

Cape native who died in Mongolia thrived on new experiences, father says

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By Erin Hevern ~ Southeast Missourian

Colin McLain walked a path different from many, traveling in Asia and Europe.

Although his most recent journey, an eight-week "externship" with the legal adviser to the president of Mongolia, ended with the Cape Girardeau native being found dead in a national park there, his father, Randy McLain, said the last time he spoke with his son, Colin was enjoying himself but also focused on his work.

Colin McLain thrived on new experiences, his father said.

Randy McLain was told by the U.S. Embassy in Mongolia on Tuesday, nearly two days after his son went missing, that he was found dead in Bogdkhan National Park.

Colin McLain, 25, and another American began hiking a trail in the park July 3. On the second day of their hike, and close to their destination, Colin McLain stopped to rest while the other hiker continued on. The other American didn't report Colin McLain missing until the afternoon of July 5, about 36 hours later. The family was informed Thursday the American has been charged by the Mongolian government for failure to report Colin McLain missing in a reasonable time.

Preliminary autopsy results show he died of hypothermia, but the cause of death has yet to be confirmed.

His family and friends describe him as adventurous, intelligent and a natural leader.

His friends from Washington, D.C., where he was attending American University, held a memorial for him Friday, speaking about the kind of friend and person he was. They filled a remembrance book with photographs and stories of Colin McLain, which they hope to give to his relatives, according to a Facebook page dedicated to the event.

"He was an important member of our family," said Sheridan McKinney, a friend and instructor at American University, the law school Colin McLain was attending. He was seeking extra course credits at the college by taking the externship in Mongolia. "Colin became active with a student organization I led -- the International Trade and Investment Law Society. His passing comes as a significant shock to his classmates."

Flying to Mongolia wasn't Colin McLain's first trip out of the United States. While attending Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., he took a 10-week course that led him to Korea, China and Thailand. Also during college, he ventured into Switzerland and France for a brief time.

"He took off on his own then too and did some sightseeing. He liked traveling and just enjoyed being around people too," said Colin's mother, Judy McLain. "Even though there was often a language barrier, he liked to understand as much as he could about the culture and lifestyles of the country."

Jesse Moreno, a Carleton College alumnus who bonded with Colin McLain through a student senate

election, remembers Colin as a man with a quirky, wry sense of humor, qualities Moreno said Colin used to make his points during debates.

"The reasons we ran exemplify the kind of person Colin was; he was a leader, he was principled and he sought to serve his fellow man," Moreno said.

Both Moreno and Colin McLain were elected, and in his first term, Moreno said, Colin quickly gained the respect of the senate as a hard worker who spoke intelligently and plainly. He enjoyed being around people but wasn't a conformist, Moreno said.

"I think this was because he had the capacity and gift to think very broadly," Moreno said. "I'm sure he would have used his law degree to help formulate policies that would have benefited thousands, if not millions or billions."

Before attending law school full time, Colin McLain spent a summer as an administrative assistant at The Cato Institute, a not-for-profit public policy research foundation in Washington, D.C. When fall came around, staff wanted him to stay, so he worked as a media manager for the institute.

Khristine Brookes, vice president for communications, said she can't remember a day that Colin McLain came to work in a bad mood.

"I just had the impression that he bounded out of bed every morning and said 'OK, God, what have you got for me today?'" Brookes said. "He was reliable both as an employee and as a friend. If he said he was going to do something, you could trust him to do it, which, sadly, is a bit of an oddity in Washington these days."

While Colin McLain's parents are proud of all of their son's accomplishments, they were particularly proud to see their son compete on the television show "Jeopardy!" in January. Colin McLain went through a long process to get on the show, including a computer test and a practice game. Nearly 18 months after he tried out, "Jeopardy!" representatives called him and said he'd be a contestant on a show to be filmed in January. The show aired March 23, the day after his birthday. He came in third, Randy McLain said, and won \$1,000.

"He didn't say a whole lot, but you could tell he was really excited," Randy McLain said. "That was a big adventure for him."

Much of what Colin McLain enjoyed, however, were quieter activities. He liked to read, host trivia nights and watch movies with friends and family, according to his parents.

"A conversation, sometimes, was part of his entertainment," Judy McLain said.

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