Nancy MacDonald Cultrera '52*  
Eliot, Maine

I was so glad to see the article on Dean Ninetta Runnalls in your last issue. Where I grew up, in Dover-Foxcroft during the 1950s and 1960s, everyone knew that she lived with her sister Katherine Danforth in a lovely home on Lawrence Street. Her other sister, Lila Atherton, lived up the street. My mother served with Dean Runnalls on the board of trustees of Foxcroft Academy and often spoke of her quiet, but very forceful and perceptive presence. As a student at Colby from 1965 to 1969, I would often visit her for tea when I returned home for visits. One always addressed her as "Dean Runnalls."

In 1972 I became engaged to her great-great nephew, Robert White. I still have the letter that she wrote me. "As the oldest representative of the Runnalls branch of the family, I want to extend a cordial welcome to our family group. I do this very sincerely and hope you will now exchange 'Dean Runnalls' for 'Aunt Nettie.'"

My mother-in-law, Priscilla Hathorn White '42, told the story of how Dean Runnalls was involved in the building of the Mary Low dormitory. She kept insisting that the closets the architect had planned were too small. He did not agree. So she had him make a sample closet in the cellar of her office building. She then asked a female coed to bring her

clothes down and put them in the closet. They did not fit. The architect agreed to enlarge the closets. I don't imagine Dean Runnalls told him that she had selected a student that she knew had a very extensive wardrobe.

One of her favorite places was her camp on Sebec Lake. This was a family spot that her father had built in 1935. My husband and I spent several summers living next door to her in his family camp when we were first married. She was a lovely lady. It was a Runnalls family tradition that Aunt Nettie knit the "coming home" bonnet for each new baby. I still have the last one she made for my daughter, Dillen, in 1978.

Again, thank you for highlighting a woman who had such a great influence in women's affairs at Colby.

*Cheryl Stitham White '69*  
South Portland, Maine

### No Poker Face Here

My mother, Carrie McConnell, age 97, has been a resident at Gray Birch Rehab in Augusta for many months. The days have mostly been long and boring. Last Sunday afternoon, when I went in to visit, she was missing from her room. The aide told me she was in the dining room playing poker! What? Being an old-school Baptist she never did that in her life, let alone on Sunday. But there she was.

Seems the Colby football team was doing some community service and they were there playing poker with all those old ladies. The guys were helping the ladies as none of them had a clue. Didn't matter. They were eating it right up. Using sugar packets for chips. My mother was trying to get rid of me, I think, as she was having a ball.

So after telling all these nice guys that I was having my 50th reunion (they cheered) and a funny story Dale Ackley '63 used to tell about

her grandmother saying that you should never play



cards on Sunday—unless the blinds were drawn—I left my mother and went to chat with her roommate. After a while, in came my mother saying she had lost everything. I told her that she would just have to go get a job.

She has talked of nothing else but that game all week, telling me over and over how nice the guys were and also handsome. True. They did look pretty good.

I hope they all know how much that afternoon was appreciated and what fun it was for the oldsters to have those young people around.

*Catharine Webber '63*  
Hallowell, Maine



### That's Our Own Albert F. Drummond

We got our copy of *Colby* in the mail, and lo and behold my great-grandfather's picture was on the front cover. His name was Albert F. Drummond, from the Class of 1888. He was born May 26, 1866, and died March 1966, almost 100 years old. He lived at 66 Burleigh Street in Waterville for most all of his life. He held the title of the oldest living Colby alumnus for a few years.

I remember him well. I was 16 years old when he died. We would visit him on a weekly basis. He was a great man, the grandnephew of Josiah Hayden Drummond, Class of 1846. Drummond Dormitory was named after Josiah.

*Bill Taylor*  
Waterville, Maine