



A Patchwork Quilt

My daughter volunteered to create the cover for her high school literary magazine. She painted horizontal rows of multicolored triangles, each abutting the other, as if stitched together like a patchwork quilt. There were triangles with colored, wavy lines, some with dots, and others with colored squares or circles. Each one was different and each represented a graduating senior student. In the center of the cover there appeared a large blue and green globe representing the earth. It was surrounded by all of the triangles, all of them different, yet all focused on the world at the center of the page. The students were different, yet all focused on success in life as their common goal. When I look at that cover, I think of the Academy with its diverse members. Fifty years ago, the Academy was organized with 44 members. Now there are more than 4000 members from all regions of the United States and from 55 foreign countries. Some are young, others are older. Most are male, but there are increasingly more female members. Some are part-time, although most are full-time, and some are academicians, whereas most are clinicians. The majority are solo practitioners but many others work in group practices. Each has a unique perspective on pediatric dentistry. Like that patchwork quilt, each is focused on the common goal of contributing to the health and welfare of children.

It is in the nature of things that people tend to be envious of others, to always see distant fields as greener. So it is understandable when some of our members may be envious of others who seem to have things better. Solo practitioners are envious of those who function in a group and share the responsibilities and burdens of managing a practice. Yet solo practitio-

ners have the advantage of freedom to do things as they please. Women who practice part-time are often viewed as having easy lives without the worry of owning a full-time practice. Ignored is the reality that women who are part-time often have two careers, one in professional practice and the other managing a busy household with young children. There is also the typical "town and gown" controversy. Full-time clinicians view academicians as having free time to pursue an easy life. Actually, many academicians must work evenings and weekends to advance their careers. They frequently have responsibilities similar to clinicians, managing personnel, ordering supplies, and worrying about the productivity of their clinics. They work for less salary and fixed incomes which cannot be increased if they work extra hours. They have no opportunity to build collateral in a practice. Clinicians also work long hours to develop their professional careers. They often take the risk and feel the anxiety of borrowing large sums of money to establish a practice.

The distant fields do look greener as many of us experience the frustrations of work and sometimes overlook the satisfactions of accomplishment. Not recognized is the extent to which we are dependent on each other to fulfill our overall goal. Each individual's contributions might be different, yet they are essential to the mission of helping children. Just as there is beauty in a patchwork quilt, there is strength that comes from the diversity of membership in the Academy.

The tag line of the 50th anniversary meeting in Philadelphia was "The Future is Bright." The future is bright for children when there are caring individuals as their advocates.