

Good afternoon President Nyre, Dean Boozang, faculty and staff, families and friends, and most importantly my fellow classmates of the class of 2021. Welcome. It is an honor to be speaking here today. Most graduation speeches usually include the line “we did it!” to celebrate our major accomplishments. But that line has a different meaning now than it ever has in years past. In the middle of our law school journey, our nation was thrown into the most devastating circumstances. I don’t think any of us would have believed three years ago that half of our law school experience would be spent during an international health crisis. All of us at Seton Hall were forced to adjust to this new reality, and we rose to the occasion.

It has been a very difficult year and a half for many of us. I personally lost one of my closest loved ones to COVID-19 during my last year of law school. And when I sat down to write this speech, I thought of the man who was to become my father-in-law. While I do not necessarily have many words of wisdom for you all, he definitely did. In April 2020, he delivered a short speech titled “Find Your Hero in Your Heart.” And he began with saying, “the great news is that everyone from everywhere has the ability to become a Hero at any time!” Now he also recorded himself saying this in an Incredible superhero costume which likely made his speech way more entertaining than mine is right now, but he went on to say the basic things a true hero needs. And I will tell you a few of them now.

Heroes look at conflict as an opportunity rather than behaving defensively by pointing fingers at others. Right now, we are at a critical point in our nation's history and our generation has the opportunity to make a difference. At the moment the struggle to ensure each and every person in this country is given equal rights is being fought in classrooms, courtrooms, and boardrooms. It is an intellectual dispute that the generation before us has been unable to solve, providing our generation with the opportunity to be the people who can fulfill the necessary actions to guarantee that no person in the United States is denied the freedoms provided to them in the Constitution. The education we received here at Seton Hall has prepared us to be those heroes who look at this conflict as an opportunity to make a positive change in this world. Both inside and outside of the classroom, our professors fostered an environment where we spoke freely about our beliefs and about what we think is right for this country. Our debates were passionate, yet respectful, and we learned that it is possible to come together.

Heroes are also not afraid to ask for help from those who support them. Many of us would not be here today without the help of our friends and families. But I know all of us have very different support systems. And for those of you who got through this journey alone, you should be proud of yourselves. Hopefully you can use your experience to be the hero for someone else in the future who needs it. If we learned anything in the last year and a half, it's that a pandemic can really

bring out the best in people. And I witnessed it firsthand within our Seton Hall community. Whether it was Professor Healy playing music before every class, or Professor McLaughlin telling us stories about his adorable grandchildren, our community went above and beyond to make difficult days a little better. And we were all a part of that. We held Zoom study sessions with fellow classmates and found new creative ways to interact with one another to stay connected. That is what being a hero is all about.

And a hero is someone who does not let their ego get in the way. Heroes are humble. The degree we are receiving today provides us all with limitless opportunities within the legal profession and beyond. Your fellow classmates sitting all around you are the next generation of judges, partners, prosecutors, public defenders, and politicians. I have no doubt that the future governor of New Jersey and the future U.S. Attorney of New Jersey is sitting here today. I ask that when you get to the top, remember where you came from. Remember the classmates who helped you get there and remember that you did not do this alone. We are all very fortunate to be receiving a degree from a University where the sky really is the limit.

And lastly, if there is one thing you take away from this speech, let it be this. Work hard, but don't work so hard that you miss out on all of the amazing things life has to offer. Because at the end of the day the things that give our lives

meaning are the people we surround ourselves with and the memories we make along the way. The hero inside all of us should never fear living each moment to its fullest.

I want to congratulate my classmates of the class of 2021 on a job well done. I hope whatever you choose to do in the future, you look back on your time here with heartening remembrance and always know that Seton Hall prepared you for your life beyond these classrooms. And know that we all have the potential to be heroes. We did it! Thank you.