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From the Editor's Desk

Gerry Boyle
Colby College

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From the Editor's Desk

The days that followed September 11 were incongruously beautiful on Mayflower Hill: the sky a vivid blue, the air crisp and cool. That we could be handed the gift of autumn in Maine seemed an added affront to the thousands of Americans, and residents of as many as 60 other countries, who had just lost their lives.

As I write this, two weeks after the attacks, the shock waves it launched have dissipated just a little. Or maybe the attack and its ramifications have become the new undercurrent beneath everything we do. This is the new reality that threatens to make irrelevant all that just a short time ago seemed so important.

Or does it?

At Colby the CNN images streamed into offices, dorm rooms, the Spa, where people stood in silent clumps under the television screens. By evening the stunned silence had given way to grief. In Cotter Union students listened as a dozen of their peers made their way to the stage and spoke. Some were in tears, some just somber, but no one there grieved alone.

And so it unfolded. That night, sadly, Katherine Wentzell '02 prophetically predicted a backlash in the nation against Muslims and Americans of Middle Eastern descent. Wentzell urged her fellow Colby activists to come up with ways to ward off racist fallout from the attack.

Hundreds of demonstrators the next day sat motionless on the steps of Miller Library to show their support for a nonviolent response to the tragedy. A television news crew filmed the event and persuaded a few students to break their silence long enough to comment.

Muslim students, including Amjad Tuffaha '02 and Zahra Khilji '02, offered to speak on their faith to the Colby community, and the response was overwhelming. The students were the subject of a page-one story in the *Morning Sentinel* and soon were accepting invitations to speak at area schools. Education quickly moved off the Hill.

At Colby, in classrooms, lecture halls, residences and lounges, students and faculty gathered themselves up. Panel discussions were organized and well-attended. Faculty signed up in droves to teach to the tragedy. Discussions were underway about the Middle East, its history and our role in it. In conversation and in class, members of the Colby community explored the ethical questions that the nation faces as it formulates a response to the attack. A blood drive is scheduled; it is expected to be packed. More than \$4,000 was raised by students and sent to the Red Cross.

At Colby we tried to report how the College community reacted to the new reality in our country and in the world. But with the magazine nearly ready for the printer, much of what had been planned was allowed to stand. A couple of elements were dropped because this did not seem the time for humor. An alumni profile was pulled because the alumnus is a Navy SEAL. He called from the staging area in Germany to ask, for security reasons, that the story not run. His unit, he said, was ready to go. The profile has been shelved indefinitely.

We don't know where this new reality will take us. We do know that Colby will continue to be a place where information is disseminated, ideas are debated, moral and ethical questions are raised. And perhaps we'll be less likely to take for granted the gifts that we've been given and that more than 6,000 people have had taken away: the beautiful autumn days, the company of the people we hold dear.

Gerry Boyle '78
Managing Editor

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Colby is published four times yearly.

To contact Colby:
Managing Editor, Colby
4181 Mayflower Hill
Waterville, ME 04901-8841
e-mail to: mag@colby.edu
207-872-3226

visit us on the internet: www.colby.edu/colby/mag/

To contact the Alumni Office:
207-872-3190