

Commencement 2011

May 27

Remarks by Sean Camoni

Deans, Professors, Administrators and Staff, Distinguished guests, Family and Friends-

Fellow graduates -

Today is the day.

For some of us, today is the day you have planned for years. Every decision you've made for as long as you can remember has been made with this day in mind. Your goal was certain, your path direct. Today is your day.

Others have come to this day by a more winding road. You built your castles in the air, as Thoreau put it, and have found that he was right: your work has not been lost, because you have succeeded in putting the foundations under them. Today is your day.

However we started, whatever motivated us to step onto this path, today we celebrate together the fruits of that decision. Of course, in the success of today, it is easy to look back and say we made the right choice; it is always clearer in hindsight than in the moment. But it is those crucial moments of decision that make all the difference.

I faced such a moment one night last spring, with exams bearing down on us and my wife nine months pregnant with our son. I awoke with a start, waking Michele as I did. In one of those moments of perfect clarity that come only in the deepest, stillest parts of the night, I knew, without so much as a whisper of a doubt, what I must do. "Honey," I said, "We have to name the boy Obi-Wan Camoni."

"You're an idiot," Michele said, and went back to sleep. When our son arrived 28 hours after my last exam, we named him Justin.

In hindsight, I can see that that was probably a good decision. I can only hope Justin will agree in a few years; after all, he is the one who will have to live with our decision not to name him after a Jedi.

We live each day with the consequences of not only our own decisions, but of others' as well. In our coursework, we all spent considerable time studying the Common Law, the centuries' old tradition of accumulating decisions of courts, judges and juries, into a body of rules and standards.

Three years ago, I had no idea what the term "Common Law" meant. I have developed a deep appreciation and respect for this system that was born under kings and survives to govern democracies. And I have come to understand that there is nothing common about the law.

We humans tend to build things that reflect our own condition and experience. So this system of law based on the accumulated decisions of those who came before us is not surprising, when we consider that that is, essentially, what we are as well.

We are the product of, not only our own decisions, but also the choices and efforts and successes and failures of all those who came before us. It is fitting then, as we celebrate an achievement of such consequence as graduating from law school, that we recognize and show gratitude for the shoulders on which we've stood to reach this height.

Today is possible for many of us because our parents and grandparents worked tirelessly to give us an opportunity for a better life. Recognizing that, we understand the impact our decisions will have on our children, and echoing on into the generations.

Today is possible for us because brave men and women took up pens to craft a nation of laws, and took up arms to liberate and defend it. Now we have chosen to take part in shaping the future of those freedoms and those laws, and we have been trained to do so by the ablest of teachers within a supportive and dynamic community; a community that has been affected by us as much as we have been by it.

Take what our class has done in our short time here at Seton Hall. Our class, led by the Student Bar Association, was instrumental in promoting energy efficiency and

conservation in the law school. Through SBA, student groups, and the Unofficial Bar Review, the Class of 2011 has raised the bar for social and networking events. Members of our class helped to create a new and resoundingly successful Alternative Dispute Resolution team. Our classmates resurrected the law school newspaper and won national praise for the Cross Examiner. Members of our class were consulted by a congressional committee, observed a military tribunal at Guantanamo Bay, and honored Jordan's first female judge with the Sandra Day O'Connor Medal. And, of course, perhaps our greatest legacy: thanks to our class, the fall semester will always have a snow day built in to the exam period.

Remember this community in the months and years ahead as we fight to make names for ourselves in the competitive legal world. Take the bonds of friendship that have grown in our time here beyond the walls of the school building, and take confidence in our collective strength and mutual support. It has helped to get us this far. Think about how hard it has been to make it to today. Think about all the times when we were sure we were in over our heads, positive we had just failed an exam, and convinced that we should have gone to farmer school. Think of all the faces we saw sitting in our first year orientation who are not sitting with us today. It is only because we decided not to give in to doubt and frustration and fear and exhaustion that we have made it to this day.

And for some, that was harder than for others. Our friends lost fathers, mothers, grandparents; some had children - one took exams while 9 months pregnant. Classmates overcame physical and learning disabilities, cared for sick family members, lost jobs, got mugged, took ill - and yet, with the grace of God and the help of friends and family, we persevered. This is no easy thing we have done; take pride in this moment. As Professor McLaughlin pointed out to us in Section C, it is a very small number of people who attain this level of academic accomplishment. We are already in some heady company, even just as we begin our lives as lawyers.

We are lawyers now. While the full meaning of this new position of privilege and power is sinking in, we should recognize our responsibility to use this for the good of our fellow men and women. It is right and honorable that we should follow in the noblest traditions of this profession, and render service to those who need it. After all, we did not get here on our own.

Ultimately, we reflect the decisions and actions of those who have come before us, and we are molded by what we choose to do in response to what is given us. If the common law has been formed in the image of woman and man, perhaps it is because we have been formed in the image of that which created us. If God truly created us in His image, then maybe what that means is that when we look in the mirror, we see reflected there the sum total of all of creation as it has affected us - through family and friends, professors and classmates, kings and judges and perfect strangers, whose influence is tempered by the exercise of our own judgment. In this respect, we are the common law of the highest court, set down by the highest judge. There is nothing common about the law, and there is nothing common about what we have achieved. Today is our day.

Congratulations. Good luck and God bless the Class of 2011.