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From the President

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Billy Oates '65 would have turned 75 this summer. He died on Valentine's Day this year, which was tragic for all of us who treasured him. But with a little distance, I wonder if that day, one that celebrates relationships, wasn't meant for Billy in some special way. After all, he loved his family with all of his heart, lived life with passion, and adored Colby.

Many knew Billy as a great investor, a founder of Northeast Investment Management in Boston, a civic leader, a man of faith, and a generous patron of education and the arts. To me, Billy was defined by his commitment to his family, especially his wife, Muffy, their three daughters, Lilly, Kate, and Emily, and their families. There was nothing more important to him than his family vacations, which he planned with glee. By all accounts he was a relentless vacationer, insisting that his family be the first at the chair lift each morning and never turn back from the ascent of Colorado's highest peaks. The family stories are legendary.

Billy was a great storyteller himself and had a way of cutting to the heart of an issue with precision and a smile. He served on Colby's Board of Trustees and the Colby Museum of Art Board of Governors, so I had many opportunities to enjoy his stories and be buoyed by his unyielding support. He was quick to call after a meeting to check in, to thank me for the work our team did, and to see what he could do to help. And, every once in a while, he would slyly ask: "In the Colby we are building, will there be room for someone like me?"

It was a loaded question that would typically be followed by a recounting of his first visit to Colby. His was a story refined over time, perhaps largely apocryphal, and always entertaining. He described himself in his senior year of high school as a small but plucky hockey player (that part was undoubtedly accurate) who arrived at Colby for a recruiting visit, met the coach at the Alford Rink, and laced up his skates. He sprinted up and down the ice twice. The coach liked what he saw, and Billy was handed a letter with an offer of admission onsite.

I knew Billy's story omitted many critical details—like the admissions office being involved for starters—but that was the point. He wanted to contrast what he saw as a simpler time to the rigor of today's admissions process. Did today's standards, he was asking, always result in better decisions? Our modern-day process is hardly infallible, but it has led to enrolling exceptionally talented classes with individuals who hold unlimited promise in a variety of fields. The roughly 550 students entering this fall were chosen from 11,190 applicants; on every measure of academic preparedness and diversity in its many forms, the Class of 2021 is the strongest ever to enter Colby.

Among these bright and talented students is a group of highly skilled hockey players who enter Colby on the strength of their academic records along with the athletic talent and drive needed to take our programs back to the top of the nation's leading conference. Those entering this year will play championship hockey in our new athletic facilities, opening in 2020—65 years after the opening of the Alford Rink that started a tradition of athletic excellence at Colby. These changes made Billy proud, and he served as a strong force for progress. He always wanted us to look ahead, to position Colby for changing realities, and to insist on the highest standards for the college he loved. Anyone—and there were many of us—who admired Billy's impeccable, always occasion-appropriate attire knew that he wasn't a "good enough" sort of guy. In his gentle, generous way, he pushed us to be our best.

So with all of these changes, and with the global competition for a place in Colby's incoming class, will there still be room for someone like Billy? Each time he asked me his question, I thought, if you mean will there be room for someone committed to leading in his community and profession, who is smart, insightful, compassionate, generous of spirit, and sustains the institutions and individuals who are doing important work in the world, who brings a smile and good cheer to every encounter, and who loves his family unequivocally, I would say the answer is most certainly yes.

David A. Greene