

Colby



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Fourth Floor Eustis

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What Would We Be Without Winter?

The back page of the College's admissions viewbook for the past several years has featured a photograph of snow-drenched trees framing Miller Library above a caption that reads "Wisdom comes with winters." The epigram is attributed to Oscar Wilde, whose credentials as an expert on winter may be suspect but who did spend several years in prison, which, depending on your point of view, could be equated with Maine's longest season.

After the January ice storm that brought Waterville to a standstill and forced some residents to endure a week or more without electricity, one could make the case that the only wisdom associated with winter involves a plane ride to Florida. That's probably not what Wilde meant, and it certainly is not the message the admissions folks wanted to convey.



If the adage implies something not quite positive—as if perhaps winter is, as your mother or father may have said when describing the benefits of some hated childhood chore, "character building"—it also suggests that it's a season worth celebrating. Okay, winter makes us tougher, and having earned the spring by enduring the winter, perhaps we gain

instruction about the cyclical pattern of life. Or is that just a fancy rationalization to keep us from moving to the Carolinas? At Colby, apparently not.

Hear students describe the beauty and solitude of the arboretum on a snowy Saturday morning and one is convinced that winter is a source of deep, resonant pleasure. Hear employees grouse after an early April sleet-fest and it seems clear that the season can only be viewed with contempt. The true feelings are somewhere in between, but one thing is certain: winter holds a prominent place in Colby's collective psyche. It is part of the essential Colby-ness.

People here love winter. And they hate it. But they would not like to be without it. Like a beloved companion with a few bad habits, winters here are tolerated and accepted with the knowledge that every obnoxious event will be offset by a glorious blessing. Swirling, bitter nights can give way to still, azure mornings when the light has the texture of silk. Magical is the only word to describe the way the campus looks on such a morning, when dollops of creamy frosting glisten on every cornice. One is reminded of what Emerson called "the masonry of the North."

Beyond its sensual delights, though, is a unifying force that gives the season its power. It binds the Colby experience across generations as firmly as the traditions of the academy. Alumni from different eras had different teachers, different clothes, different tastes. But they all had rich, ripened winters. And naturally, virtually all of them claim "their" winters were the snowiest, coldest, most Arctic-like in the history of the school. All part of the fun.

Whatever else can be said of winter, at Colby, one can depend upon it. Students are guaranteed the chance to play snow Frisbee on the lower quad and ice hockey on Johnson Pond, to swim through hip-deep drifts and perform acts of bravado while insensibly dressed. Each new class upholds these and other honored winter rituals and in so doing adds thread to a woven community.

Makes a very sturdy fabric. ♦

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