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Linfield Bound

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STAFF ESSAY

Linfield bound

From generation to generation, Wildcat values link us



Bethal Fraser

Lynn Fraser '85

Debbie Nelson '94

Scott Nelson '94

Sofia Nelson '22

Abram Nelson '24

By Scott Bernard Nelson '94

The most natural things in the world sometimes take us completely by surprise.

I was floored this spring when my youngest announced he planned to enroll at Linfield. A purple “Linfield Bound” mailer had arrived in our mailbox only a week earlier, sent by the Office of Admission to encourage admitted students to social-media brag their college choice. “I’ll never need that,” he said dismissively, tossing it aside.

My wife and I, Linfield classmates from a different era, couldn’t bring ourselves to throw “Linfield Bound” in the trash. So it remained, forlorn, on the counter where our 17-year-old had abandoned it.

Until he decided to pick it up again — to his amazement and ours.



May 26, 1985. That was the day I first set foot on the McMinnville Campus, to watch my mom graduate from college. She was 38 years old, and I was 14.

Neither of my parents had a college degree when I was

growing up. Dad was a butcher and mom was a secretary at the middle school. But she wanted more for her life, and for her family. So she worked nights and weekends for five years, typing papers on a blue Smith Corona in our basement and driving 50 miles roundtrip to attend Linfield distance-learning classes at a community college.

I’m ashamed that the work she put in and the sacrifices she made to earn her bachelor’s degree barely registered in my preteen and teenage brain. Now, with the benefit of age, I know how heavy that burden must have been. I also know how much it paid off — that small-town school secretary went on to earn a law degree, run a division of the U.S. Federal

Election Commission and teach for many years at the Georgetown University Law Center.

Even the self-absorbed 14-year-old I was in 1985, though, could be gobsmacked by the immensity of a moment.

Commencement was breathtaking. There was my mom, Lynn Fraser '85, walking confidently across the stage in cap and gown to shake hands with then-Oregon Secretary of State Norma Paulus. There was my dad, beaming, eyes glistening. There was my younger sister and my aunts and uncles and cousins, mugging for the camera afterward just like dozens of other families on a picture-perfect Oak Grove day.

That's the day, inside my head, we became the kind of family that went to college.



Back in the fall of 1930, I'm told, Linfield was little more than a handful of buildings in McMinnville surrounded by farmers' fields. The nursing school in Portland wouldn't come along for another five decades. It had been only a few years since Linfield was known as McMinnville College and the sports teams competed as the Baptists.

One of my grandfathers, Bethal Fraser, showed up in McMinnville that year as a cocky 20-year-old looking to play football.

The 1930 team won a single game (over Albany College, which would later move to Portland and become Lewis & Clark), and grandpa ended up with an injury that put an end to his playing days. With the country sliding into the Great Depression, he soon dropped out — but not before realizing he was more interested in getting a college education than in playing football.

Grandpa went on to work most of his life as a mail carrier for the U.S. Postal Service, and eventually finished his bachelor's degree at the University of Washington. He became assistant postmaster in Poulsbo, Washington, raised a large family and remained thankful to the end for the educational beginning Linfield had given him.



So here we are: 90 years and three generations after my grandpa stepped onto the football field as a Wildcat, and 40 years since my mom started her Linfield distance-learning journey. Both of my kids are now Linfield Wildcats.

Our daughter is going into her junior year, a double major in psychology and sociology, a cheerleader, active in her sorority, busy on campus and already exploring doctoral programs. This spring, our son, the 17-year-old, decided Linfield is right for him, too. In his case, it was anything but a foregone conclusion. Two small colleges had offered wrestling scholarships, and he had spent agonizing months trying to choose between them.

At the eleventh hour, he realized he couldn't picture himself at either one. He couldn't, in fact, picture himself living and learning anywhere other than Linfield. He had been to campus often enough to realize the Linfield experience is not the norm. It dawned on my son, as it had his great grandfather in 1930, that the education and the experience was more important than the sport.

Both of my kids will make their own way and write their own life stories. I have every confidence Linfield will challenge them, encourage them, embrace them, teach them and change them. It's where they will make the deepest friendships in their lives. It will prepare them for a lifetime of living, loving and working, of being good human beings and trying to have a positive impact on the world.

Because it's *Linfield*.

My children's degrees will say Linfield University. My degree, and my wife's and my mother's, are from Linfield College. Yet none of the things that matter to us will change: small classes, top-notch faculty who also serve as personal academic advisers, students active in clubs and causes and athletic teams, a strong study-abroad program, a wide-ranging curriculum and a lifetime of relationships born from the intensity of the residential experience here.

This fall, my son is "Linfield Bound" — to a new university rising from the foundation of a college with a 162-year history of changing lives. Like my grandpa's. Like my mother's. Like my wife's, and like mine.

It turns out, keeping that nearly discarded mailer was the right thing after all. Really, the surprising thing would have been if he had chosen to go anywhere else.



Scott Nelson '94 is Linfield University's director of communications and marketing.