

Good afternoon, family, friends, faculty, administration, staff, and the resilient, distinguished Class of 2026.

Right before my first year of law school started, I remember sitting with my dad and telling him, with absolute, unearned certainty, that I was going to be the graduation speaker. I wasn't asking for his opinion; It was as if I had already been chosen, and I was giving him a courtesy update.

In reality, I had no clue what was in front of me. I saw the title "LAW SCHOOL" in big, bold, intimidating letters, but I had no clue what law school would be like.

But instead of the "yeah, right" or the skeptical eyeroll you might expect from a parent who's seen you fail at plenty of other things, he believed me. He didn't blink. His only response that day was, "Well, I can't wait to hear what you say about me in your speech."

Well, Dad... wait till you hear this.

I think about that conversation today because, at the time, this moment felt like a scene from a movie that hadn't been cast yet. It didn't feel real. Not just graduation, but the sheer volume of "life" that had to happen between that living room conversation and this very stage.

We all arrived here many years ago with a very specific, very polished version of how this was going to go. We thought law school would be a structured, linear staircase. We thought that if we bought the right highlighters, briefed every case, and stayed disciplined, we could map out every turn.

But as we quickly learned, the law doesn't care about your roadmap.

Early on, most of us dealt with that quiet, nagging voice. We sat in those first-year Torts or Contracts classes, listening to someone else nail a cold call, thinking, "*How did I even get admitted into this school anyway?*" We tried to pretend that we were 100% focused, that we were "law machines." We liked to think of law school as a contained experience—a vacuum where, if we just studied hard enough, the rest of the world would hit the "pause" button till we graduated.

But life doesn't have a pause button.

Life shows up exactly when it's most inconvenient. It shows up in the middle of reading *Pennoyer v. Neff* for the sixth time, when you're still trying to figure out what a "quasi-in-rem" jurisdiction actually is. It shows up when "A" is trying to give a life estate to "B," and you're just trying to figure out why "A" can't just be a normal person and sell the house. It certainly shows up when you're staring at a Bluebook at 2:00 AM, questioning every life choice that led you to a world where a comma in the wrong font can ruin your grade.

Life showed up in the middle of everything we thought we had neatly scheduled. And we all, in our own ways, had to learn how to carry more than just a heavy backpack.

For some of us, it was personal health battles. For some, it was the weight of family responsibilities or financial stress. For others, it was the quiet, invisible problems we didn't talk about in the hallways, but that we carried with us into every final exam.

I want to say that aloud today because none of that struggle shows up on your formal transcript. There is no line item on your CV for "Resilience in the face of a personal crisis." It won't be in your graduation photos. But that "unseen" work is exactly how we actually got here.

For me, I am reflecting on one of those challenges at this very moment. As I look out at this crowd, my dad isn't in his seat. I know I am not alone today in missing a loved one, a parent, a grandparent, a spouse, or a friend whom we expected to be here. And we are mourning the version of this day we originally imagined.

But even with the heavy weight of what we've lost or what we've struggled through—we kept going.

We didn't move in a perfect, straight line. We stumbled. We took detours. We had days where "showing up" was the absolute maximum we could manage. But we moved in a way that brought us here.

When we look back on these three to four years, it won't just be the big milestones we remember. It won't be the specific holding of a Con Law case. It'll be the "in-between." It'll be the 5-minute venting sessions on the 5th-floor library that turned into an hour. It'll be the collective, silent prayer we all shared when the professor's eyes scanned the room for a cold call, and we realized we hadn't opened the book. It'll be the fierce, ridiculous arguments in study sessions over a hypothetical that would never actually happen.

Because that's what this was. Not a destination, but a process of transformation. It was a thousand small, difficult decisions to keep walking. And slowly, without us even noticing the shift, we became the version of ourselves that is sitting here today.

We didn't get here because everything went according to plan. We got here because we were brave enough to keep going when the plan failed. We learned to trust the process, even when the process felt like it was breaking us.

So, if I could go back to that conversation with my dad, what would I say? I would say what I hope every single person in a cap and gown says to their support system today. I would say: "First, thank you for all the sacrifices you made for me. Second, I made it."

It isn't exactly how we all pictured it. Each of our paths was messier, louder, and harder than we ever could have known. But we made it. And that is the true definition of this moment. This isn't just the end of school; it is proof that we can endure. It is proof that we can get through things even when they don't go the way we imagined.

The truth is, life is probably not going to suddenly become perfectly clear after graduation.

There will still be uncertainty.

There will still be setbacks.

There will still be moments where we feel like we're figuring things out as we go.

But now we know we can.

We know what it feels like to work through something difficult.

We know how to adapt when things don't go according to plan.

We know how to keep moving forward, even when the path in front of us changes unexpectedly.

When you look around this room, it's actually pretty incredible to think about what that means.

Every person sitting here has already done something hard.

Seeing we were capable of getting to this moment, in spite of everything life threw at us along the way, I really believe there's no limit to what we're capable of next.

So, to the Class of 2026—to the friends who became family, to the faculty who challenged us, to the loved ones who carried us when we were too tired to walk... and to my dad.

We made it!

Thank you.