

SETON HALL|LAW

Commencement 2011

Awards Ceremony, May 26, 2011

Remarks by Donald F. Burke, Jr. '11

Good afternoon and welcome faculty and administration, family and friends. Thank you all for the parts you have played getting us to graduation. To our faculty, thank you for your guidance, for teaching us how to think like lawyers, and for your friendship outside of the classroom. Thank you to the administration and staff for supporting all of our endeavors and for ensuring the success of student activities. And most importantly, thank you to our families and friends for supporting us throughout these last few years, and long before. We are so proud you are with us today as we enter this noblest profession.

Before we entered law school we were told that for the next three years we would spend most of our time buried in books. Dean Hobbs told us to look to our left, and our right, because we might be looking at our future spouse. Mayor Booker inspired us with tales of Newark's renaissance and joked that by the time we graduated the mighty river just beyond our law school would be so clean, and I am quoting here, "you and I will take a dip in our Speedos." Well, we did spend a lot of time buried in the library. Some of us did meet our significant others. But I have yet to see anyone doing the backstroke in the Passaic. So I'd like Mayor Booker to know I will be wearing a Speedo under my robe tomorrow and I'll be heading over to the river after the ceremony!

By now you all know our professors have some of the most unique and innovative ways of teaching. Those of us who have had Dean Cornwell for Criminal Law have witnessed Winnie the Pooh's senseless murder of Piglet, Professor Wefing took his class The Current U.S. Supreme Court to Washington, D.C. to meet with the Justices themselves, and many of us have had the good fortune to hear Professor Franzese's greatest hits performed live! These are just a few of the creative methods our professors use to make the Seton Hall classroom experience unlike any other.

The education we have received here is more than what we learned in the case books and more than what we reduced to outline form. The most important lessons we learned were by example. Through watching the struggles, persistence and successes of the Guantanamo Lawyers. By emulating the passion and hunger for justice of the members of the Last Resort Exoneration Project. Through the challenges of representing those who otherwise might not have a voice in the Center for Social

Justice's clinics and pro bono programs, we have come to learn the enduring legacy of this Law School, one that we are charged with advancing, is that the law is the noblest profession.

Most of us are here because we answered a calling - in my case, I represent the third generation to answer the call. For three generations, beginning with my grandfather, Stephen J. Foley, with us today, a member of the first graduating class of Seton Hall Law School in 1954, followed by my mother in 1985, the foundation has been laid here at Seton Hall. I was always taught that to practice law is to devote one's life to the betterment of society. No matter who we will go on to represent, our clients deserve our thoughtfulness, our fidelity and our impassioned advocacy. Every individual has rights under the law. It is our job to safeguard those rights. When Shakespeare penned the infamous words "the first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers," he was talking about the surest way to spread anarchy throughout society. Law is the antithesis of anarchy. No other profession is enshrined in the constitution; legal representation is so fundamental to a civil society that when one's freedom is at stake it is guaranteed by the Sixth Amendment.

Now, I'm not knocking other professions. Sure - doctors are important, accountants are important. After all, we lawyers need someone to sue!

So, despite the uncertainties that may lie ahead, we can rest knowing that lawyers are an integral part of every component of society. Twenty six of our forty four presidents once poured over the Commerce Clause, over one third of the Members of Congress had to memorize the exceptions to the hearsay rule, and roughly twenty percent of the CEOs of the largest fifty corporations knew, at one time, the difference between a contingent remainder and a vested remainder.

When we become lawyers we will join the ranks of the greatest defenders of liberty, such as John Adams who, when defending the soldiers responsible for the Boston Massacre, cogently stated the highest maxim of a lawyer: "Whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence." We will also be in the company of those who, through their actions, imparted the values of civility, patience and non-violence and changed the way we see the world, such as Saint Thomas More, who, in refusing to give legal sanction to the whims and desires of a corrupt king, gave up his life in defense of the law. Many before us have left an indelible mark on society; now it is time for us to make our mark. It won't always be easy. But Atticus Finch put it best when he said: "Courage is...knowing you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do."

My fellow classmates - this is the legacy we have inherited. This is the honor that has been bestowed upon us. We must take what we have learned here at Seton Hall Law School and use our knowledge and skills for the betterment of society. Strive to follow the example of those at this Law School who have answered the noble calling of our great profession, especially when the cause seems daunting and difficult. Remember that the value of our degree lies not in the paper that we'll receive when we walk across the stage, but in the hearts of the men and women who have gone before us, striving to create a more perfect and just society through the application of law. I have no doubt that as a result of the foundation built here at Seton Hall Law, we will rise to the meet the challenges ahead, and fulfill the obligations of the noble calling we have answered.

Congratulations Class of 2011!