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Retiring, Endings, Beginnings, and the Enduring Beauty and Knowledge Contained in an Ancient Tree

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Retiring, Endings, Beginnings, and the Enduring Beauty and Knowledge Contained in an Ancient Tree

One of my favorite sportswriters, Tom Sorensen of the Charlotte Observer, announced the other day that December 11 will be his last column. After 40 years as a sportswriter, he is retiring. The news surprised me and saddened me—I am going to miss his wry humor, his observations on sports, and his fine writing. But it also made me happy: happy for him, that he can leave a job he still loves, still at the top of his game. I can think of many athletes—and non-athletes—who held on too long.

I am not announcing my retirement! Not yet. I know I am getting nearer to that time with every day, but I have a few more years in me, I think.

The end of another semester always makes me think about endings and beginnings. I have written about that before, and while I am tempted merely to recycle one of those old columns for this last column of the semester, I will resist that temptation and go in a

slightly different direction.

I came to Winthrop in 1993, and I have seen many colleagues and friends retire. Some I still see, a few more I keep in touch with, too many have passed on, and even more are gone from my life and from the life of the campus, I know not where. But I remember them, and many other people do too. I think of mentors and role models and leaders who are gone from us, and although they are gone, they have left a legacy that will continue for many, many years.

And I think of colleagues who are very near retirement, people who have been an integral part of the Winthrop family for so many years. I am not mentioning names, but it is hard to think of Winthrop without them—they are so much a part of who we are. But Winthrop will go on after they leave us, better for their work and devotion, but Winthrop will go on. And they will go on, too, to a

well-deserved rest, writing a new chapter in their lives.

A university's faculty and staff come and go. Many of us, especially at Winthrop, stay a long time, most of our working lives. But we are ever changing, even if that change seems slow.

I also think about the many people who have just come to us, new faculty and staff who are starting their careers, or who are coming to us from another job, as I did when I came in 1993. I remember being welcomed to the Winthrop family, which I heard with more than a trace of my usual cynicism. Family, right. That's what they all say.

But we are indeed a family, with all the positives and negatives that grouping brings. Happily, the positives far outweigh the negatives. I don't know about your family, but mine drives me a bit crazy at times, and I am sure I drive them more than a bit crazy. But I really do love them, and I

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am glad I am a part of them, that they are a part of me.

But the real heart of any university is made up of the students. They are why we are here, why we have jobs, why this place is here. Even so, the students are much more transient than we are. They are here for such a short time, when you think about it—four or five years, years that seem long to them, but are the blink of an eye to those of us who are in it for the long haul.

Students are like a stream, constantly flowing, coming to us, staying with us for a time, then passing on. I have vivid memories of so many of them. Like retired colleagues, I keep in touch with some of them (many more than I used to, thanks to Facebook), but most of them are gone from my life. But they are not gone from my memory. I suspect I am not gone from most of theirs.

All of us—faculty, staff, administration, students—are just passing through.

Do you have a favorite tree on this campus full of beautiful trees? I do. As I think I have written before, my favorite tree is the ginkgo in front of Margaret

Nance Hall. I go out of my way as I walk around campus to visit it. It is so stately, so massive, so tall. Its leaves are shaped like fans, bright green in the spring, then a startling golden yellow in the fall.

It was long thought that the ginkgo had become extinct. But early in the 20th century, in a remote part of China, a grove of ginkgoes was discovered. These trees had been tended by monks for hundreds of years. They had lovingly saved a treasure from extinction.

That discovery set off a world-wide frenzy of planting. Garden clubs all over America and around the world received seeds or seedlings, and many ginkgo trees were planted. There are several around campus and around Rock Hill, probably planted in the 1920s.

Think of this: a ginkgo can live to be more than a thousand years old.

It gives me chills to think about that, to think of what my ginkgo has seen, what my ginkgo will see. Long after we are all gone, all forgotten, that tree will be a witness, tall, strong, stately, its leaves emerging a tender green in the spring, turning a golden yellow in the fall.

Year after year. Over and over.

I was sad to see those two old oaks fall in our recent storms, to see them cut down and hauled away. But as I was walking past Byrnes Auditorium today, I noticed the way a new vista has opened up in their absence, and I saw the new bright green grass that now grows where they once stood. Sadly, they are gone. But the campus has adjusted.

So the end comes to another semester. But a new beginning is just around the horizon. And it will ever be this way. On to the end, and on to a new beginning!

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Give yourself an early Christmas present by registering for the 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning, to be held on campus on Saturday, February 6, 2016. The conference registration fee is \$45, which includes a full day of interesting sessions, a continental breakfast, a sit-down luncheon, and a keynote address by Dr. Dan Mahony. The conference is growing each in size and content. Please join us for a stimulating day of learning about teaching, teaching about learning.

Thanks For Helping Make the Teaching and Learning Center Work!

Winthrop's Teaching and Learning Center offers a wide variety of sessions each year for faculty and staff, on teaching, technology, professional development, and personal development. From leading class discussion to mastering the Smart podium to tenure and promotion to cooking soufflés, the TLC tries to make sure that all faculty and staff receive

the kinds of professional and personal development that will make them better teachers, administrators, and employees.

To offer this programming, the TLC depends on the talent, expertise, and generosity of our faculty and staff. We do not have a big budget to bring in outside speakers and experts. Even so, we are able to offer engaging,

timely, and valuable sessions every year on a variety of topics. We thank those who have offered their time and talent in past years.

If you have a request for a session you would like to see, please email me and I will try to arrange it. And if you have a session you would like to present, please email me. We will set something up as soon as we can!

A Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The TLC for several years has been offering a service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology,

and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

Register for a TLC Session
At

www.winthrop.edu/tlc

The 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

Save the date! Saturday, February 6, 2016 we will have our 3rd Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning. The call for papers and sessions is now up on the TLC website:

<http://www.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

Thought For the Week

"The Christmas holidays have this high value: that they remind Forgetters of the Forgotten, and repair damaged relationships."

--Mark Twain