

Suffolk University Law School Commencement
Sunday, May 20, 2018
Blue Hills Bank Pavilion, Boston
Commencement Speaker
Charles Joseph Ferrara, Jr.

Hey, y'all. You got a New Orleans boy in front of you so I don't know what's going to happen. Okay.

Chairman Lamb, members of the Board of Trustees, President Kelly, Acting Provost Royo, Dean Perlman, Chief Justice Dalianis, esteemed members of the faculty, administration, and staff of the Law School, beloved family and friends, and you, my fellow graduates, good evening and welcome.

Well, how fun was law school, right? We did it. Congratulations. When some of you asked if I would consider giving this greeting, my response was clear and unequivocal, that's ridiculous. I'm hardly reflective of the majority of our class. I'm more than a few years older than most of you. I don't have any bling. I had a hard time. It was tough. I'm doubting what I could say that would possibly be of interest to this august group. But I was with you. I was with you. And I decided okay. Our classmates were very persuasive, a good quality for lawyers.

So let me just give a few thoughts on this joyful evening of our commencement. I stand before you today as the proud son of a Louisiana trial lawyer and a nurse. My parents are people of tremendous integrity, compassion, and love. They were my first and best teachers. They will tell you that as a child I was one who strongly resisted bedtime and the confines of the crib. I'd crawl around the house into the late hours of the night, and concerned about these night owl behaviors, my parents did what most first time parents do. They consulted the pediatrician. His response to their surprise, don't worry about it, he'll settle into a routine eventually. Just remember, every waking moment is a learning moment.

Every waking moment is a learning moment. For all of us graduating today, many of our learning moments of late have been experienced at the Law School's Sargent Hall. We have come to know that building quite well, haven't we? Permit me to recall three elements of our beloved building which seem worthy of our reflection today.

First, at the center of the lobby floor is the seal of Suffolk Law School. On that seal are inscribed these words in Latin: *Honestas et Diligentia* – honesty and diligence. Every time we entered and exited that building we walked across that seal, and it called us to ground our steps in virtue. It was an admonition, if you will, that a firm foundation must be rooted in virtue.

Second, that enormous flag of the United States, which is suspended overhead and drapes down through the core of our building. That flag represents our nation, founded on the principles of equality, liberty, and justice for all. And it is the defense and promotion of these principles which defines our very vocation as lawyers. We have a particular responsibility to ensure that these principles are more than mere lofty ideals. They must permeate our labor, become embedded in our laws, and thus experienced more fully by those we serve. That flag reminds us that we live in a country where the rule of law matters. It is organic and it must be cultivated with wisdom and care in every age.

Third, directly across the street from our building is the Old Granary Burial Ground. In this historic cemetery lie the remains of great patriots and revolutionaries. It is for us a stark reminder that our time on this earth is indeed limited. If we are to effect change as lawyers, we must do so without delay. None of us knows the exact number of our days. And the gift of each new day is an opportunity to start again, to become a better person and a more human lawyer.

That cemetery raises questions for us. What will our children say of us? What will our legacy be? I recall one evening in Professor Brennan's trial advocacy class, Judge Georges was a guest lecturer. Perhaps you know this esteemed Suffolk alumnus. A little guy about five-one, unassuming, with a really quiet, soft voice. Judge Georges, would you stand up and just say hello here? This is Judge Georges. He's about eight-ten, played football in high school, and commands a room with a booming voice that's the voice of God, I'll tell you. That night he looked at 20 terrified students and said to us as he did at our orientation, remember this – you will always have your bar number and your name. They are yours and yours alone. Your name must mean something. I shivered. In our practice of law, friends, may we always conduct ourselves with dignity and in a manner worthy of that revered title, counselor.

We have worked really hard to get to this day, and we have the “B” word to get through a little bit down the road. And law school's been hard not only because it was academically rigorous, thank you, faculty, but also our education in the law was a process of formation, of personal transformation. We have been trained to think like lawyers, to write like lawyers, to approach legal problems with a disciplined analysis and to be zealous advocates for our clients. But we're also committed to behave according to a code of ethics. Professional responsibility is important.

We are not the same people we were at orientation, are we? We are changed. How so? Let's go back a few years to those first days. After law school, we now know that property is a bundle of sticks. Somewhere in the world there exists the reasonable man, person. Partaking of the carbolic smoke ball does not prevent you from getting the flu. Don't ignore the color of the banana on the grocery floor; it makes a big difference. The next time you're out fox hunting and somebody else shoots your fox, let it go. The fruit of the poisonous tree has nothing to do with fruit or trees. What normal people call a deck or a porch, we call a curtilage. Two words: hairy hand. We even

learned a little Latin – *res ipsa loquitur*, *pro hoc vice*, motions in limine, *mens rea/womens rea* (just kidding), and let's all just finally admit that even God doesn't fully understand the Rule against Perpetuities!

Along this journey we've experienced so much – illness, heartbreak, divorce, marriage, births, deaths, job transitions, economic challenges, cold calling professors, clinics, final exams, final exams, final exams, and more. We pushed and pushed and pushed and now we're here. You are strong, friends, and it has been a delight to walk with you these years. Let us be grateful for this rich experience and to all who made it possible for us to be here today. Let us be humble as we reintroduce ourselves to our families, our friends and our colleagues, and to all who supported us and patiently endured our reduced availabilities, our missed events, our perhaps less than charitable edge, especially during finals, and the self-absorption which this legal education has sometimes demanded of us. Please, seek out the truth tellers in life, for they will keep us honest and save us from the disintegrating ego and elitism which can sometimes taint our profession. Embrace humanity – in all of its marvelous, messy mystery because in the end, it's all about relationships.

Fellow graduates, friends, as we take our leave of Sargent Hall, may it never leave us. With our feet firmly grounded in virtue, let us raise our hearts and minds in the service of equality, liberty, and justice for all. For our time is indeed short. The world is calling us by name and our name must mean something. How will we respond? Let's do what we do best, Suffolk lawyers. Let's get to work. Heartfelt congratulations. Farewell and thank you.