

**Commencement Charge to the Class of 2008**  
**President Thomas C. Galligan Jr.**

Congratulations on your graduation from college. Congratulations to you for all you have achieved, and congratulations to your families, friends and other loved ones who have supported you, cheered you, cajoled you, pushed you, and loved you. I daresay that without them you might not be sitting here about to receive your diploma from Colby-Sawyer College. This is, in many ways, as big a day for them as it is for you and I promise we will get to it very soon. But for just a minute bear with me and think back to the day you started college here at Colby-Sawyer.

I was not here so I cannot tell you exactly what happened. I cannot tell you if it was raining or sunny, hot or cold. I cannot tell you exactly what my wonderful predecessor, Anne Ponder, said to you in her remarks at Convocation. Nor can I tell you what others said or if you sat here with excitement, fear, and some trepidation about the adventure ahead—college.

I do know that there was a theme to that orientation and to your class' first year of college. That theme was "leave your mark." "Leave your mark;" make a difference; do great things; make our college and world a better place. It is a great theme; it is a laudatory idea. It is good advice. And you have made a difference here at college and in our community.

You have done great work. You have completed demanding academic programs. You are a better critical thinker than you were when you entered college. You are a better communicator, both orally and in writing. You better understand and embrace broader perspectives of thinking and living than you did when you sat here at Convocation. You have completed Capstone projects in your majors. You have advised the college on becoming more sustainable. You have written for and edited the newspaper. You have danced. You have worked at the radio station. You have done great things on the stage in the Sawyer Center. You have created and displayed wonderful art. You have participated in athletic championships, and whether you won or lost, you have competed valiantly and represented your college well. You have shaped policy at the college. You have tutored children in local schools. You have taught children here at Windy Hill and in our region's schools. In short, you have made your indelible mark on Colby-Sawyer College and will leave us a better place and community than we were before you arrived.

Now, I counsel you that this same charge—to leave your mark—applies just as easily today and in the future as it did four years ago. Go out into the world and do great things. Go out into the world and make it a better place. Go out into the world and make it a fairer place... and make it a greener place. There is still much inequality, unfairness, violence, injustice, pollution, and violence for you to address. I imagine when you are done fixing what you can there will still be some left for your children to take on. But just because you can't do it all, don't ever stop trying to do what you believe in. I don't want to sound too over the top—after all this is a Commencement charge, not some kind of sermon or political speech -but go out and leave your mark.

Now, I will add a little curve to all this righteous advice. Go and leave a mark, BUT try not to leave too big a bruise. Make an impact, but try not to hurt people or things along the way. You can make a difference, and I know you will, but in doing so try not roll over people. Try not to hurt them physically or emotionally. In making a difference, please do it the right way. What else does this mean, at least to me? It means that you have to take the time to think about what you are doing and how you are doing it. I don't say you have to necessarily dwell on it, but I do suggest you have to be self-aware and self-analytical. Be a little like Socrates and examine your life—examine yourself and make choices accordingly. Leave your mark, but don't leave too big a bruise. Make sure to periodically look at just how it is you are leaving your mark, and decide whether you are pleased with that. I hope Colby-Sawyer has provided you with some of the tools you will need to undertake that examination, just as I believe we have provided you with the tools to leave that wonderful mark.

For now, I will leave you with a story. My father was orphaned at age nine and worked very hard, with the support of an aunt, to put himself through college and law school. He then spent over 60 years practicing law and, at least in my eyes, achieving much—leaving his mark.

Part of the way he left his mark for me and my family was always being willing to invest in his only child's education. That would be my education. But aside from investing in my education, he preferred to save his money, not spend it. He had been a poor child and did not want to waste money on things like clothes, cars, toys or trips. He never met a nickel he did not want to save. One thing he did buy for the family was a one-acre parcel in New York State near where he was born, and it was there that we spent our summers -

without a car, without a television, and without a working radio—just what a teenager wanted, believe me!

One week my friend Frank Drobot was visiting us and we convinced my father to drive us to the theatre to see a movie—“The Out of Towners,” with Jack Lemmon and Sandy Dennis, not the one with Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn. We were going to see the original. Frank was 15 and I was 14. As we walked up to the ticket booth, my father moved in front of us and looked in at the young woman in the booth, who was about 16, and said: “One adult and two children.” I looked up at the sign above the booth which very clearly said: “Adults-- \$3. Children under 12-- \$2.” I know Frank saw it, too. And I was sure my father either had seen it or was willfully ignorant. He was going to save some money.

The young woman selling the tickets looked at my father and then looked over his shoulder at Frank and at me, and began to open her mouth.

My father, who could get angry at the tip, let alone the drop, of a hat responded before she could speak. “One adult and two children. They live under my roof, and as long as they do so and I pay for their food, clothing and care, they are children.” The young woman swallowed hard and charged us for one adult and two children. We had saved \$2.

Later that same summer I was in Atlantic City with the Drobots on their vacation and we were on our way to the movies. As we approached the ticket booth I recall saying to Mrs. Drobot, in reference to Frank and me: “You know, we can pass as children if you want.” Mrs. Drobot leaned back and looked at me and said: “Tommy (people sometimes called me Tommy), we don’t do that.” It was apparent to me that she had heard the story about my father and the movie and I imagine as I listened to her and understood my ears got a little red—perhaps with vicarious embarrassment or shame, or even a little anger. When I got home from Atlantic City I told the story to my father and he hunched, but said no more.

Now, fast forward with me about 30 years to a house in Tennessee, where I sit with my father who is 91 years old and moving towards the end of his life. We are sitting quietly. I am impressed that our time together is limited; I am impressed that he has, to stick to our theme here, left his mark on me and on his world.

“Tom,” he said.

“What?” I answered.

“We were wrong,” he said.

“What?” I must say I was not sure what I had been wrong about.

“We were wrong; the Drobots were right.” He had pulled that movie thing out of his memory from 30 years before. “We did the wrong thing.” We? I thought. How did I get pulled into this? “We were wrong about the movie tickets. They were right, we should have paid full price.”

So there it was; he had been worrying about a \$2 savings from a transaction in which he had done the wrong thing 30 years ago. To me the sad part of it was that at the end of his life he was worried about what he had done wrong. At the end of a successful, happy, and engaging life he was worried about what the church in which he was raised would call a minor or venial sin. After all he had done - after the mark he had left - he was worried about a little bruise.

But there was a happy and wonderful thing about it, too. At 91, he was still examining the life he had lived and was living. After all he had done and seen he was still weighing the rights and the wrongs. He was still looking not only at the mark he had left, but the bruises he had caused. For that, as his son, I will always be proud.

So, go out, and leave your mark. But please be aware of how you are leaving that mark—and minimize the bruises. Now, thank you, and on with the ceremony.