

Postscript

By Elizabeth Vardaman

In “Postscript,” the Irish poet Seamus Heaney invites us to drive “along the Flaggy Shore, / In September or October, when the wind / And the light are working off each other.” If we should see “the earthed lightning of a flock of swans” on a “slate-grey lake,” Heaney cautions us no Kodak can do justice to the scene: “Useless to think you’ll park and capture it / More thoroughly. You are neither here nor there, / A hurry through which known and strange things pass / As big soft buffetings come at the car sideways / And catch the heart off guard and blow it open.”

In my work as an assistant dean, I’ve seen a thousand students whose lives are as amazing as those swans. And their graduation day always catches my heart. This past May 12th, 560 undergraduates received their degrees from the College of Arts and Sciences. Some had struggled through difficult and painful ugly-duckling years before discovering their majors and callings. Others sailed across the stage on the same powerful wings that had enabled them to soar through years of rigorous courses.

After the ceremony as faculty and families met on the lawn, one of our highest-ranking seniors told me that he “could not have received a better education in the world” and that it was here he “found [his] heart in serving the poor.” Posing for pictures, laughing, hugging, and “swanning” around in their caps and gowns, many of the new alumni affirmed that Baylor had been everything they had hoped for, and even more.

After the farewells of May Commencement, I headed west out Highway 84 toward my home near McGregor chuckling, shaking my head, and reviewing the year — what a year.

Faculty members at Baylor know we have a privileged view; we watch in awe, season after season, as remarkable men and women achieve a ballast of identity and skills that propel them from cygnets into swans. We

ly much younger than ourselves, who seize every chance to enlarge their sensibilities, expand their intellect, and grow in their commitment to God and man. Celebrations of the spirit, such as graduation, remind us why we chose this vocation in the first place.

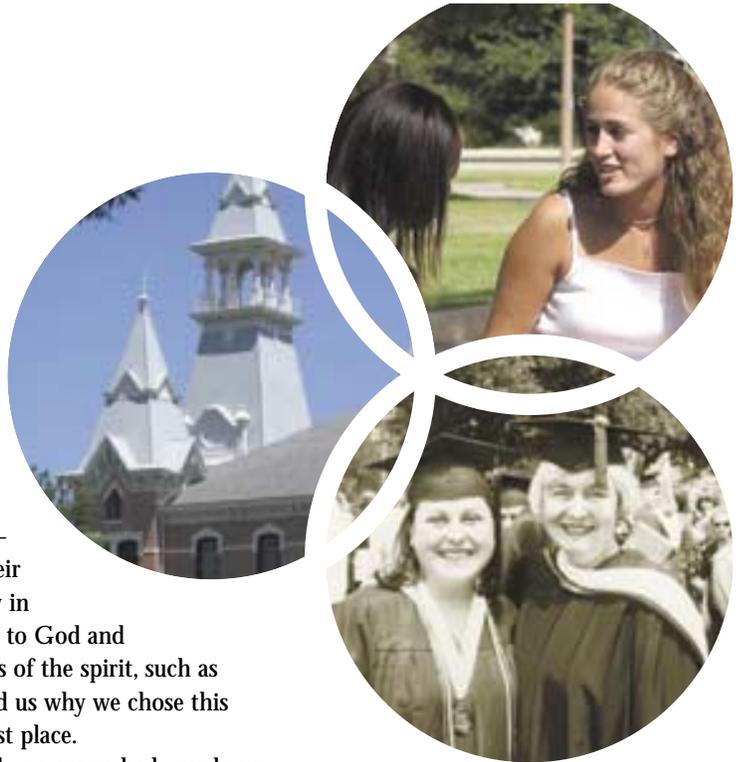
For me, certainly no group had ever been more distinguished than the class of 2001. Their dedication to scholarship, truth, beauty, and service was inspirational. Eight of our best and brightest had bid for prestigious scholarships, such as the Marshall, Rhodes, Fulbright, Rotary, and Boren. Some had won; some had not. Yet they had all handled the outcomes with maturity and grace.

These graduates were gathering up their learning now to take their places in the world of work; in missions; in graduate and professional programs at Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Oxford, London School of Economics; and in other places around the globe — Scotland, China, Germany, Israel, and the City of Waco Housing Department, to name a few.

“Good-bye, Jim, Allison, Beau, Holley, Michael, Donovan, Tanya, David, Jonathan, Brian, Tito, Emily, Rebecca, Rachel, Josh, John, Paige,” I cried to the cornfields and the crows as I passed. “You and so many of your classmates are our pride and joy, our living poems.”

Arriving home, I declared with flair to my husband, “This time was the greatest. We will never see the likes of these again!” Jim smiled and went back to his reading.

On May 29 my car sped back to Baylor — orientation was beginning. The first exciting day, I met a freshman who plans to study Japanese and math. Another spoke passionately of journalism and Chinese;



coming here for two degrees, biochemistry and music. Next year’s fine feathered fledglings were preparing to crowd the hours of their lives with knowledge and purpose.

Will these students surprise and engage us once again? Absolutely. Those special moments when our students connect with our courses are exhilarating. Often such insights and revelations lead to nothing less than transformations.

So, we begin afresh — spring’s bright greens having changed to fall’s welcoming golds, postscripts having turned to prefaces. Those who had hoped to hold Baylor graduation 2001 in their hands, paste it in an album, and pronounce it “the last, best class” should have known better. Instead, like interlocking rings, the seasons mysteriously and forever move, linking generations of treasured students and memories in poignant, glittering, new combinations. Dag Hammarskjöld describes best what I’m trying to say: “For all that has been — Thanks! / To all that shall be — Yes!” ☺

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