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## A Friend in Deed

Children in need of surgery, refugee families, victims of abuse—Jacques Hermant steps up

By Laura Meader

*Jacques Hermant '71, left, with an Iraqi child Hermant and his wife, Marylene, recently cared for while the toddler underwent heart surgery in France. At right, the 18-month-old goes for a stroll with the Hermants.*

### Jacques Hermant '71 means business.

With two advanced degrees, 13 years in business positions at large European companies, and 32 years of teaching and administrative experience at universities around the globe, Hermant has built an impressive résumé.

Equally impressive are his humanitarian credentials.

The homeless and unemployed, domestic abuse survivors, financially challenged students, and children with heart defects have been aided by from the benevolence of Hermant and his wife, Marylene, who have opened their home and hearts to people for decades. And this spring they will join thousands of others by hosting a Syrian immigrant at their home in Nantes,

France, a port city on the Loire River. “We’ve been married forty years and have always had someone living in our home,” Hermant said. “Now we are quite used to it.”

What may seem ordinary to Hermant—unbounded generosity, a spirit of kindness, and a lasting commitment to help others—is nothing short of extraordinary to many others.

Born in Lyon, France, Hermant transferred to Colby his junior year. Encouraged to study international business by Colby’s late Professor of Administrative Science Walter Zukowski, he went on to earn an M.B.A. from the University of Indiana, Bloomington, a D.E.A. from the University of Rennes, and two faculty development certificates from Harvard.

Hermant worked in France for Fiat Iveco Trucks and Mobil Oil France and consulted for clients that included British Petroleum and others before moving into academia in 1977. He’s served as a dean at business schools in Paris, Angers, and Nantes. Specializing in management and banking strategy, he’s been a visiting professor at universities in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the United States, including at the Harvard Business School. Since 1992 he’s been at Audencia Business School in Nantes, where he’s professor emeritus.

Hermant’s penchant for giving began at Colby. His first effort was volunteering at a blood drive at Colby, followed by assisting an elderly woman in Indiana. He’s corresponded with prison inmates and accompanied cancer patients to appointments. Over time he worked with different populations and broadened his involvement.

It's not about donating money, but giving of himself. "For people in despair, taking the time to listen to them, to be with them" is most important, he says. He goes way beyond listening to connect with individuals and truly help them.

"He's very generous of his time and his energy," said Sara Crisp '80, who worked as Hermant's au pair when he lived in a Paris suburb in the 1980s. Crisp, now a painter living in southern Maine, felt welcomed into his family, and she grew personally from the conversations, history, and culture to which he exposed her.

Hermant's family includes four children: two biological, one adopted from Korea, and one integrated in the clan when he could not afford \$10,000 school fees. "The mother was making a hundred dollars a month as a teacher in Madagascar," Hermant said. "One day we called him and invited him to live with us. He's been with us for six years."

Another student came to Hermant after being rejected for funding for a fellowship because he lacked a sufficient track record. So Hermant established a foundation to provide grants for him and other such students, funding one project a year from 1992 to 2002. His Fondation Internationale pour l'Humanitaire awarded travel grants to students that in turn triggered funding from larger organizations. He watched joyfully as his "very little travel grants" opened doors.

These days Hermant is involved with a domestic abuse organization in Nantes and he shelters survivors in his home. He's also involved with Mécénat Chirurgie Cardiaque Enfants du Monde, an organization that provides cardiac surgery for children from medically underserved countries. Since 2005 the Hermants have been host parents to eight children, including an 18-month-old Iraqi toddler who had heart surgery Feb. 15. These children, in France without their parents, stay with the Hermants for two months.



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**For people in despair, taking the time to listen to them, to be with them” is most important.**

—Jacques Hermant '71

After the toddler returns home, Hermant will prepare for the Syrian immigrant, who will rest in Nantes to acclimate and assimilate into French culture while awaiting permanent housing and employment.

Though retired, Hermant travels worldwide teaching bankers and professionals in countries that include

Vietnam, Morocco, Lebanon, and Australia. He plans to work a few more years and then spend more time with his children and grandsons. And, of course, "We'll keep having people in our home," he said with a laugh. "You feel good when you help people."

"It is more agreeable to give," he said, "than to receive."