

**James Finnegan '24**  
**Class of 2024 Student Graduation Speaker**

Once again, welcome family, friends, and most of all, the Class of 2024! We made it guys! Graduation day. We started out as wide-eyed 1Ls baffled by things like the rule of perpetuities. Now look at us: bright-eyed graduates who still don't understand the rule of perpetuities. All of us have put in a lot of work to get here. We could not have done it without everyone who supported us along the way, some of whom are here today. On behalf of our entire class, I want to thank the deans, faculty, and administration for everything they have done to provide us with such an excellent legal education. And thank you to our friends and family for all of their support as we've pursued these degrees.

Law school is full of ups and downs, well, unless you're trying to use the elevators at school, then it's mostly just full of waiting. Graduating law school is no easy feat. We've all learned and accomplished so much over the past few years. We've mastered legal doctrines from tort law to tax law. We've rolled up our sleeves to gain practical experience through internships, clubs, and clinics. We've cultivated our legal writing skills using our good friend CREAC. For the non-lawyers in the audience, CREAC is an acronym that means "well, it depends," because that's the only answer we ever really have. We've spent many early mornings and late nights working hard, sacrificing time with loved ones to study, all so that one day we could become lawyers. Now that day is here.

On the journey to today, I'm sure we've each had moments when the rigors of law school threatened to overwhelm us. In those moments, we each had people we leaned on for support. Friends from our 1L sections who helped us understand tough topics or family members who encouraged us to keep going. My older sister Shannon was one of these pillars of support for me. She graduated from Seton Hall Law in 2020, so I was fortunate to learn from her wealth of knowledge about navigating law school. She always helped me strive to do my best, and more importantly, to stay grounded in those more challenging moments.

I had one of those moments over Thanksgiving break this past fall. People told me the last year of law school was going to be fun, but the semester had been anything but a 3LOL. From the first day of class, it felt like I was behind on everything: readings, journal, moot court, internship, not to mention my nemesis: the MPRE. With exams looming, I needed to get on top of things. So, on Black Friday, I found myself swirling in a sea of criminal procedure notes. As I slogged through my studying, I got a text. My sister Shannon was being taken to the hospital.

I had just seen her a few days prior, and she seemed fine. Sure, she had bit of a cold, but she also had two kids in daycare so that added up. I tried not to worry as I turned back to my notes, assuming I would get word soon that things were under control. I was wrong.

Soon I was at Penn Hospital. Shannon laid there in a frightening state I hope I never see again: restless, agitated, and delirious. Something was catastrophically wrong in her brain, but it took several agonizing days for the doctors to figure out the culprit: acute hemorrhagic leukoencephalitis. You know, it's not a good sign when even the doctors can't spell it. They told us this autoimmune disease is highly lethal and incredibly rare. Only about 100 cases have been recorded in history. And somehow, my sister had it.

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Just like that, all of my law school obligations faded. Everything I had been so stressed about, everything that demanded so much energy, suddenly seemed so trivial. I didn't care about grades or jobs or even graduating. All I wanted was for my sister to survive.

Immediately, Shannon's vast network mobilized. Everything from prayers and cards to babysitters and meals poured in from friends and family. Her friends contacted doctors and nurses all across the country, searching for any insight to help her fight the disease and to help us comprehend the intensive treatment.

With all that support behind her, and thanks to incredible care and a few miracles, Shannon overcame the odds. Not only did she survive, but her recovery has astounded the doctors. I'm beyond blessed to have her here today.

Just four years ago, Shannon was in our shoes: celebrating her achievements at graduation and embarking on her legal career. She served as a Comments Editor on the Law Review, she graduated *magna cum laude*, she was inducted into the Order of the Coif, and she went on to excel at her big law job. As impressive as these achievements are, they are not what truly mattered this past November. When things went gravely wrong, Shannon's friends and family didn't lend their tremendous support because they were impressed with her resume. They helped because of how she treated them, because of the relationships she built with them. I think this is an important lesson for us to carry forward into our careers.

Today we enter a profession rooted in competition. The very structure of legal practice is adversarial. Few other professions care so deeply about things like where you went to school, your firm's ranking, or the prestige of your clerkship. We've been pitted against each other for coveted spots at the top of the curve and for the most sought-after jobs. In this atmosphere, it's all too easy to compare our successes to those of our peers. But if we measure success by comparison to others, we will be left unfulfilled no matter the heights of our achievement. Therefore, let us all take joy in our accomplishments, and never surrender joy to the accomplishments of others.

We graduate today with resumes bearing the fruits of our labor and with degrees officially declaring us Juris Doctors. But the most valuable assets with which we leave law school are the relationships we've forged with each other and the reputations we've built for ourselves. All the rankings and scores in the world, no matter how high or how low, won't be there when we're at our lowest. Friends and family will. With them beside us, every success will taste sweeter, and every burden will feel lighter.

As our careers unfold, I trust our future colleagues will recognize us as Seton Hall Lawyers not just by the outstanding work we do, but by the fierce friendship and sincere kindness we extend to those around us. For now, let's celebrate! Let's celebrate our achievements. Let's celebrate the achievements of each other. And most of all, let's celebrate those who support us in all we do.

Lastly, my friends, "may the road rise up to meet you / may the wind be always at your back / and until we meet again / may God hold you in the palm of His hand." Congratulations Class of 2024!