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A View from Melrose

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Vital work, now more than ever



This has been the most important and rewarding professional experience of my life; for me, Linfield has been a blessing.

Our nation and our world seem fraught with anxiety these days. Some of it may come from malevolent individuals or groups; some of it from the decline of objective journalism; much of it from our new and instantaneous means of communication.

More than ever, we need education, we need reason, we need compassion, and we need facts. It is important that we strive as individuals to promote these antidotes to corrosive dialogue and behavior. It is also important that we protect the institutions that will sustain our democracy.

In 1990, when I was administering international exchanges, I brought a prominent Croatian political philosopher to the United States. Many asked him if he feared a new civil war in post-Tito Yugoslavia. Tirelessly, he explained that the ethnic violence of World War II was still fresh in people's memories, and he assured us that Yugoslavia had now become a civil society, focused on reason and discussion rather than tribal identity and vengeance.

Three months later, the U.S. State Department advised me to cancel our study-abroad program in Croatia. Three months after that, civil war broke out. Yugoslavia disintegrated.

When I read and hear about political and social differences in America, about gridlock in Washington, D.C., about shootings in our schools and on the streets, I recall the confident words of the Croatian professor and feel a twinge of fear. But then I reassure myself that we have a long democratic tradition, that the United States has been historically held up as a model civil

society, that unlike some of the Balkan states we are a blended nation of cultures and people.

I am most reassured when I look to our students, who are thoughtful and engaged; I am proud to see their civic accomplishments after they leave our campus community. But we must remain vigilant, and we must ensure that our college remains strong.

I have dedicated my professional life to independent undergraduate education because it is an antidote to the threats that swirl around us. Linfield College is a small but powerful bulwark against the demoralizing quarrels and feuds of today. Yes, we have our own differences but we work them out, as all responsible citizens should. We are preparing leaders for the future. Our work is more vital than ever.

This is my final essay in *Linfield Magazine* before I hand the baton to President Miles K. Davis. I hope you will join me in supporting him and our college as we strive to make the world better. It's more important than ever.

But before I sign off, I must express my gratitude for your friendship, advice, and help. In particular, I thank the students (and now alumni) who have been here during my presidency. You have always brightened my days, and you have always inspired me. This has been the most important and rewarding professional experience of my life; for me, Linfield has been a blessing. I now move into retirement, but I will never forget the college, and I will always be grateful to you.

— Thomas L. Hellie, President