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Valedictory

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VALEDICTORY*

David D. Gregory

Every law school class has its own unique character. This class has lots of them. You are not like planets—disparate elements in separate orbits. What is special is the way you have “cohered.” It is wonderful to see that even those few who went away to other schools for their last semester or last year have returned to be with their number on this great day. Some members of this class have even fallen in love with each other. Go to law school; find love. Imagine that! To me, you are like stars—of more or less equal brilliance, forming interesting constellations. Hold to those bonds among yourselves.

A few years ago the graduating class asked me to deliver a benediction at graduation—thinking evidently that that meant a few reflective words at the end of the ceremony. But “benediction” means a “blessing”—something that you all who know me must agree I am in a poor position to bestow. Recognizing the honor in being asked, however, I accepted the invitation and changed the name to something I was qualified to give—a valediction—which means a farewell.

I became intrigued with the distinction. I knew, of course, that the common element, diction, meant saying. I discovered that the separate element of valediction comes from *valère* meaning to be strong, to be well, and to be worthy—which must have been a common form of giving good wishes when saying farewell among the Romans. Valediction thus shares a common root with valor, valiant, valid, and value.

We who are your tutors are very proud of you. We believe that we have helped you to discover within yourselves valuable intellectual and practical talents. How you use them is up to you.

I do have a few thoughts for your consideration.

Look at reality with a cold, hard, steely-eyed gaze. Lawyers get bad reputations by distorting reality. If you feel yourself losing sight of reality, fear not. I have the solution: Ask your mother.

Preserve the language and speak English. There is a mischievous effort these days to corrupt the language. We should have learned from Orwell that corrupting the language is instrumental in corrupting society. Speak plainly. Part of the lawyer’s task is to communicate what is technical and complex to persons of ordinary intelligence and reasonable prudence. It is contrary to that responsibility to say that a defendant was charged with DVA and OUI but for lack of PC the charges were dropped to SA and DTE.

Recognize that, regardless of what you may have picked up in Law School, not everything is arguable. There *really* is such a thing as truth. Like justice, truth is something we must strive to attain. On a personal level that means that honesty is the best policy. I tell you that in the hope that you can avoid learning that lesson the hard way.

*The Law Review thanks Jane Gregory for allowing us to publish Professor Gregory’s valedictory address. This publication is with her permission, she retains all rights in the work, and any use or reproduction is prohibited without her express, written consent.

Avoid single-mindedness. No matter how good one value is, it is never the only one.

The word that gave us the name "valediction" is perfectly suited to signify our leave-taking from you:

Be strong.

Be well.

Be worthy.

However, the words that most commonly mark a leaving-taking will also suffice. That word is Goodbye. Close behind that valediction echoes a benediction from which it came: God Be With Ye.

Good friends: Goodbye.