

Student Lasallian Commencement Address  
May, 2001  
Presented by Kate R. Woodburn

Fellow graduates, Br. James, and honored guests. I grew up in an area where I was a lot like everyone else. I had a lot in common with most of the people at my school. I went to Riverdale Grade School, Riverdale Junior High and Riverdale High School (located in three buildings on one piece of land near my hometown). There were 100 students in my high school gra



to St. Anthony when something was lost and had to be found, or went to the Chapel to get their foreheads smudged with ashes on Ash Wednesday. Of course, the other side of the story is that I regularly rediscovered how much our faiths were alike. We shared the same Bible, the same Jesus story, and many of the same values.

So, everyone is different and everyone is the same, even if how isn't obvious right away. If people didn't have diverse thoughts, beliefs and backgrounds there would be nothing to learn and definitely no one to teach it.

If I had gone to a college that was closer to home or at least in an area more like the one where I was raised, I would not have been exposed to people who were raised in the city and had a totally different background than mine. If I had gone to a school where there were more Methodists, or even one where religion wasn't as prominent, I would not have been exposed to this school's Catholic and Lasallian mission, the points of which I find very valid and important to any faith.

I have learned so much at Lewis from the being exposed to the many different backgrounds and beliefs of the people I've met. Those differences are what make each of us unique. Our similarities allow us to share our uniqueness and learn from each other.

For example, there is an issue in which I have recently become very interested. I know that this interest is due to where I was raised and how I was brought up. This year I've used this issue as the topic of a speech and several reports, because I want people with backgrounds unlike mine to realize that although it may not seem obvious, my issue could well affect everyone.

In the last six months I've discovered that while many students are somewhat familiar with the term "estate tax" very few understand how it will likely affect them and our nation. As a journalist, I try to pay close attention to the news. Currently the estate tax can take anywhere from 37 to 55 percent of an estate when the assets of that estate total at least \$675,000. It doesn't take long for a small business or a farm to be valued at that amount, especially when you add in land and equipment. The problem is that these taxes must be paid in cash, not land and equipment, and farmers and small business owners don't have a lot of spare cash sitting around. So, it's not hard to see why so many heirs are forced to sell so many farms and small businesses when the owners pass away. In this way, the next generation loses its livelihood. Farmlands rarely remain open fields, but

instead usually become housing developments. The loss of open land is a loss to our agricultural economy and our environment. Every time a small business closes, big business gets closer and closer to a monopoly.

Clearly, these are not positive things, but my concern goes deeper. Although the loss of small farms is apparently having little effect on what you eat and drink today. This may not last. It may not be next year, or even five years from now, but sometime in our future, there won't be enough farms. Without enough farms, there is not enough corn. No corn, no beef. No beef, no ham