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## From President David A. Greene (From the President)

David A. Greene

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

*As we opened the Bill & Joan Alfond Main Street Commons this fall—a key element of our efforts to deepen Colby’s connection to our local community and bring vitality to the city we call home—I spent some time reflecting on what home means to me. I wrote this essay, originally published in the Morning Sentinel, to share my experience of Waterville and my optimism for its future. I would like to share it with you, as well. As always, I welcome your thoughts.*

Last summer I traveled to a small town in Tipperary, Ireland. It was a somber occasion. I was there for the funeral and burial of my young nephew, whose tragic death has shaken our family. My brother and his wife, who lost their beloved son, wanted him to be in a final resting place that held deep meaning to him. My nephew had visited this town many times, and his mother’s family had lived there for generations. It was a place where he always felt at home.

After a few days there, I understood why.

On the night we arrived, people filled the pub across the street from our bed and breakfast. They came that night because we were there. They sang for us—uplifting songs, comedic ones, and heart-breaking ballads. This was the pub, one of three in the town, where no one sang. But they did that night.

The next day, I met two men while they were digging my nephew’s grave. I thanked them for their hard and unforgiving work. Later that night, I saw them again, singing in another of the town’s pubs, just yards away from the first. I had assumed they were paid to dig graves in the cemetery. It turns out they simply did it because it needed to be done, and that’s what you do when a family is grieving and needs a hand.

Neighbors, most of whom were complete strangers to my family and me, filled the church for the funeral service, and we all dined together afterward. They were strangers no more. They shared stories with us, asked us scores of questions, and searched for—and always found—points of connection. Though we were from far away, outsiders in this deeply rooted community, our differences were secondary to them. They were focused on our commonalities, the thin threads that bind us together in our collective humanity.

It was easy to see this wonderful community as home.

And that’s exactly how my family and I felt when we moved to Waterville. We found families that had been here for generations and newcomers who were discovering the wondrous surprises of

this city. We saw the ways in which people in this community support one another, packing the rink to watch the Waterville Panthers win a state championship, and filling our places of worship when our friends and neighbors passed on.

Waterville, at its best, is a welcoming, accepting, loving community. We look after our neighbors, we lift each other up when it is needed most, and we care more about what ties us together than what divides us.

Two hundred Colby students and several faculty and staff moved downtown this fall to the newly constructed Bill & Joan Alfond Main Street Commons. I hope they experience Waterville in the same way we did when we moved to this special place. I want them to appreciate Waterville’s fascinating history and have the opportunity to learn from those who have long called this city home.

I also hope they learn the joy and purpose of contributing to the city and of engaging in the richness of its life. The students living on Main Street will be working in community organizations, furthering the capacity of those organizations to carry out their important missions. With any luck, that will become a lifelong passion for all Colby alumni. Every community is stronger with this commitment from its citizens.

We live in a terribly divisive age, where politics (on all sides) is blood sport, mean-spiritedness is an admired leadership trait, blaming others for one’s own failings is rewarded, and exposing vulnerabilities is seen as a victory.

It doesn’t have to be this way. I heard our better angels in the singing voices of those who sought to comfort us in that tiny pub in Ireland. I have seen them in the volunteers at the Waterville homeless shelter, who seek no reward other than to lighten the burden of those in need. I have recognized them in the everyday interactions that demonstrate the caring nature of this community.

And that, to me, is the essence of home.

David A. Greene