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Foreword

Melea Reicks Licht

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I first met Paul Lasley, now professor and chair of sociology and anthropology, on a campus visit with my parents. Paul was the only professor my father had a chance to meet before his death months later. Lasley’s third floor East Hall office was filled with farm tools, some antique and some just old. Behind him on the wall was a large black and white photo of two impoverished children, barefoot before a barn with chipped white paint. I honestly don’t remember what we talked about. I just remember that photo. And how Lasley made us laugh. His laugh filled the room and spilled down the hall. It was the first time that day my parents and I really laughed. We felt so much more at ease the rest of our visit. To see professors as people was an important lesson for me.

Since then Lasley and his family have embraced me and mine. I worked for Paul as a teaching aid. We led a travel course to Ireland for several years. He sat on my graduate committee. Lasley and his wife Pauletti (or Papa and Nana as my young sons call them) were at the hospital just hours after the birth of each of my children. They invited us to sit in their pew at church. They stood beside me with the rest of my family during some of the most trying times of my life. I’m so thankful for the light and joy, fun and family we bring to each other’s lives.

That’s the kind of connection—one of extraordinary personal support and kindness—that underlies the education offered in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Iowa State University. There are countless stories like mine, of professors and staff going above and beyond for their students. It’s not just a job—it’s their passion.

That’s why my heart swells whenever Paul Lasley, proudly beaming, introduces me: “This is my ‘adopted’ daughter, Melea.”

I hope the stories in these pages are able to capture and inspire the special feeling that’s possible here, and conjure fond memories of special professors and staff from your own time at ISU. If so, please consider sharing your story by e-mailing stories@iastate.edu. I will compile and share responses with our readers via our monthly e-newsletter, STORIES Online. Visit www.cals.iastate.edu/stories to sign up.

Kind regards,

Melea Reicks Licht
Several times a semester, I meet with a student advisory group to listen what’s on their minds and let them know what’s on my mind.

The lineup of about a dozen students changes each year, but it began as a way to gain student input on difficult decisions the college was wrestling with because of declining state budgets. I recall one student telling me that as a future alum, she wanted to look back at her college and be assured it was still among the best programs in the nation. It was invaluable to hear these kinds of insights and concerns.

Since then, our topics have expanded. We’ve talked about a wide range of areas. They commented on our strategic plan draft. (One even volunteered to work with our strategic planning committee, which I gratefully accepted.) They brainstormed new ways to recruit high school students and to communicate with current students.

We’ve talked about how important it is for a new student to make friends through learning communities, and whether students in our majors need more living-together learning communities in the residence halls. We’ve discussed the need to develop more courses that link science to societal issues.

My favorite part of our meetings is to open it up to let the students talk about whatever’s on their minds.

Some talk excitedly about the employers they met at our annual career day. Some share conversations they had with freshmen about how they’re adjusting to campus and how they’ve felt welcomed. Some talk about the record number of members in their student clubs. Last fall, one proudly spoke of a first-place showing of the soil judging team at a regional competition, and the individual honors bestowed on team members.

I deeply value the thoughtful input I hear every time I meet with these students. When I walk into the room and see them gathered, it is a highlight of my week and reinforces the important work we do together at Iowa State University.

Wendy Wintersteen
Endowed Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences