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A View from Melrose

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Diverse cultures enrich life



Not everyone on our street was Swedish.

In fact, in the small mining and lumber town in northern Michigan where I grew up, within our block we had families who were Greek Orthodox, German, Swedish, Finnish, Orthodox Jewish and Polish. Most of the parents spoke their native languages, and the first-generation Americans

tried to learn the languages, mostly so we could understand what our parents were saying to each other.

Our hero was Adam Meliss from Poland, who owned and operated the popcorn wagon all summer long. We felt he had been the most successful immigrant of all on the block.

What a rich learning environment, and what wonderful food we shared as we celebrated the traditions of the various cultures!

In college in the early 1950s, I had my first opportunity to study abroad. Much to the chagrin of my Swedish parents, I traveled to Norway to study for a term, and that began my life-long love of travel and learning about other cultures and other countries. That is when I began to understand how much we had to learn from each other and how much our world needed that shared understanding. It still does.

My life has been richer for having known so many people around the world. I have lived as a member of a minority in the world of Islam and the Jewish community in Israel. I have studied, traveled and taught in Europe. I am working with students at Africa University from 21 African countries, with 26 tribal languages. And it all began on that street in northern Michigan.

Fewer American children nowadays grow up amid the kind of diversity that my childhood playmates and I took for granted. This makes it all the more important for them to be exposed to diversity later on and to learn to value it. We are living in a diverse world and it is imperative that we encourage our students to learn and explore other countries and other cultures. We need to help them appreciate the importance of living and learning in a multicultural environment.

If we can teach our students those lessons, they in turn can help others view the color of one's skin, the accent in one's voice, the religious practices of one's faith, the special foods that we share as opportunities for growth, learning and enjoyment.

In so many ways our alumni, students and faculty have helped us, from the Reach Back Mentors group to the support group that our students provide for biracial families.

Our Hawaiian alumni still come to roast the pigs for the lu'au—an experience they want to continue to share.

Our Japanese exchange students dress in their beautiful kimonos to entertain the school children and the residents of a retirement home.

Our Spanish-speaking students reach out in many ways to serve our changing community here in the valley.

All of our international students, from over 20 countries, come to share with us, as well as learn more about the complex, joyful and beautiful United States.

Our faculty, through their research and outreach, have led many of us to a better understanding of the rich diversity that is becoming a part of our everyday lives.

This issue of *Linfield Magazine* highlights the experiences of some of today's Linfield students as they encountered diversity in the college's international programs. The experiences themselves are diverse, as are the programs that made them possible and the greatly expanded number of countries students can now visit as part of their Linfield education. As varied as the experiences are, they all share a common denominator: the transformational effect they have had on the way these young people see the world, and sometimes themselves.

—Vivian A. Bull

President Vivian A. Bull learning the pipa, a Chinese lute, at Wenzhou University

