October 2000

From the Hill

Gerry Boyle  
Colby College

Stephen Collins

Alicia Nemiccolo MacLeay

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine

Recommended Citation
Boyle, Gerry; Collins, Stephen; and MacLeay, Alicia Nemiccolo (2000) "From the Hill," Colby Magazine: Vol. 89: Iss. 4, Article 10. Available at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol89/iss4/10

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the College Archives: Colbiana Collection at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Magazine by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby. For more information, please contact mkelly@colby.edu.
Hector Hernan Mondragon Baez says he always ignored death threats and "kept working." His commitment to the rights of indigenous tribes, peasants, the urban poor and laborers in his native Colombia was stronger than any fear for his own safety, even after he was tied to a tree and tortured for nine days in 1977. When his children were threatened, though, he finally took heed and left Colombia for Spain in 1998. But only briefly.

Mondragon, who is on campus as the 2000 fellow of Colby's Oak Institute for the Study of International Human Rights, had returned to his country last summer to carry on his work. Soon friends showed him hit lists published in Bogotá—20 names including his own. Another list surfaced this April and he was one of 60 people targeted by what he calls "the regime," a term he uses to describe corrupt government officials and the ruling landed class which he says are interested in protecting and expanding its own power and wealth.

"In Colombia in the last days, my work is not easy," Mondragon said while decompresing in a Lovejoy office a week after arriving in Maine. "I can't live in one place—change lodgings day to day. I can't drive myself. If they see me, I'd be murdered." As a result he had asked that any announcement of his selection as the 2000 Oak Human Rights Fellow be delayed until he was safely out of the country.

Taking a break from his work at Colby—preparations for a one-credit hour course he's teaching titled "Human Rights in Global Perspective"—his hands shook as he explained his situation. "When you called I am nervous on the telephone, but I realize I can talk here," he said.

The son of a chemistry professor and a pediatrician, Mondragon was 12 years old when his church group visited the shantytown neighborhoods in his hometown of Bogotá and saw what he calls the "precarious lodgings." The experience set his compass, which has not been deflected by discouragement, threats or even physical abuse. "In these houses I decided this was my life," he said.

Trained as an economist, he has worked for more than 30 years to secure the environmental, economic and cultural survival of dispossessed Colombians. "Colombia is the most dangerous place on earth—for the peasants. Last year there were 420 massacres," he said, defining a massacre as at least six people killed, sometimes many more. "Indians, peasants, workers, children. The rural sector is the worst."

At issue are land and resources. Large landowners, oil and mineral companies and hydroelectric developers want the land. In the last 15 years, he says, 1.5 million peasants have been displaced. "Twelve million acres are lost to land speculators, the political class, party leaders and corrupt government officials," he said. "I call this bureaucratic capitalism . . . class domination."

Mondragon worked as an advisor to the Indian National Organization of Colombia and the Peasant National Council. He also advised the World Bank, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Labor Organization on their projects in Colombia and tried to protect indigenous people and their territories and peasants and their lands. In 1991 he spent six months living with the Nukak, a recently contacted indigenous group, and helped them to secure one of the largest areas of protected reserve lands in Colombia. He recently worked with the Embera Katio tribe to resist a hydroelectric development project that threatens the tribe's ancestral lands.

"I have supporters within the regime, but the regime runs an efficient system of elimination," Mondragon said, citing the murders of numerous opposition leaders, including five presidential candidates in the last 15 years. "In 1998 they threatened my son and daughter because I supported the Embera Katos against the Urra hydroelectric project." His wife and son, Daniel, came to Maine with him, and Daniel enrolled as a student at Colby this fall.

The Oak fellowship was created to provide a semester's respite to front-line human rights practitioners who come to Colby for rest, reflection, study and writing. Mondragon is the third Oak Human Rights Fellow. He follows Zafaryab Ahmed, a Pakistani crusader against child labor, and Didier Kamundu Batundi, a peace and human rights activist from the Republic of Congo. —Stephen Collins '74
“A Newsroom Hero” to receive Lovejoy Award

Bill Kovach, “the conscience of American journalism,” “a newsroom hero” and “a pope of the press,” according to recent headlines, will receive the Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award at Colby on Thursday, November 9.

Kovach rose from very modest family circumstances to editorial positions at The New York Times, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and The Washington Post before leading the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University for 11 years. He currently is chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists.

He quit his first job as a reporter, at the Johnson City (Tenn.) Press-Chronicle, when his editors wouldn’t let him cover civil rights, and he resigned from his last job as a newspaper editor, at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, after clashing with management over how aggressive and crusading the newspaper would be.

Kovach will receive an honorary degree and will speak at 8 p.m. in Lorimer Chapel on November 9, the 198th anniversary of Lovejoy’s birth and the 163rd anniversary of his funeral.

Lovejoy, valedictorian of Colby’s Class of 1826, became America’s first martyr to freedom of the press when he was killed defending his presses against a pro-slavery mob he had angered with his anti-slavery writings. Since 1952 Colby has honored his memory by presenting the Lovejoy Award to a newspaper writer, editor or publisher who has contributed to the nation’s journalistic achievement.

Colby’s New Serra is Collecting Comment

First there was the crane, towering heron-like over the Colby campus in July. When the crane departed, it left behind three 30-ton blocks of solid steel, each measuring four feet by five feet by six feet. The blocks were placed precisely, as directed by sculptor Richard Serra, in the granite-paved Paul J. Schupf Sculpture Court at the entrance to the Museum of Art.

“It collects the building,” Serra said.

And like most of Serra’s work, it has collected comment.

Bill Kovach, recipient of the 2000 Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award.
In May, the Student Government Association honored Tony Marin, a mechanic with the Physical Plant Department, with an Administrative Staff Appreciation Award. Colby visited with Marin recently as he recuperated from knee surgery. A Clinton native, and the youngest of nine children, Marin lives in Benton with his wife, Patricia O'Keefe.

There's a story told about what brought you to Colby. Could you tell it again?

That's a true story. I came to Colby so I could get married in the chapel. In the fall of '91. The story goes, I told Pat it was time to get married. We'd been hanging out for probably eight years or so, and I said, "We can get married in the backyard." [He laughs.] But she said, "If we can get married in [Lorimer] chapel, that's where I'd like to get married." So she called and she talked to Darlene Halle [now retired from the Office of the Dean of the College] and Darlene told her you either have to be alumni or work up there. So we didn't have a chance. When Pat told me that, I said, "Well, I'll get me a job at Colby." At the time I was working at Houle's [Plumbing, Heating and Air Conditioning in Waterville]. So I went to work up there and before I even left personnel, I hadn't even worked at Colby at all, I knew the day I was getting married. The girls in personnel scheduled it for me. March 7, 1992. That was the day we got married. They gave me two days to pick from and that's the one I picked.

You're a people person. Do you know everybody at Colby?

I know a lot of people. More than a lot of us at physical plant, but I don't know 'em all. I'll say hello to everybody.

You met the candidates for Colby president?

There was a fellow from Middlebury and he was sharp. He was young. I enjoyed listening to him. I went and ate my dinner back at the shop and when I came around back by Bixler, I knew if I timed it right, I'd get a chance to say hello to him. And I come around and sure enough, he was walking away with [Colby trustee] Larry Pugh. They were hanging out. One of the students came by that was on COOT with me so I had a talk with him. This [Middlebury] fella got away from me so I whistled to him like a rabbit, you know? I stopped him in his tracks. I went over and I told the guy, I said, "I'll tell you what." I said, "I don't know if you'll be president at Colby but you'll be president somewhere." You could see that the guy was sharp. And then they picked Bro. Bro's a good choice.

But you enjoy the students?

I've been on COOT [Colby Outdoors Orientation Trips]. Last year it was my first time. So I go back to see my buddies. It was Jody Pelotte [dining services]. I say, "Hey, I'm going on COOT." I told him where I was going. I brought my cooking grill, my little Sunbeam. Jody fixed me up with some racks of ribs, I brought some sausage. I brought a whole cooler full of food. 'Cause they feed 'em trail food. They feed 'em rice and beans and gorps. Nothing I'd eat. So I had my Jeep and I brought all my stuff and I was Wishbone. I was the cook.

You still see those kids?

Oh, yeah. They've been over a couple times. My wife will feed them. We had them over for Easter. They're good kids. They just need a place to come to. They like Colby but they like to get away, too.

Mark Johnston, he works in mechanical services, we took a day off and went bird hunting up north. That was the first time I'd ever done that, riding the roads up there. Paul Neundorfer [01] went along. And Drew Johnson [01] had to get back for football practice. And we lost communications with him. So on the way home, I was trying to figure out how I was gonna talk to [Dean of Students] Janice [Kassman] and tell her, "We lost one of your football players. And now we gotta go find him."

Ever get strange service calls?

We're a hero when we get a chance to go fish out somebody's earrings or something. . . . One of the apartments we were in, it was a beautiful apartment, they had a plugged shower. And it was plugged. You get girls with long hair, it doesn't take long for that shower drain to catch up. We got the snake down in there. We call it going fishing. We pulled back this rattail. It was huge. And the girl, she says, "I'll take that off [the snake] and I'm going to keep it because I'm going to show everybody else what we found."

. . . This spring the students honored me with a service award. They invited me to this presidential luncheon. I didn't know what it was so I showed up there, my normal self, and this place is full of people from Lovejoy and Fustis. I walked in there, they says, "Tony. We got troubles?" I says, "No, I don't think so." I says, "I got me a letter to come to lunch so here I am." Kids look at you a little different after that. They see you and they say, "Aren't you the guy who got the service award?" I say, "Yeah." They say, "How did they decide that?" I say, "I have no idea, but thank you." That was kind of nice. We hung it up downstairs. Put it on the mantel.

Another story I was going to tell you, I told President Cotter, "I've got something for you. A small token." . . . I says, "Well here it is." I handed him a two-cent coin. It was dated 1865. That was the time they were changing the name of Waterville College to Colby. I did a little history on it. The guy Colby offered them a hundred grand to get them through some rough times. So old Bill Cotter, he's looking at the date on it, I said, "That's 1865." I told him that story. He said, "Well, you're right." I said, "Keep this two cents. And when you look at it, know that I'll be giving my two cents for the good of the College."
"My childhood was spent pretending I could see. I thought people wouldn't like me if they knew how blind I was."

Poet and memoirist Stephen Kuusisto, speaking at Colby about growing up blind in the 1960s.

"You can make your history, you can end injustice, you can make a difference. Go out and do it."

Activist Kevin Jennings, referring to the upcoming vote on a gay rights referendum in Maine and urging students at Colby (cited by The Princeton Review for "gay community accepted — there is very little discrimination against homosexuals") to support the measure.

"Some 35 tons of energy and commitment. It's a staggering thought."

President William D. Adams, at the Class of 2004 matriculation convocation, sizing up the incoming class by estimating its collective weight.

"We may be wowed by the sculpture, but I know I'm going to love the crane."

Joe Feely, an art history major and now Colby's staff architect, anticipating the 450-ton crane required to put the three pieces of the new Richard Serra sculpture, each weighing 30 tons, into the Paul J. Schupf Sculpture Court.

A Pecchant for Pinter—with an English Accent

As a student at the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa, Robert Gordon directed Harold Pinter's play Silence. After graduation Gordon spent two years as an actor in South Africa, but because Pinter was among the artists who boycotted South Africa in protest of the apartheid regime there, his work was off-limits to professional theater companies. Gordon moved to London, where he tried to quench his Pinter thirst. He took in John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson in Harold Pinter's No Man's Land and Peggy Ashcroft in a Pinter revival. "It just fascinated me," Gordon said. "The cadences, really. The music of the language."

Chairman of the drama department at Goldsmiths College, University of London, Gordon was invited by Jim Thurston, chair of Colby's Theater and Dance Department, to take part in yet another Pinter festival, one held at Colby in September. The festival included Gordon and actors Lisa Brancaccio (daughter of Colby's Pat and Ruth Brancaccio) and her husband, Torbin Brooks, in three short Pinter plays, including Ashes to Ashes. Also, in the Runnells Cellar Theater, Anna-Michelle Young '02 directed Stuart Luth '01 and Noah Charney '02 in The Dumb Waiter. Lauren Schaad '01 directed Mountain Language.

The festival was part of the ongoing celebration of Pinter's 70th birthday. "Once we gave him an honorary doctorate at Goldsmiths College and I had to host him a bit," Gordon said. "One thing about him is you don't tackle him on his political opinions. Because he always tells you what he thinks and he's capable of using four-letter words, if you disagree with him too violently. Also, he's a very kind man. I was at a Pinter conference earlier this year and he came just to the dinner and did a reading for us. He's a brilliant actor. Very good. He read the short play Celebration. He read it brilliantly. He was nine characters. Just one person. He was every single character. He made each one seem slightly different. He was extraordinarily good."

Gordon says Pinter is a very private person and told the assembled scholars that he doesn't feel he can be in the same room while his work is being discussed, which it has been for nearly a half century. Gordon, who has written a book on Tom Stoppard, said he considers Pinter the greatest living English-language playwright. "I think it's probably the language, in a sense. And the sense of surrealism of the plays. When the play opens you're in a recognizable social world. . . . More and more you realize it's a very deconstructed real world. There are gaps. He refuses to explain certain things. . . ."

"Pinter doesn't write in the obviously avant-garde, that Beckett uses. He's not abstract. He doesn't just write the stream of consciousness-type stuff. Because he's English and he's an English actor, he starts with the terms of the English theater in his head."

Gordon says Pinter wrote in his early plays with great skill of the world of the working-class English and in recent years has effectively portrayed the upper class in England. "The question is, when you do it in the States, does it change?" Gordon asked. "Can you still capture these nuances? Does the American actor try to adopt a kind of fake British accent? We do that for Tennessee Williams and our actors are appalling."

Brancaccio and Brooks chose to do the plays with an English accent that, while not absolutely accurate, Gordon thinks would pass for an American audience. "As long as you can hear the style of the language, as long as you can hear the assumptions that the language makes, for an American audience that will be fine," Gordon said. "That's one of the things that I'm trying to test. It's a kind of practical research project."

The research will continue in Hungary and South Africa, where Gordon will stage Pinter plays. In those countries, he intends to examine whether the meaning of the plays changes in relation to the surrounding context. But there is one source Gordon won't be able to tap, and that's the playwright himself: "He doesn't like to be quizzed. . . . He'd rather just be with actors in the pub." —Gerry Boyle '78
Colby’s Class of 2004, 470 strong and more international than any of its predecessors, set a new record before school even opened this year—it was the first class to get 100 percent participation in the Colby Outdoor Orientation Trips (COOT) program. President Bro Adams expanded to 471 the number of new Colby recruits exploring Maine and getting to know one another when he joined COOT trips for kayaking on the Kennebec River, hiking on the Appalachian Trail and theater exercises at a camp on Messalonskee Lake.

The Class of ’04 represents 37 states and 28 countries, and its members were selected from among 3,907 applicants. Twenty-six of the new students were high school valedictorians and another 10 were salutatorians. Twenty-two are the son or daughter of a Colby graduate (or two).

Addressing the matriculation convocation, Dean of Admissions Parker J. Beveridge’s biggest applause line was: “One of you is named Colby, and none of you is named Bates or Bowdoin.” (Colby Scroath ’04 is from Ohio.)

Helping to make this group the most international of freshman classes are 11 Davis United World College (UWC) scholars—freshermen who completed two years in one of the UWC system’s international secondary schools and then won scholarships through a program announced last spring by Colby trustee Andrew Davis ’85 and his family. The inaugural group of Davis UWC scholars at Colby (there are others at Princeton, Middlebury, Wellesley and College of the Atlantic) come from Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Jordan, Sudan, Macedonia, Zimbabwe, Yugoslavia, Argentina, Bulgaria, Latvia and Lithuania.

Seven of them graduated from the Red Cross Nordic UWC in Norway. No other secondary school, abroad or stateside, sent more members of the Class of ’04, though Lexington (Mass.) High School was a close second, sending six, Beveridge said.

Charles Data is from the Sudan but lived in Uganda, his mother’s native country, for a decade before attending Red Cross Nordic UWC. Like the other UWC grads he earned an International Baccalaureate (IB) degree but found that the only university in Uganda that recognizes the IB is a medical school. Since he’s interested in economics rather than medicine, Data applied to Colby before the Davis UWC scholarships were announced.

Ana Prokic from Belgrade, Yugoslavia, left her home to attend Armand Hammer UWC in New Mexico. Her plan was to “finish high school in the United States, get good grades, attend university and become a lawyer,” she said. She cited the example of an acquaintance in Belgrade, who was trained as a dentist but had to spend seven years driving a bus, as one of the things that motivated her to study abroad.

The former UWC students arrived at Colby after spending two years of study, conducted in English, at one of the 10 UWC schools. Reflecting on her first two weeks getting acclimated to Colby, Prokic said, “We’re at a big advantage; we’ve been away from home for two years already. My roommate is only from Connecticut but it’s her first time away from home.” And, she said, her roommate told her that an early bout of homesickness was put in perspective when the roommate considered what international students experience, leaving home for a year or more on another continent and in another culture.—Stephen Collins ’74
Far From Campus, A First Look at Colby

Take 470 strangers and divide them into groups of 10. Name the groups things like “Surplus-Elephant A” and “Flagstaff-Bigelow B.” Drop each group off in the Maine woods for four days. They’ll confront challenges like finding trails, climbing mountains, purifying water and claiming the best sites for shelter.

Sound like Survivor? Well, it’s actually COOT—Colby Outdoor Orientation Trips—designed to bring first-year students closer to their classmates and to the surrounding environment. And the challenge has been going on for 25 years now.

Colby’s first official freshman wilderness orientation trips, organized jointly by the Outing Club and Student Activities Office, took place in 1975, when 18 freshmen were selected from 90 applicants. Along with nine upperclassmen and professors Robert Reuman and Donald Small, they arrived on campus five days early and split into two groups. Most hiked Maine’s highest peak, Mount Katahdin, but a small number worked on a volunteer trail crew on the Appalachian Trail.

“It was very seat of your pants,” said Susan Benson Turnbull ’75, who served as director of student activities from 1975 to 1977. The concept was the brainstorm of Nancy Noreen ’76, who was active in the Outing Club. She worked with Bruce Cummings ’73, director of student activities from 1973 to 1975, to organize the first trip.

The following year the number of trips increased to five, including hiking, canoeing and biking. “Even to send out five was a big production,” said Turnbull.

Now trips are four days long and each includes a trained male and female upperclassman leader. This year’s 49 trips included sea kayaking, backpacking, fly fishing, canoeing, theater and conservation projects. “We have a COOT for everyone,” said Alex Chin ’96, former assistant director of student activities. “Even if you’ve never camped out in the woods before, we have a COOT for you.”

Though recent classes have come close, the Class of 2004 was the first to achieve 100-percent participation—including President William Adams, who visited fishing, theater, kayaking and hiking trips.

COOT’s influence is felt even before students enroll. After taking a tour of Colby, Jordan Burke ’04 told her parents, “I’d go there just to go on COOT!”

Chris Sussman ’02, a transfer student who offered his thoughts on the trip while hiking the Appalachian Trail in western Maine, said COOTers are too busy to be homesick, and the camaraderie of the trips exemplifies the community atmosphere of the College.

Not only do students learn about the Maine environment, but life at Colby is discussed in depth. Leaders share thoughts on who are the best teachers in which departments, where you can get good pizza or Thai food and how to maximize your dorm space.

“The first impression these kids get as students is your trip, and if you can make that awesome, that affects how they do at school,” said Alex Browne ’03, a trip leader.

In 1975 leaders were taken straight from the Outing Club roster; now there is a formal selection process and a week of wilderness leadership and medical training for all leaders. “So much energy is put in to make it fun,” said Burke. “The leaders can make or break the trip.”

“These kids go back and, even though they may not be similar, they have a base group,” said Browne. “Instead of wandering into this huge dining hall alone with all of these upperclassmen, they have friends.”

Spending four continuous days hiking with other students not only offers scenery but opportunities to bond in ways that would never happen on campus. “You learn about people in different ways,” said Elizabeth Turnbull ’04 (daughter of COOT pioneer Susan Turnbull). “People get pushed out of their comfort zones.” —Alicia Nemeccolo MacLevy ’97

Happy Is As Happy Does

As a faculty member who lives with his family in Lovejoy Commons, Associate Professor of Economics Michael Donihue ’79 was amazed to see just how engaged, busy and committed Colby students are, both in the intellectual and social life on campus.

The observation made him curious. Colby students operate in high gear, but are they happy? In 1995 The Princeton Review rated them the happiest in the nation, but that ranking slipped in subsequent years and Colby hasn’t made Princeton Review’s top-20 “happiest students” list for the last two years.

Donihue decided to investigate. Last fall students in his Economics 393 launched the first “Colby Lifestyle Survey,” and the second annual poll was slated to begin this month.

“Basically I conclude that students are not the beer-drinking, irresponsible, juvenile stereotypes sometimes portrayed in the media,” Donihue said. “While there is a lot of drinking and even some problem drinking, it’s not a rampant problem on campus. Students are involved in a lot of good behavior and more studying leads to better grades.”—Stephen Collins ’74

The Findings

☐ About 100 students were expected to complete the survey. Six hundred responded in the first week.
☐ 88 percent said they were either mostly happy or very happy with academic life at Colby and 78 percent said the same of social life.
☐ 60 percent of students spend at least an hour in the gym each week and 78 percent participate in at least one club.
☐ 11 percent claimed they watch more than 10 hours of television a week; 23 percent said they skip more than five classes in a semester.
☐ 18 percent of female students are vegetarian but only 4 percent of males are. Vegetarians are less likely to drink beer but more likely to smoke cigarettes.
☐ Watching television, drinking beer and skipping classes all are hazardous to your grade point average. Studying results in higher GPAs.
Colby students had to learn computer. But some things about computer science remain as relevant as stopping. "Three years from now, half of 30

Dale Skrien teaches computer science the old-fashioned way.

Dale Skrien teaches computer science the old-fashioned way. Now you can’t buy a machine with less than five gigabytes,” Skrien said.

Yes, things have changed since those not-so-long-ago days when Colby students had to learn UNIX operating system to use the College computer. But some things about computer science remain as relevant now as they were when Skrien first came to Colby. He is one of them.

A graduate of St. Olaf College in Minnesota, Skrien arrived at Colby fresh out of graduate school at the University of Washington in Seattle. At that time Microsoft was just a gleam in Bill Gates’s eye; in graduate school Skrien took just one course in computer science. He taught statistics and mathematics at Colby, sat in on a few computer science classes and then spent his pre-tenure sabbatical year earning his master’s degree in computer science. He’s been teaching computer science to liberal arts students ever since.

Bearded and soft-spoken, Skrien is like a rock in the middle of a rushing stream. And as everyone knows, the computer world never stops rushing. “Three years from now, half of what you know will be irrelevant,” he said. "The way we try to do it is try to avoid teaching that half that’s going to be irrelevant.”

For most upper-level computer science courses that means teaching what Skrien calls “the foundational stuff”—sorting algorithms, knowing the advantages and disadvantages of each one. Applying that knowledge to extensive programming projects. “We think of our computer science major as teaching problem solving,” he said.

How to do that? The old-fashioned way.

Skrien stands in front of the classroom and lectures. In the age of the silicon chip, he goes through boxes of chalk. He continually asks for feedback from students, trying to change the way students consider problems. "When I’m writing my lectures, I’m trying to think to myself, ‘What does their intuition tell them is obvious?’ Their intuition will give them the wrong answer. It’s getting them to develop new instincts.”

That long view of learning wasn’t lost on his students.

Charles Herrera ’87 and his wife, Tammy Parker Herrera ’89, both managers in Silicon Valley computer firms, had their first exposure to computer science with Skrien. “If I hadn’t been so encouraged by him early on, I might have given up on computers,” said Charles Herrera.

That encouragement is spread around. Skrien says there is no such thing as a dumb question in his classes. “It’s an indication to me that I didn’t present something very well,” he said. “I go over it again.”

So Skrien and his colleagues answer questions in class. After class. During office hours. Via e-mail. “They answer [questions] so diligently that I wonder how they have time to do anything else,” said Joshua Ladieu ’02.

But there was one question Skrien couldn’t reply to. So two years ago, he went searching for the answer.

He applied for a sabbatical year and took a part-time job with Digital Equipment Corp. in Nashua, N.H. Skrien worked in “a cube farm” as a software engineer. He liked the job so much that he went full time and changed his sabbatical to a leave of absence.

But the year in private industry taught him he belongs in a classroom. “During the time I was at DEC, every time I was learning something, I was thinking, how can I teach this to my students?”

So he returned to Colby, better able to answer students’ questions about the big world of the computer industry. “I would say, I have no idea,” Skrien said. “Now I can say, I have no idea except this one situation. I can give you an example.”

Though many of his students have gone on to careers in the computer industry, and the two-year-old Computer Science Department continues to grow (10 majors this year, compared to just one independent major in 1996), Skrien’s teaching remains more foundational than vocational. And for Skrien it remains its own reward. “One thing that makes it worthwhile is at the end of a class… and they’ve been telling me things; I’ve been telling them things. Maybe we haven’t even covered what I was planning to cover. We’ve gone off on tangents but we’ve gone off on important, useful tangents, and I feel it’s been a very productive day and the students have learned a lot. That’s what is important to me.”—Gerry Boyle ’78
Tracks of the Unseen, Nick Jans '77's third collection of essays on Alaska wildlife, landscape and photography, is a compilation of honest and thoughtful reflections that produce a broad sense of place—a place of mountains, valleys and tundra. But from the start Jans breaks down our stereotypical images of the Alaskan bush and replaces them with an unsentimental reality, one of bears and trash dumps, snowmobiles and rusting bed frames, basketball courts and numbing darkness. The result is 27 insightful essays that reflect both the reality of Alaska today and the country's raw beauty.

Jans's essays cover photography, wildlife behavior, landscape, environmental change, Eskimo culture, relationships and the logistics of living north of the Arctic Circle. By refraining from nostalgic musings or attempting to vividly describe the country's grandeur, Jans instead gives the reader a far deeper appreciation for his setting. Not only does the reader learn about the real Alaska in each essay, one not found in a coffee table book, but the reader also learns about Jans himself.

"Most outsiders just don't get it," he writes. "Pictures help a little, but they're never big enough, and there are things no snapshot can capture—the bite of fifty below zero, for example, or what it feels like to stand alone in a tundra valley, a hundred miles from anyone."

However, each of Jans's thoughtful and well-crafted essays is complemented by one of his own intriguing color photographs of the land. The book itself is dedicated to Jans's friend, the late wildlife photographer Michio Hoshino. As in his essays, Jans's photography focuses on a single object or moment—caribou running, a sole grayling, tundra plants—to elicit a broader understanding.

Any of Jans's essays can be read individually, but together the narratives build upon each other to create an interwoven and complex picture of the Alaska he has come to know and love over 20 years.

In 1979 Jans arrived in Alaska ready for a year of adventuring. "I wanted a point-blank grizzly, a pack of wolves, or a double rainbow each time out—or better yet, all three at once," the author admits. But through time and the patience necessitated by photography he came to appreciate the more subtly sublime moments, a lone owl in a tree, fresh wolverine tracks or the golden frailty of autumn.

In each essay Jans describes a singular tie to the place, its history and its people. His examples—mammoth bones, snowmobilers gone missing or the slow shifting of treelines—are evocative of a setting that he admits is hard to describe.

Jans's voice is spare and direct, whether he is explaining the large-scale shifts of a white spruce forest or describing being charged by a bull musk ox, and he straightforwardly tackles issues like life and death. "And so we turn to nature, maybe to find what we once knew: Nothing is ever lost or forgotten," he writes. "It's the land—the stone and rivers, snow and mountains—that is alive. Death and rebirth are no more than its breathing, the process of life itself."

But whatever the subject, Jans's wit, good humor and common sense remain evident, even when fishing for mudsharks at 40 below. "Over all these years of living up here, I've found flashes of illumination in unexpected moments, been overtaken by insight when I least expected," he writes. "But if there's some subtle lesson here, it escapes me. All I feel is cold."

Like Jans, readers of Tracks of the Unseen will lose preconceptions along the way and end this journey with a clearer perspective of Alaska and deeper regard for the place and its people. "True respect seldom grows out of ignorance," Jans writes, and his essays are an education. —Alicia Nemiccolo MacLeay '97

These Small Lives
Tundra is one of those small words that spans an entire state of mind. There's a high, lonesome sound to it, something that summons longings half-forgotten, a vision of limitless space, silence, wind, and cold. An austere world where life wrestles with its alternative. A world our ancestors, ice-age hunter-gatherers, must have known intimately. The almost-archetypal image that we carry is, for once, accurate.

The River Within
My experience in Alaska began with water, and the tie remains. As I write, I look out over the river that brought me into this country, and feel a surge of emotion: quiet familiarity, gratitude, passion, a sense of shared time and history. Love would be another name for it. After living along a river, as so many thousands of Alaskans do, it's almost impossible for me to imagine a life not connected intimately with its clear, cold substance. The valley this river has carved defines my home ground, both actual and spiritual; its channels and many tributaries are, summer and winter, my pathways. From it and along its banks I draw much of my food. In a real sense, part of the river flows inside me.

Tracks of the Unseen by Nick Jans, Fulcrum Publishing (2000)
A Stepping Stone of a Film

By the time Brent Katz '98 arrived at Colby he already had spent nearly 18 years as a professional actor, doing both commercials and films (Amityville 2: The Possession and Last Exit to Brooklyn, among others). At Colby, Katz decided to change his focus to the other side of the camera. "I really made a film school for myself in Colby," he said. "There was no set curriculum or anything, but there are opportunities up there that I just took advantage of."

A history major from New York City, Katz tapped the hundreds of films available at Miller Library and took a film course from Ken Eisen '73, a theater owner, movie critic and film distributor. Katz incorporated his own video into class projects whenever possible, took film courses in London during a semester abroad and churned out screenplays in his spare time. "During my senior year I was sending them out to different studios," Katz said. "I soon learned the futility of that task."

But Katz didn't give up. He just regrouped.

A filmmaker friend advised him to make a short film that would show studios his abilities. Katz selected a section of one of his screenplays and, with his best friend, Gregg Simon, tried to figure out how to turn his story into film. "At first we thought it was going to cost ten or twelve thousand dollars," he said. "We were kind of naive at that point."

This was the fall of 1998. Katz and his partner decided to try to raise money by throwing holiday parties. A New Year's Eve party at a Manhattan club raised $10,000; the film was underway.

Titled "The Final Solution," the film is the story of a Holocaust survivor who, on a train years after World War II, happens upon a concentration camp guard who killed the survivor's wife. The survivor must decide whether to take revenge.

The film was shot over three days at a train museum in Connecticut, where Katz and friends (including Brendan Gilligan '96, Aaron Sigman '96, Nima Karanouz '98 and Amy Spratt '99) spent months restoring a dilapidated passenger car. When the $10,000 ran out, Katz borrowed from friends. "There was a point [during the filming] when it was raining so hard and it was just not letting up and everybody was saying, 'Let's pack it up and go home,'" Katz recalled. "I said, 'That's not an option. I have other people's money at stake.'"

The 15-minute film was made—with Katz in a lead role—and then taken on the film festival circuit. Stops included Flagstaff, Ariz., Houston and Waterville, where Eisen, an exacting critic, was impressed. "Brent's work is both technically assured and full of passion," he said.

At the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the film was noticed by producers whose credits include What's Eating Gilbert Grape? and Notting Hill. "They want us to do something younger, a romantic comedy, a Miramax kind of thing," Katz said.

He is. A second short film is in the works. He said he hopes to deliver it with a full-length screenplay. "It's kind of a stepping stone to get to make commercial films," Katz said. "Nobody's going to give you twenty million dollars if they don't know what you've done."

—Gerry Boyle '78

Brent Katz '98

recent releases

Perish Twice
Robert B. Parker '54
G.P. Putnam's Sons (2000)
The prolific Parker returns with a second adventure for his recently created female protagonist, Boston detective Sunny Randall. The creator of Spenser—and more than 36 novels—Parker puts his newest gumshoe through particularly perilous paces this time around. Hired to protect a prominent feminist, Randall grapples with a double murder and wrenching personal battles in her own family. Another trip through the Boston underworld, with Parker's elegant prose as your guide.

Feminism, the Family, and the Politics of the Closet: Lesbian and Gay Displacement
Cheshire Calhoun (philosophy)
Oxford University Press (2000)
Has feminism left lesbians behind? Calhoun answers this question through an in-depth examination of lesbian and gay subordination. She critiques the analytic frameworks employed within feminism that render invisible the differences between lesbian and heterosexual women in order to bring the study of lesbian life from the margins to the center of feminist theory. She strives to move lesbian and gay politics away from the concerns of sexual regulations and toward concerns of displacement of gays and lesbians from both the public sphere of visible citizenship and the private sphere of romance, marriage and family.

Sunday at the Ballpark: Billy Sunday's Professional Baseball Career 1883-1890
Wendy Knickerbocker '73
Scarecrow Press (2000)
The aptly named Billy Sunday was a great American evangelist, once ranked in the top 10 when a national magazine asked readers to name the greatest man in the United States (Teddy Roosevelt and Thomas Edison also made the list). But as Knickerbocker explores in this book, Sunday was also a fine major league baseball player. Director of library services at Maine Maritime Academy and a long-time baseball fan, Knickerbocker shows us Sunday's struggles and accomplishments as a truly exceptional baseball player in the game's rough-and-tumble early years. He refused to play on Sunday and was an ardent champion of Prohibition. Needless to say, the only thing Sunday ever stole was bases.

Campaign Finance Reform: Beyond the Basics
Anthony Corrado (government)
In the wake of yet another failed effort to enact campaign finance reform during the 1998 legislative session, the new Congress will once again wrestle with an issue that the public continues to rank as a high priority. Political scientist Corrado, one of the nation's foremost experts on campaign finance and the political process, provides essential facts about campaign finance reform as well as clear explanations of key concepts and areas of dispute.
Addressing Physics

In his State of the College address on September 11, President William D. Adams outlined the strategic planning initiative that is underway at Colby and that will help guide the College as it enters a new millennium and prepares to celebrate its 200th anniversary in 13 years. The planning process was begun after former president William R. Cotter announced his retirement and will continue under the guidance of Adams and a 17-member committee empanelled this fall.

In September, Adams announced that the planning initiative received a major boost with the receipt of a $2.8-million grant from the Sherman Fairchild Foundation. The gift established an endowment to fund a faculty position—an endowed chair in physics—and provided $200,000 for the strategic planning process. It also included endowments to support student research and internships as well as an endowment for professional development opportunities for the faculty.

"The moment of leadership transition presents an unparalleled opportunity to engage in a strategic and comprehensive reassessment of the College's educational profile and fundamental institutional goals," Adams said. "This extraordinary gift provides unique opportunities for the new president of a college. More importantly, though, it creates exciting advantages for students and faculty that will enrich the already strong learning experience at Colby."

The strategic planning effort, whose goal is to create a vision of the College's future that will set priorities and guide activities, will proceed through the coming year. A comprehensive plan will be drafted for presentation to the Board of Trustees at its fall meeting in 2001.

In the State of the College address Adams also promised to have an institutional plan for diversity completed by the end of this school year. He said further increasing the diversity of the student body and the faculty is a personal goal as well as an institutional priority.

-Scherry Collins '74

Participation Rate Passes 50

One of the more gratifying statistics at the close of the overachieving Campaign for Colby, which raised $150 million and concluded last winter, was the growth of the College's alumni participation rate. It took an extraordinary effort by the annual giving office, alumni volunteers and, not least of all, alumni donors to achieve 50 percent participation in 1998-99, the first time above 50 percent in Colby's history.

Even better news—it was no flash in the pan. This year (1999-2000) the all-important participation rate edged even higher, to 50.58 percent. The participation rate is watched closely and used to gauge alumni satisfaction with and support for their college. The total raised by the Alumni Fund also was a record, and the fund posted one of its largest-ever one-year gains—13.6 percent. Nearly 40 of the gifts were above $10,000—a dozen more than the previous high for donors in The President's Cabinet category. The ever-growing Parents Fund set a new record, too, raising a total of $502,719.

HHMI Adds to Science Awards

Colby's leadership in teaching natural sciences to undergraduates got a boost this summer when the College received a four-year $800,000 award from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI). This award for undergraduate biological science education was the third major grant the College has received since 1991 from HHMI, the nation's largest private supporter of science education. Only 53 of more than 200 schools that applied received grants.

The HHMI grant provides funding for laboratory instruments and computers as well as support for their college and university courses to keep up with the changes in their fields.

In addition, this award supports the continuation of a highly effective partnership program, begun with the first HHMI grant, which has improved secondary school biology in four local school systems through providing lab and computer equipment for area schools as well as workshops and courses for teachers. Colby's science partnership with area schools even funds replacement teachers so that high school science teachers can take college and university courses to keep up with the changes in their fields.

HHMI's latest undergraduate awards, totaling $50.3 million, were designed to help institutions that grant bachelor's and master's degrees respond to a recent surge in enrollments in the biological sciences as well as to rapid advances in molecular biology, genetics and related life sciences.
So Cool, She’s Hot

Barbara Coulon turns a nose for trends into a career

If you listen to "emo" music, wear Nike Prestos, ride a collapsible bike or have a jacket with a built-in pocket for an MP3 player, Barbara Coulon ’94 wants to talk to you. Or maybe she already has.

Coulon is a professional trend spotter, which is to say she is paid to spot what’s hot before the rest of us know it’s even simmering. From her base in New York, she prowls the streets and boutiques, restaurants and clubs of the nation’s trendiest cities and reports back to her clients: MTV, Procter & Gamble, Calvin Klein and Sprint, among many others. “It’s sort of the ultimate liberal arts,” Coulon says. “You have to have your hands in everything.”

Vice president of trends for an agency called Youth Intelligence, Coulon is part psychologist, part anthropologist and part marketing maven. An art major with a business minor at Colby, she set out to find a way to combine her pop-culture creativity and business savvy. After a stint with a Boston advertising agency, Coulon moved to Youth Intelligence, where she and company founder Jane Rinzler Buckingham and one other trend spotter were the only employees. Three years later Coulon is one of 10 employees, and business is booming. “In terms of youth marketing, it’s a great time to be in it just because ‘Gen Y’ is so in the media and they’re a huge consumer group,” she said in a recent interview from her Manhattan office. “We never have a slow time.”

For those who need a glossary, “Gen X” is 20-somethings. “Gen Y” is teenagers, the consumer group watched most closely as companies try to predict what products will be in demand in the future. Buckingham is 32; the rest of the staff is under 30. At 26, Coulon is a veteran. The 20-something trend spotters collect intelligence on the street and deliver it to corporate boardrooms: ABC Networks, American Express, Coca-Cola and Sony among them.

The companies subscribe to The Cassandra Report, a Youth Intelligence study that runs 200 pages and reveals tastes of 300 young “trendsetters” and 750 mainstream consumers.

“If we usually always do New York, L.A. and one other trendy city like Miami, San Francisco, Atlanta,” Coulon said. “So first we’ll go to a happening area or store or a boutique, where trendsetters would normally hang out. Then we’ll ask them a series of questions: ‘What activities do you like to do? What magazines do you read? Tell me something interesting about yourself.’ If they have interesting answers, then those are the types of people that we talk to.

“It’s hard, because the mainstream sample, that we can do quantitatively.” For the trendsetters, it’s a mixture of instinct and analysis. Coulon has the ability to do both.

“She’s really able to piece together trends from different places,” Buckingham said. Coulon also has the discipline needed to back up her trend-spotting opinions with data, Buckingham said. “It’s sort of a fun business, so people think it’s all about shopping and buying products. It’s also about quantitative research and making sure that the numbers add up and making sure everything is done as methodologically correctly as possible.”

While Buckingham noted that the media have a tendency to make trend spotting a bit more fun than it really is, there is the satisfaction of seeing your picks go mainstream.

Scooter-like go-peds, an oddity when Coulon first spotted them, are now sold in Macy’s. Coulon also spotted “emo” music (like punk but mellow), fur wraps, Braille jewelry, hip sacks, Cuban jazz and lifestyle stores (furnished apartments where everything is for sale). “It’s just sort of detecting it earlier than everyone else,” she said.

All this from a product of suburban Boston (her mother is a nurse, her father a retired financial services manager) who wore baseball caps and plaid shirts in college, and who by her own admission wasn’t the trendiest person at Colby. Now she reads UK magazines like Wallpaper and The Face and ID, lives on 23rd Street in Manhattan and travels at least one week a month. Coulon has been featured in Glamour magazine, which called her career “crave-worthy.” Coulon concedes it’s pretty cool but points out the downsides. For one, talking to 200 people in a week can be draining.

Another potential downside: youth marketing is best left to the young, and youth, like a trend, is fleeting. Coulon said her age isn’t yet an issue. “Not right now,” she said. “People still ask me if I’m still in school.”

For more detailed information on career events and other club news visit www.colby.edu/colby.mag/circuit online.
Enveloped by Cuba

When bills were introduced in the House and Senate last year that would have made it easier for U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba, Elizabeth Maclean '94 saw her phones light up.

Maclean works for the Center for Cuban Studies, a nonprofit organization in New York whose mission is normalization of relations between Cuba and the U.S. From its offices in Chelsea in lower Manhattan, the center publishes a magazine called Cuba Update, maintains a Web site (www.cubaupdate.org), houses a research library and art gallery—and takes tours to the long-restricted island. “We’ve gotten a million calls where people are like, ‘Does that mean we can go now?’” Maclean said.

Not at all. As of this writing, it appeared the bills would leave travel restrictions in place in exchange for relaxing limits on sales of food and medicine to Cuba. That means it’s unlikely that there will be a big increase in the number of Americans visiting Cuba (165,000 went last year, including 100,000 Cuban-born naturalized Americans, according to The New York Times). Those Americans who do travel to Cuba may take a circuitous route through Mexico, Canada or the Caribbean to sidestep restrictions. Others can follow Maclean’s example and go to Cuba to work.

A veteran activist who began working with Habitat for Humanity in high school in Ohio, Maclean went to Cuba in June with other Colby alumni as part of a “construction brigade.” Along with Eric Miles ’93, Prentice Grassi ’95 and Karen Oh ’93, Maclean joined in a project called “La Abeja Obrera,” Spanish for “The Worker Bee.” Joined by a contingent from San Francisco, the group, now numbering approximately 25, met with Cuban municipal officials in the town of La Guinera, a city with a rich community activist tradition, chosen by the United Nations as one of 50 model global communities. The American group visited a school for mentally challenged children, poured cement, hung doors and painted a mural at the town community center. “I really find it’s such a great way to get to know other people and to work together,” Maclean said. “You learn a lot.”

After four trips to Cuba, including a six-month stay in 1994, Maclean says she finds the Cuban people are generous, warm and open, very different from Americans. “It’s a different focus entirely…. (Whether they are) political or not, that comes across.”

She also noted the allure of Cuban architecture with its balconies and courtyards, buildings still beautiful even in a state of disrepair. Everywhere in the towns one hears mothers calling children, children playing. “It’s like everyone is talking to everyone all the time,” Maclean said. “It kind of envelops you.”

Licensed by the Treasury Department, the Center for Cuban Studies is not affected by the travel restrictions. In fact, more Americans have expressed interest in the next La Abeja Obrera trip, Maclean said. The New York contingent is limited to 25 people because larger numbers can become unwieldy and impersonal, she said.

But even small groups are worthwhile, she said, as the projects connect activists who can remember when the economic embargo was imposed in 1962 and those who were born 20 years later. “I just feel it fills this void,” Maclean said. “I feel like people my age and younger are really doing stuff, are really looking for a way to be connected, to do international work but not to be a tourist. To do it actively. To participate.” —Gerry Boyle ’78

Medal Round in Sydney

Hilary Gehman ’93, far right, with teammates Laurel Korholz, Kelly Salchow and Jennifer Dore, after qualifying for the finals of the Olympic quadruple sculls in Sydney. The team finished fifth in the medal round.