

President's Charge to the Class of 2010

President Thomas C. Galligan Jr.

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Today is a day to celebrate. Today is a day of joy. Sadly for one of your classmates there will be no celebrating and no joy today. Genevieve "Genni" Moore, scheduled to be with you today is not here because her father, Jim, passed away this week. Jim was a great fan of Colby-Sawyer College and Colby-Sawyer volleyball. Please join me now in a moment of silence for Jim, Genni and the entire Moore family and all those who contributed to our graduates success but who are not with us today.

Well, here we are. You will remember, I hope, that almost four years ago on a warm September afternoon, we started out together at Colby-Sawyer. And now after four years together, you are graduating. I hope you know that since we started together, you will always occupy a special place in my heart as my first Colby-Sawyer class. Now, you might recall that on that September afternoon almost four years ago, I told you about my daughter Jennifer who had just moved to New Hampshire and entering high school just as you were starting college.

You will perhaps remember that I said I did not want to offend you in comparing Jennifer's high school experience to your college career but that I wanted to point out that like you; she was in a new place doing a new thing. It was a new beginning for everyone. That afternoon, I read a letter to you that Jennifer had written to her best friend from Knoxville, Tennessee, Elizabeth Wallace. In that letter, Jennifer acknowledged that she was unsure and afraid but was looking ahead with curiosity and hope.

Well, New Hampshire and high school worked out just fine for Jennifer. She learned a lot; she made all sorts of friends; she sailed from Maine to Puerto Rico; she studied abroad in France; she played JV and varsity sports; and much more. Since that September afternoon in 2006, she has grown and she has matured.

Today, I think and hope that being here has worked out for you as well. I know we - your teachers, advisors, coaches, and all our staff - have worked hard to make your Colby-Sawyer experience a great one. I know we have worked with you and have challenged you; we hope you have learned from us because I know we have learned from you. That is what engaged teaching and learning is all about. Now you leave us and it is time for you to go out and make your mark on the world. I will return to that in a moment. For now, I'd like to turn back to Jennifer.

I want to go back to her because guess what she is going to do next? She is going to go off to Pitzer College in Claremont, California—a place that has many similarities to Colby-Sawyer. It is small; it is interdisciplinary; and students are engaged in their learning with faculty who work closely with them to improve their lives and their learning. What makes it a little different from Colby-Sawyer is that it is not across the street; it is 3,000 miles away.

I reminded Jennifer there is a wonderful 1,000-student college much closer to home, but how many of you would want to go to college across the street from your parents' house? In any event, her mother and I are proud of her and excited for her. During Jennifer's years at college, we want her to learn as you have learned. We want her to grow as you have grown. We want her to emerge from her college career with greater self-knowledge and as a committed lifelong learner and as a critical thinker who is prepared to take on the world. We want her to learn firsthand the exhilaration of living in the world of ideas and to embrace all it has to offer.

And you know what else we want for her and for you? (No pressure, Jenny!) What we hope for and want for Jenny and for you is something your families and your college have already convinced you that you can accomplish. Find a job? Yes, but more than that. Be nice people and good citizens? Yes, but more than that. Behave ethically? Absolutely. Never stop learning? You bet. Support Colby-Sawyer College over the years ahead? Certainly, but even more than that.

We want you to go out and use your intelligence, your education, your experience and your heart to make the world a better place. As I told the business students the other night, I truly believe that a small candle burns within all of us to be part of some positive change in the world. Why, after all, do we go to college? To be happy, to be safe, to succeed? Yes, yes, yes. But I think we also do it, at least, in part, to improve our lives and the lives of those around us. That flame flickers and reminds us that it's up to all of us to make the world better. Whatever professional or personal road you choose to follow, you can still do your part to improve life on our planet.

I know that graduating from college can be a time of great joy and of equally great uncertainty. But even while other bigger flames may burn inside and around you, your college experience has ignited in many of you sparks of passion and hope and a desire to do important and rewarding work. College exposes you to some great and diverse ways of thinking and to high ideals, and it tends to expand your sense of possibilities for your life and how you might

make your mark on the world. And I very much hope you and all of us, as well as your families, friends and future employers realize how precarious that little flame of idealism can be. And that we appreciate our responsibilities to stoke those fires and to help you keep them burning inside. At heart, so many of us do what we do at this college because we are idealists as well, and even as you leave Colby-Sawyer, we will be here for you as you set off to accomplish all that you dream.

Why do I think that's important and do I believe it's even realistic to think that one person can make a difference in the world? After all, it's quite possible that none of us even agree on what in the world needs to be changed or how to go about changing it.

But I bet we can agree that the world could be a better place. We would likely agree there is injustice in our country and in the world, and that injustice often strikes those least equipped to deal with it. No doubt we agree that the earthquake in Haiti was a terrible tragedy and that the situation was and continues to be aggravated by the fact that Haiti is incredibly poor and that its lack of reliable infrastructure before and after the earthquake has made the consequences of a natural disaster much worse and even more intolerable to compassionate societies.

The Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has done extensive work on famines and has shown that the death due to famine is never a result of actual food shortages, but rather, occurs when the poorest people lack access to available food, and when governments or others have failed to react quickly enough to provide alternative food supplies or resources.

In reference to recent events, a writer for *The Economist* wrote: "Death by disaster is in many ways a symptom of economic underdevelopment: Witness the very different consequences of the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile. In general, richer places and richer people are better able to survive and respond."

Here on campus in recent years, we have been affected several times by weather-induced power outages, which are better described as damaging storms than as disasters. I know they were a big pain in the neck, but, you know what, we got through them; we pulled together to stay warm on some pretty cold New Hampshire nights; we enjoyed each other's company while we waited for the heat to come back on; and we were okay. We survived our small crises. Think about those both in our country and around the world who in similar or worse situations cannot

go home or to find comfortable, safe shelter or food. I bet we can agree without dissent that they had it tougher than those of us who had somewhere to go and could safely get there.

My point is only that there is much injustice in the world and you can work to eradicate it. There are many ways in which you can work to improve your community. You can commit to environmental sustainability. Work for a food bank. Volunteer. Do something to help others. Look for ways in your workplace, town, city, state, nation or the world where you can be a catalyst for positive change.

Now, Amartya Sen is probably smart enough to devise some grand theory. But in his most recent book, *The Idea of Justice*, he eschews the effort. To summarize quickly, he believes a ton of time can be spent on articulating the best theories, but if we wait for theories to become realities, we risk never acting or accomplishing anything. We will never all agree on the best approach. Instead, he says that if we focus more on the world in which we live, we may not create the perfect solution, but we may be come up with something better. That is, we may not obtain perfection but we may achieve *better*.

So, as E.F. Schumacher said in 1973: “Small is Beautiful.” Our small steps to improve ourselves and the world around us may not resolve every issue or problem, but they may well make us better than we are now. So, let’s not become paralyzed by our inability to find the perfect overarching plan that will guide our actions; let’s agree on what we find intolerable and address that; and let’s use the powers that we possess as individuals and collectively to make our corners of the world better.

Next, on how, let me counsel you not to be overcome by fear. Some of us are more risk averse than others. But I am saying that in trying to make the world a better place, don’t be so afraid of action, of trying something new or standing up for what you believe in, that you choose to take the easier path or do nothing. Don’t say, we can’t do that because if it does not work I may have a little less tomorrow than I have today. Imagine if our nation’s founders felt that way. We would be still be citizens of Great Britain. To paraphrase FDR: “We have a lot to fear, including fear itself, but let’s not magnify our fears of fear.” Let’s take a deep breath and move on.

So, friends, as you walk across the stage today and as you then walk through the honor corridor we will form for you as you depart this tent, diploma in hand, realize that you are not walking away from college and Colby-Sawyer. Instead you are entering the wider world; you

are walking into the world with the benefit of a Colby-Sawyer education; you are walking into the world with a mission—a mission I hope my daughter Jennifer shares after her years at college as well.

Your mission is to make the world a better place for all of us and those who come after us. Your mission is to take what you know, what your families have taught you, and to combine it with all you have learned and experienced here and to go and improve the world in ways that none of us ever dreamed were possible. That is what you can do and that is what Colby-Sawyer hopes for you and from you. Thank you.