News
Obituary



Colman McCarthy, Dec. 13, 2016, at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Bethesda, Md., where he teaches two morning classes five days a week on peace studies. (Rick Reinhard)



by Tom Roberts

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Colman McCarthy, columnist, author, educator and peace activist, died Feb. 27 in the Dominican Republic, where he has lived with one of his sons since 2022. He was 87.

A member of the family said the cause of death was complications from pneumonia.

Colman, from a perch on the op-ed page of The Washington Post from 1969 to 1997, became, in the estimation of the Washingtonian Magazine, the "liberal conscience" of the paper. Alternately witty, iconoclastic, deeply principled and at times self-effacing, his writing covered politics, religion and even sports, always through the lens of social justice imperatives. From 1999 to 2021, he wrote regular columns for the National Catholic Reporter.

In a recent conversation, his son, James, recounted that what often gets lost in the attention to Colman's exhaustive career as a writer, teacher and peace advocate is his considerable athletic accomplishments. Colman was a scratch golfer who had a PGA tour card back in the 1950s. He detailed his association with some of the big names of the day in a 2014 NCR column. In that piece he recounts that he played as an amateur in the 1959 Mobile Open and "finished 10 strokes behind [Arnold] Palmer, managing to win low amateur."

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His son also said McCarthy was an ardent runner and did the Boston Marathon, for which one has to qualify, three times, the New York Marathon five times and the Marine Corps Marathon in D.C. numerous times. Colman also once calculated that in his daily commutes by bike to and from The Washington Post and in his cycling over decades to the various high schools, colleges and universities where he taught peace courses, he had logged more than 100,000 miles riding around the D.C. area on his Raleigh three-speed. It was all part of his principled determination to use a car only when necessary.

Colman was preceded in death by his wife, Mavourneen, in 2021.

He is survived by three sons, John, in the Dominican Republic; James, New York; Edward, Southampton, New York; six grandchildren; and two nieces and a nephew residing in Switzerland.

An extensive profile published in 2016, details McCarthy's path, obstacle-filled at times, to a career in journalism. Read that story here.