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From the Hill

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Erik Quist ’99 is up and running.

Thanks to a carbon-fiber orthotic brace recently developed by the military, the Marine Corps captain, whose feet, ankles, and spine were severely damaged in a bomb attack in Afghanistan in August 2011, can walk, jog, sprint, and jump. One of his goals is to run in this year’s Marine Corps Marathon.

Another is to redeploy and again command Marines in combat.

And once he was fitted with the device, the physical abilities and new priorities all took shape in a matter of days.

Not bad for a guy who, after multiple surgeries, was told that amputation of his left foot might be his best option. That, he said during rehab training at an Army medical facility in San Antonio in December, “was never really an option for me. I didn’t want amputation, period.”

Five years ago Quist may not have had a choice. That was before the wave of catastrophic injuries from explosives set off under Humvees and other military vehicles, mostly in the Afghanistan war. The bombs sent hundreds of wounded into military hospitals back home, where medical teams set out to salvage their shattered limbs.

For many it was impossible, and still is. The Center for the Intrepid at Brooke Army Medical Center, where Quist was training in December, is a special facility that rehabilitates hundreds of amputees. The state-of-the-art gym is where many of those soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines are fitted with prostheses and undergo weeks and months of physical therapy.

“The whole gamut,” Quist said during a workout there. “Single amps, double amps, triple amps. In October there was a guy who had both arms amputated. Talk about inspiring.”

The scene that day was one of determination and courage, as dozens of combat wounded worked to regain their strength and abilities. In years past, amputees were actually inspiring to other wounded. With high-tech prosthetics restoring their mobility, they could also represent the best outcome to those whose limbs had been severely damaged. “We were salvaging the limb and we were telling them, “You’ll probably get back to walking, being able to play with your kids some. But you probably won’t run, and you won’t go back to duty,”” said Johnny Owens, who heads physical therapy at the center. “Young guys don’t want to hear that. They say, ‘Why can’t I run? I want to get back to my unit.’”

For many the answer was simple. They saw that modern prostheses offered far more physical independence and athletic potential than, for example, Quist’s shattered feet. But amputation carries its own liabilities, including risk of infection and sometimes repeated and complicated surgeries.
"I had a guy who was injured in Fallujah in 2003. He hadn't run or walked comfortably in seven years. He was a three-hundred-pound guy, all rough and tumble. He gave me a hug and was weeping."

Ryan Blanck, prosthetist at the Brooke Army Medical Center

“We needed something,” Owens said. “A big innovation to make a drastic change.”

The answer came from Ryan Blanck, a prosthetist at the center who had a special forces patient ask if there was a way he could run like the amputees he saw. Blanck, who five years ago interrupted a successful civilian career in prosthetics to contribute his skills to the military, worked with Owens and Lt. Col. Joe Hsu, an orthopedic surgeon, and came up with a device born out of prosthetics technology.

The result, first designed in 2009 for Special Forces members, is the Intrepid Dynamic Exoskeletal Orthosis, a custom-made carbon-fiber boot and strut device. The IDEO (pronounced i-DAY-oh) provides power through the flex of a carbon-fiber rod. Users have to relearn to walk and run using the balls of their feet and their quad muscles. Fitting and training take weeks, but the results often are dramatic.

“I had a guy who was injured in Fallujah in 2003,” Blanck said. “He hadn’t run or walked comfortably in seven years. He was a three-hundred-pound guy, all rough and tumble. He gave me a hug and was weeping.”

As of December, about 340 military personnel had been fitted with the IDEO. Eighty percent had seriously considered amputation, Blanck said. Fifty-five patients had been redeployed with their units, including Navy Seals, Army Rangers, and members of Delta Force. That day Blanck had an appointment with a patient who had just returned from 15 months of high-level combat duty. He was there for two new devices, crafted in the center’s lab.

Due to constant demand from active-duty wounded, the device isn’t available to civilians, and retired veterans are put on a waiting list, though Blanck said he hopes that the IDEO will become more widespread over time. While he hesitated to characterize the importance of the invention, the medical press has called it one of the most significant medical breakthroughs to come from the two recent wars.

“I don’t think any of this could have happened as fast as it did [in the military] in the in the civilian world,” Blanck said. “The support within the military for its patients is pretty big.”

That support has meant previously unthinkable progress for Quist. And while he has been working to achieve his goals, others have been struck by how far he’s come. “It’s really miraculous,” said his wife, Liz Czernicki Quist ’98. “To see him running, it brought tears to my eyes. It was awesome.”
If the aging of baby boomers is a national concern in the United States, consider China. There, a one-child-per-family rule since the late 1970s has skewed the citizenry gray, and many younger Chinese people have migrated away from rural villages where their parents still live. A cultural tradition of strong filial piety collides with 21st-century mobility and demographics.

China’s “silver tsunami” is the subject of a year-long and ongoing study by five students and Associate Professor of East Asian Studies Hong Zhang. They began with a three-week research trip to China in May and June, visiting eldercare facilities in cities and a rural village to compare government and private homes and interviewing seniors who flock to city parks for tai chi and conversation.

Zhang and her students then worked through the fall semester crunching data collected in 140 interviews, presenting their research on campus, and producing a website to describe their findings. “This experience, more than helping my language skills, improved my sense of anthropology field work and what that actually entails,” said Bette Ha ’14 of Brooklyn, N.Y., one of the students on the trip.

The collaborative research, enabled by an ASIANetwork grant from the Freeman Foundation, revealed several interesting conclusions. Like aging residents in the United States and elsewhere, the Chinese elders want to remain independent, and they don’t want to be a burden on their children (though the latter is tempered by a cultural tradition that says you raise children as a hedge against old age).

While they learned about eldercare and research protocols, the five students made great leaps forward in their ability to communicate in Chinese, in their interviewing techniques, and in their social science research and analysis skills.

Zhang said it is remarkable to listen to recordings of interviews early in the trip and compare them to later interviews. “Initially they were
"Initially they were tentative and not sure of themselves. But by the end they can laugh with the people they interview and really understand and ask very good follow-up questions. Their Chinese improved a lot, and they became very good field researchers." — Hong Zhang, associate professor of East Asian studies

In addition to 140 transcribed interviews full of quantitative and qualitative data, there are 1,300 photos and five hours of video that the research team brought back. Work with that raw material continues, with exhibits planned, a presentation by Zhang and two students scheduled at the ASIANetwork annual conference in Nashville in April, and possibly a video documentary.

But even that isn’t the end of the project. Zhang talked about collaborating with one of the students on an academic paper comparing eldercare in several East Asian nations. And, looking beyond Colby she said, “Eventually my goal is also to make this a teaching resource on aging in China.”

The students—all East Asian studies majors concentrating in Chinese and most with a second major—visited Shanghai and Beijing as well as a rural village so they could include rural elderly in their studies. The work is an extension of Professor Zhang’s research on changes in Chinese families over the years. Her contacts in the village gave students entree to a sector where access would normally be limited for Western students.

The Colby women broke down the barriers of language and culture—and the challenge of being academic researchers seeking data—by joining the seniors in singing and activities. The students performed skits and taught Chinese elders the Macarena, and soon the subjects warmed to their interviewers, students said, opening up to talk about their lives and feelings, eager to help the Colby students with Chinese grammar and pronunciation.

In one-on-one interviews, the Chinese seniors “shared very personal stories, and that’s exactly when it’s hardest to understand” said Andreeva.

“It’s a lot of feelings you have to manipulate through,” said Ha. “They could be feeling tense because they don’t know who we are as outsiders—like, ‘what are we going to do with this information?’ But at the same time, we’re there to listen to them, and they don’t normally get that ear. A lot of them have been neglected by their children, so it’s a lot to juggle for us too.”
“I think if she had concentrated on one sport, she probably would have ended up at a Division I school. She’s a Division I athlete. I think Colby allowed her to play three sports that she loved and excel at those three sports.”

Karen MacCrate Henning
lacrosse coach and assistant soccer coach
A Player For All Seasons

STANDOUT ATHLETE KATE PISTEL LOVED THREE SPORTS SO MUCH SHE KEPT ON PLAYING

MATT DIFILIPPO STORY  DUSTIN SATLOFF '15 PHOTOS

Kate Pistel ’13 played three varsity sports in high school, so playing varsity soccer, squash, and lacrosse throughout her time at Colby is no big deal to her. But not everyone sees it that way.

“I feel like a lot of people would be able to do it,” Pistel said. “It’s just they’re not as crazy as me maybe? I don’t know.”

Pistel not only plays three very different sports, she’s a standout: a two-time All-American midfielder in lacrosse, Colby’s number-one squash player and an All-NESCAC squash player since sophomore year, and a tri-captain defensive back on the soccer team.

Not since Wendy Bonner Spicer ’05, who starred in field hockey, basketball, and softball from 2001 to 2005, has Colby had such a talented athlete play three unrelated sports. “They’re built similarly,” said Harold Alford Director of Athletic Marcella Zalot. “They’re both five-ten, five-eleven, physically strong. They both avoided major injuries, which is … in some ways, pretty incredible.”

Pistel has been playing soccer since kindergarten and squash and lacrosse since sixth grade, when she tagged along while her father played squash with his friends on lunch breaks.

“I think as soon as I started playing [each the three sports], I fell in love with all of them, and I couldn’t just pick one,” she said. “I couldn’t imagine quitting one of them to focus on something else. I like the variety, too, throughout the year, of not just focusing on one thing.”

At times, even as a senior, Pistel gets subtle hints about how great she could be if she made the decision to focus on a single sport. “All the time,” she said. But being a multisport athlete is part of what pushed her toward Colby.

“Even some colleges that I went to visit,” Pistel said, “they were like, ‘Well, maybe you should just play one sport if you come here.’ I was like, ‘OK, I’m not going to go there then.’ It was never in the cards for me.”

“The cool thing about her is she’s focused on what she’s doing at that time,” said Karen MacCrate Henning, who coaches Pistel in lacrosse and is an assistant soccer coach.

Three-sport athlete Kate Pistel ’13 has never missed a sports season at Colby. Facing page, the All-American midfielder unleashes a shot for the lacrosse team; the tri-captain defender drives the ball upfield on the soccer pitch, and Colby’s number-one and All-NESCAC player returns a shot on the squash court.

Above, Pistel celebrates a victory with lacrosse teammates.

“Every season, she is giving a hundred percent to that sport.

“I think if she had concentrated on one sport, she probably would have ended up at a Division I school. She’s a Division I athlete. I think Colby allowed her to play three sports that she loved and excel at those three sports.

Indeed, rather than complaining about Pistel playing three sports, her coaches embrace it.

“Kate is probably one of the fittest squash players that Colby has ever seen,” squash coach Sakhi Khan said. “I think she’s always been an icon for the rest of the squash players, because they’re amazed that she plays three sports. What she’s doing is keeping herself active. Never have I seen a day when she had low energy—which is just incredible.”

With an independent major in human development, Pistel also manages to enjoy three disciplines in her studies: sociology, psychology, and education. She also works with students in area schools and at the city’s teen center. Always being in a varsity season has made her a disciplined student. “I knew I had to plan my time wisely,” she said.

In the end, the pieces all fit for Pistel. Staying in shape for soccer helps her with all the running she has to do for lacrosse. The quickness she hone and develops on the squash court may help her beat a lacrosse defender two months later.

There’s also the matter of being a left-hander. While it’s neither good nor bad for her in soccer, she believes it’s an asset in squash and lacrosse. “Some players in squash don’t even realize that I’m lefty for a little bit and hit to my forehand the whole time,” Pistel said.

That deflection of talk about her skills is classic Pistel. In both lacrosse and squash, she claims she is far from the most skilled player on the team, painting a picture where she’s flaunting about and using her quickness and athletic ability to compensate. Yet she’s made first-team All-NESCAC in both sports in each of the last two seasons, and she’s a two-time All-American in lacrosse.

Said Khan, “She is already probably the best women’s squash player I’ve seen since I’ve been here—in twelve seasons.”

“She’s just gifted athletically,” Zalot said. “She makes it look pretty easy in all three sports, which all the great ones do.”

And just like that it will end this spring. Pistel has already played her last soccer game, and the last squash and lacrosse games weren’t far away.

“I think about it almost every day,” Pistel said. “I don’t know what I’m going to do. I’m hoping to work at a prep school after I graduate, and work in admissions and coach. So I’m hoping that the coaching will kind of fill that void.”
When conflict takes place, people lose hope. And when there’s peace, no matter how rudimentary it is, there are a lot of expectations that come, especially from citizens and especially in terms of service delivery.”

—Charles Data ’04
offers, he made the move in late 2005. He connected with a cousin and volunteered as a receptionist at a hotel in Juba.

Juba wasn’t badly damaged in the war, but there wasn’t much there beforehand, he said. “People-wise, population-wise, it would have been a city. Infrastructure-wise, it was a whole bunch of huts,” he said. “And that’s what I saw. There was very little sign of development.”

The hotel was actually an enclave of tents housing high-level government officials and international aid workers for $120 a night, and Data set up a small camping tent with a mattress there. It was a good place for him to share his résumé. As he surveyed opportunities, he decided he was best suited to provide immediate services through a donor-funded non-governmental organization (NGO).

Early in 2006 he was hired as a program development officer for a contractor funded by USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives. Transitional initiatives are America’s first response in post-conflict environments like South Sudan’s, he said, and they play a critical role in the jarring shift from war to peace. “When conflict takes place, people lose hope. And when there’s peace, no matter how rudimentary it is, there are a lot of expectations that come, especially from citizens and especially in terms of service delivery. They expect something, and they need something quick, and they don’t want long-term, perfect planning,” Data said.

His charge: “Find out from the [local] leaders what needs to be done, and help them do it.” Most projects he worked on ranged from $10,000 to $100,000—renovating schools, setting up government offices, drilling communal wells, expanding the emergency ward at Juba’s hospital.

Establishing the morgue.

In 2007, as the USAID program was wrapping up, Data joined a Dutch NGO for the next step in his country’s development. “I was to work more now with communities to try to identify income-generating opportunities for them, so they could move on with their lives.” It was time to transition from international aid as handouts to aid for economic development. “To revive what was there before the war and to build on it,” he said.

The idea was to develop value-chains, where farmers didn’t just grow tomatoes, for example, but had buyers who had trucks to get the produce to market before it spoiled.

Then he heard from a Colby classmate, Beth Holmes ’04, at the Frankfurt School of Finance & Management. He recalls her telling him, “By the way, we are bidding for a project in Sudan. Would you be interested?”

He was, and four years later he’s team leader of the Southern Sudan Microfinance Development Facility, where he directs a staff of five. They work with six lending entities and have overseen more than a million dollars in wholesale loans.

But more important than the dollar total, he said, is the support and training his organization provides. Having the right skills is even more important than the capital base at this stage, and that’s where his unit comes in, Data said.

A Colby connection can lead to a job, even in Juba, and a Colby education prepares one to adapt, and keep learning, he said. He went into microfinance saying, “I’m not a microfinance guy, but I’m willing to learn.” And it was not the first time he started a new job with little or no relevant experience. “Today this is what all the jobs look like. Looking back, I realize the best approach is to be careful, to have an idea of where you want to go—but you have to maintain some flexibility.”

“It’s working out,” Data concluded, acknowledging that the sentiment applies to both his career and his country.

“It’s really nice to see a country being born, if I can use that word. Obviously the challenges are tremendous. There are opportunities too in that whole process. … At the national level a lot of challenges need to be overcome. At a personal level, there are a lot more opportunities than challenges.”
Discovering Miss Runnals

DELVING INTO COLLEGE ARCHIVES, SAMANTHA EDDY LEARNS THAT A SPECIAL COLBY WOMAN PAVED THE WAY

JACOB MCCARTHY STORY  FRED FIELD PHOTO

At the dawn of the 20th century, the future of women at Colby was uncertain. Female faculty members didn’t teach male students, many male alumni opposed rising women’s enrollment, and housing men and women on separate campuses was getting serious consideration. Into this charged atmosphere entered Ninetta Runnals, Class of 1908, a dedicated student from Foxcroft, Maine, who was likely unsure of her place at Colby as a woman.

By the time she left the College more than a half century later, she was a part of Colby history. Runnals studied mathematics as a student and joined the faculty in 1920 after earning a master’s degree in education at Columbia University. Among those familiar with her story, she is revered as a staunch proponent of women’s union (later named Runnals Union), integration of men and women in the same classes, equal pay for male and female faculty members, and balanced spending between men’s and women’s athletic programs. In fighting these battles she faced obstinate trustees and outspoken alumni who viewed Colby’s traditions through testosterone-tinted lenses.

“She wasn’t afraid to sit down with a bunch of very wealthy, well-educated men and tell them that they were being prejudiced and biased in their behaviors.”

—Samantha Eddy ’13

Runnals pushed for construction of a women’s union (later named Runnals Union), integration of men and women in the same classes, equal pay for male and female faculty members, and balanced spending between men’s and women’s athletic programs. In fighting these battles she faced obstinate trustees and outspoken alumni who viewed Colby’s traditions through testosterone-tinted lenses.

Developing a detailed view of Runnals meant following threads through multiple historical resources to figure out not only what Runnals was doing, but why. When Eddy learned in one source that Runnals was arguing for a new women’s dormitory, she explored elsewhere for clues about Runnals’s motivations. Fortunately, Runnals was an active and vocal member of the campus community, so her name turned up regularly.

“She was appearing in women’s dorms and housing applications and she was appearing in the Board of Trustees minutes and she was appearing in photographs next to newly erected buildings,” said Eddy. “Really more than anything with her I just had to make chronological sense of it, of when and why things happen, and then put those events into a larger context of what was happening at Colby at this time.”

By focusing on personal papers and paying attention to the cultural contexts within which Runnals worked, Eddy reveals Runnals to be a colorful personality who had a complex relationship with the College. It’s a fuller view of a woman who was instrumental in shaping important aspects of today’s Colby experience.

Runnals retired from Colby in 1949, spent six years on the Board of Trustees, and remained involved with the College until her death, in 1980. She was a driving force behind Colby’s evolution from separate-yet-equal treatment of women into a model coeducational institution. Eddy said she found in Runnals a research subject with whom she could empathize and also a leader who broke ground for Colby women of today. Reading about Runnals—sometimes in the subject’s own hand—led Eddy to appreciate those who have come before her and the efforts that made her Colby experience what it is.

After discovering the journey Runnals undertook for future Colby women, Eddy said, “I realized how privileged I was to come to this institution.”
The tag line for Greenlaw’s latest? “Famed swordfish boat captain Linda Greenlaw faces her greatest battle with nature—a newly adopted teenage daughter.”

Fans of the bestselling writer launched by the book and movie The Perfect Storm know Greenlaw as one tough customer. She can wrestle an 800-pound swordfish, manage a crew of obstreperous fishermen, and navigate the roughest reaches of the icy North Atlantic. But guardian of and companion to a troubled teenager? That’s a side of the Maine fishing captain that Greenlaw’s legions of readers have not yet seen.

The memoir, years in the making, begins when 15-year-old Mariah arrives to live with her uncle on Isle au Haut, the rockbound Maine island that Greenlaw calls home. The uncle, new to the island, is thought to be a regular guy coming to the aid of his niece—until it’s revealed that he’s been abusing Mariah. Islanders come to the teenager’s aid, and the independent Greenlaw is nominated as the best person in the community to provide a safe home—and to serve as a mentor.

Greenlaw, who has no children of her own, is thrust into a new and challenging role. This memoir recounts her journey with Mariah as the unlikely pair learn about each other and themselves. Advance blurbs describe the book as “remarkably candid and tenderly funny.” Judging by Greenlaw’s earlier works, it will also be unflinchingly honest.

**The Laundry Monster**
Jeanne Morrison Cook ’87
Minor Storm Press (2011)
Cook’s first children’s book (there are more coming in the “I Can Help!” series) was inspired as she waded through real-life laundry generated by four children, a husband, and a dog named Colby. Perhaps not the dog, but the rest of the family dirtied enough clothes to create a monster of a problem. The story unfolds on a day when the laundry really does take on a life of its own, threatening to envelop Mom forever in socks, sheets, and underwear. The kids come up with a way to save her. Not to reveal too much, but Cook’s book also includes a couple of pages of laundry tips, including “It’s Fun To Fold!” (She suggests making a contest out of matching socks.) More at minorstorm.com

**Nets Through Time: The Technique and Art of Knotted Netting**
Jacqueline Bendelius Davidson ’59
Maine Authors Publishing (2012)
Davidson was introduced to the technique of knotted netting at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine. It was an auspicious meeting, as she went to write an award-winning book (honored by the New England Book Festival) about the history and craft of knotted netting. It’s a technique that produces everything from fishing nets to fine doilies to bed canopies to Native American adornments. And, as with many commonplace items, careful study and consideration reveals that there is more to knotted netting than meets the casual eye.

Netting tools made of wood, bone, and ivory have been passed down through generations. Fishermen knotted nets in biblical times, and they are represented in art on the walls of the pyramids. Davidson traces the history and also offers simple instruction so readers, if they are so moved, may join the long and largely unsung lineage of netmakers.

**A Guide to Groups, Rings, and Fields**
Fernando Q. Gouvêa (mathematics)
Mathematical Association of America (2012)
Those looking for a way to review and refresh their basic algebra will benefit from reading this guide, and it will also serve as a ready reference for mathematicians who make use of algebra in their work. In addition to the standard material on groups, rings, modules, fields, and Galois theory, the book includes discussions of important topics often omitted in the standard graduate course, including linear groups, group representations, the structure of Artinian rings, projective, injective and flat modules, Dedekind domains, and central simple algebras. All of the important theorems are discussed, without proofs but often with a discussion of the intuitive ideas behind those proofs.

**The Roots of a Family: Life in Rural Maine**
Gail Anne Glidden Rowe ’72
TheBookPatch.com (2012)
What better way to learn about life in rural in Maine than from the story of a family that weathered good times and bad, from the Great Depression to the Vietnam War. Rowe recounts experiences of her extended family, three generations of rural Mainers, including hard-working Irish immigrants, an ancestor who left his bed in a Civil War field hospital to take refuge in Canada, and a roster of hunters, fishermen, and farmers. It’s a family story replete with telling details, from the real workday of a dairy farmer to letters home to Maine from the front during World War II. Rowe, retired from the faculty of Southern Maine Community College, writes both a family story and a Maine story, and in the process a compelling and true story of our times.