

Valedictorian Speech: Melissa Lewis, December 17, 2011

Thank you Dean Hasl for your warm introduction.

Before I begin, I would like to share with you something my daughter Emma told me last week.

Some of our fellow professors have met my daughter, and predicted she will be among the Thomas Jefferson graduating class of 2030, following in her mother and grandfather's footsteps.

But, I regret to inform you, Emma has told me she is going to be a doctor.

She is confident in this ability because she already has the tools. They come in a pink plastic case.

I am incredibly honored to be here today. We have all invested long hours over our years in law school and it is hard to believe we are done.

It seems like only yesterday, I was sitting down in Room 300 for my very first law school class. CivPro with Slomo. That is a real thing, see your graduating student to decode.

Graduating from law school is an amazing accomplishment. Less than Three-percent of Americans have graduate degrees. You are now among the highly-educated elite. You should be proud of yourselves, as I am sure your loved ones here today are.

I know the job market is daunting and many of us have wondered whether we made the right choice coming to law school at all.

I read an article quoting the dean of the Rutgers School of law last year, and it stuck with me. The essence was this:

"The real value of legal education is not economic; ... it's about freedom. Legal education gives students what 99.9 percent of humanity yearns for but is denied: control over one's own life. It is a license...to live the American dream to its fullest."

I found this to be both true and inspiring. A legal education enables you to

live your life on your own terms.

You can go to work for a large firm, work 70 hours a week, and truly “live” the law.

You can dedicate yourself to public service, helping those who need it the most, by fighting for them on the front lines or behind the scenes legislating.

Alternatively, you can work for yourself, because after all, this degree makes you the product. Your time literally can be money.

I have taken the time to sit down with many Thomas Jefferson alumni, who have successful solo practices. They have all said, the value of your degree, is what you make of it. You have control over your life and its successes.

A perfect example of law degree as a ticket to freedom is my father. My father has been a great inspiration in my life. He dreams big, has unfettered optimism and truly enjoys life.

My father has his own law practice in Arizona. He works as much or as little as he desires, wherever he wants.

He spends months at a time in Costa Rica and visits Europe frequently throughout the year. All made possible with his Thomas Jefferson Law degree.

Life in the law can be incredibly stressful, but it does not have to be. For me, I find balance with my beautiful daughter Emma.

I am thankful to her for providing me with inspiration and finding a way to make me smile every day.

Think about how you want to spend your days and do it. If you find yourself waking-up and dreading the day ahead, stop what it is you are doing. And instead, find a way to enjoy each day because life is too short not to.

Congratulations again on your accomplishment, you out ran the bear. And remember, an investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.