

Valedictory Address of Noah Wald May 20, 2012 TJSL Commencement

Thank you Dean Hasl.

Distinguished faculty, family, friends, guests, and my fellow graduates, Good morning. Thomas Jefferson Class of 2012, congratulations, this day is actually here.

Believe it or not, standing here speaking in front of everyone is rather daunting. Those of you that may have had a class with me may find that statement a little difficult to swallow, as I was never intimidated to speak there, perhaps to an agitating degree. However, I hope those of you who know me well can appreciate how difficult it is for me to speak when I have no one to argue with. Regardless, I will do my best and try to be brief.

Today is a day of celebration. More importantly, today is recognition of our collective achievement. A day to recount the last 3 or so years and to reflect on all the sacrifices made. A day to take a moment to appreciate that it was in fact worth it as we have completed the journey and accomplished our goal. However, as we look around, we are all reminded that today is not just for recognition of our accomplishments. Today is also a day to acknowledge the many individuals who helped us realize this achievement. Whether it be a friend, spouse, parent, or professor, we were not alone on our journey. To all of you here sharing in the celebration today, we will forever be indebted for your support and sacrifices.

I would personally like to acknowledge some people, and because you made the mistake of giving me the microphone, I am going to. We have so many outstanding professors. However, there are two who I was lucky enough to spend some extended time with working for and getting to know.

Professor Slattery – My first class of law school ever was professor Slattery's course. I can remember how terrified I was before that class. I can also remember how much more terrified I was after leaving that class. His straight forward, professional, no nonsense style literally scared me straight, but it was also the kick-start I needed to set me out on the right path in my law school career. Thank you.

Professor McCuskey – I had the pleasure of working with Professor McCuskey for the last year and a half on a range of different projects. More importantly, I had the good fortune of having her serve as a mentor to me. Thank you and I wish you the best in the future, even if you are going to Ohio.

There were so many other professors who assisted me and displayed extreme patience with me and I thank all of you. In addition, there were also several individuals who helped make this day possible.

Lisa Ferreira – Ms. Ferreira, our director of student services, has such an honest and caring approach to the students here, and we are all grateful. Thank you.

Joe-I became friends with Joe first year, and he helped to keep me grounded through my time here. I know your Father is looking down with great pride, thank you buddy.

James and Mitch – My friends from under grad whom I never would have made it through without. They now live in LA and let me sleep on their couch during my 2L summer externship. Thanks guys, we'll rock later.

Now, I don't have a specific significant other to thank, as I am single, which may or may not be the secret to my success. But, law school is over . . . Ladies? However, there are two people to whom I owe all of my success. It took me a while to find my way in life, and I made a little more than my share of mistakes when I was younger. Yet, no matter how much I faltered, my parents never stopped believing in me and offering me their support.

Dad – To my father, who every day of my life I watched wake up at 6am to go to work and see patients. I remember being little and thinking how cool the M.D. at the end of your signature was. I will forever think of that now when I sign my name with J.D. Thank you for instilling in me your work ethic.

Mom –To my Mother, I have no clue how you put up with me, but I am so thankful that you have. You instilled in me a sense of respect in myself and my work that could have only come from a nurse and daughter of a Pittsburgh Steel Mill worker.

I love you both very much, and want you to know that this is as much, if not more, your accomplishment.

With the thank yous aside, I would not be “answering the call of the question” if I did not propound some inspirational message as you prepare to move on to the next phase of your lives. But, instead of pushing some overused “you are the future” or “always be ethical” message on you, I ask you look at myself as an example. I do not say this because I am cocky and think you should all emulate me. Well, I have to admit I am a bit cocky. No, I offer myself as an example because I am anything but the typical law school student.

As I mentioned, it took a long time for me to get my head on straight. After high school, I attended several colleges, but never followed through. Oddly enough, I spent the next 6 years working as a hibachi chef at several Japanese restaurants. I was getting by, but I was anything but happy with my position in life. I knew I wanted more. Day after day, that life would eat away at me until I finally could not take it anymore. I can remember the exact moment when I thought, “If I have to throw one more shrimp tail into my hat, I am going to lose it.” That day I made a decision to make a change for myself, and never looked back.

I moved across the country to Orlando to study music engineering and producing. I had never been to Orlando and I had no experience with music other than that of a consumer. Yet, I knew that I had an insane passion for music as well as the desire to improve myself. I believed that if I followed my passion and desire to succeed that all would be fine.

While in Orlando I took a couple of courses in copyright and artist contracts, thought that this law stuff was kind of interesting, and decided to apply to law school. I knew that if I really wanted to work in the music industry, that I would have to make my way west. Again, I was faced with some seriously intimidating challenges. For one, I was looking into moving 3500 miles from my home, family, and friends. Furthermore, I did not have the most traditional undergraduate experience as my classes focused more on microphone placement than poly sci and criminal justice. Yet, again, I was motivated by the decision I made to better myself and I knew that if I kept following my passion for music that I could overcome these challenges.

Six years after leaving the kitchen in Pittsburgh here I am, graduating from law school with all of you because I set my focus on my passion and did not let anything else stand in my way. You have seen me in the halls and some of you had class with me. I am not some super student. I speak my mind, I ask too many questions, I wear Steelers jerseys and funny shoes too often for a professional setting. The fact that I am standing here right now is purely a result of being driving by a promise I made to myself to always give everything my all. I came here with a goal in mind, and spent three years focused on achieving what I wanted.

As you prepare to enter practice, I offer you this advice. Remember the original reason you wanted to be an attorney. Maybe it was to deliver justice as a prosecutor, or to fight for the underdogs and give a voice to the voiceless, or maybe it was just to work within a particular industry like myself. Whatever the reason, remember that passion, find what drives you inside. If you make the decision—

honestly make the decision—to follow that passion, nothing or no one will be able to stop you from achieving anything you wish. Do not just decide what you would *like* out of your careers and lives. Instead, decide what you really *want*, challenge yourself, make a promise to yourself, and then go out and fight like hell for what you want.

I leave you with a quote, perhaps cliché' but fitting, from Thomas Jefferson:

“I’m a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work, the more luck I have.”

Thomas Jefferson Class of 2012, Congratulations.