

CONVOCATION REMARKS – SEPT. 8, 2006

Good afternoon. Welcome to Colby-Sawyer College and the opening of the 2006-2007 academic year. It is my job to deliver the president's message to you. As a rule, I love to get up in front of people and talk; I am always a little nervous, but I do like the challenge, the adrenaline rush and the chance to communicate. But today I am more than just a little bit nervous—today I am downright jittery. You see, I have never been a college president before. This is a first for me. I am going through a period of change in my life. Change can be exciting and invigorating, and growth provoking, but it can also be a little unsettling.

It occurs to me that those of you who are starting your first years here at Colby-Sawyer College are in the same boat I am. You, too, are at a point in your lives of great excitement, possibility and promise. And, you are also undergoing change. You are moving here, away from home, to begin your college education. For a while at least you are leaving family, friends, and comfort zones. And, if I may turn to your parents, families, and friends for a moment—I have two children in college so I know this is a time of change for you, too.

But, back to the Class of 2010 and me. We are on the verge of the great unknown. At times like these I have found I do best when I don't try to handle it all myself. I do better if I turn to people I trust and respect for their guidance and inspiration, as well as for assurance that I'm on the right path.

One of the greatest sources of inspiration in my life is my family. Susan, my wife of 25 years, is sitting right over there. She and I have four children: Patrick, who is a 21-year-old college senior; Sarah, who is a 19-year-old college sophomore; Aisling—a Gaelic name that means dream or vision—who is a 16-year-old high school senior (tomorrow she turns 17); and Jennifer, who is a 14-year-old high school freshman. Today's lesson in life and change I take from Jennifer.

Like us, you and me, Jennifer is undergoing change. She has moved from her former home in Knoxville, Tennessee, to New London, New Hampshire. And, she is starting high school. That is big stuff. In fact, as we speak she is off on a preschool camping trip. She is not a great camper, but she will persevere. I say she is not a great camper, but maybe I should say she was not a great camper when she left. By now she may be.

Now, I know what you are thinking. You are thinking I am going to talk about Jennifer's transition to high school—a new level in her education—and compare it to your transition to college—a new level in your education. But, you say to yourselves, I have already been through high school. This is college. Believe me, I will not insult your intelligence by comparing her high school transition to your college transition. Instead, I am going to compare her transition to first grade to your transition to college and my transition to this wonderful college presidency. You see, as Jennifer started first grade, we were moving from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Louisiana State University to Knoxville, Tennessee, and the University of Tennessee. And, recently, Jennifer wrote about that transition in an essay as part of her application to her new school. She wrote, "My most precious relationship with anyone has to be with my best friend, Elizabeth Wallace [her mother and I let that one go]. She has stuck by my side since we were in

the first grade, and, now, we are in the eighth grade. Her friendship has meant more to me than almost anything ever has. I met Elizabeth on the very first day of first grade. I was insecure because I had just moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, in the summer of 1998 from Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

My mom steered me into Mrs. Ray's first grade classroom and she and I scanned the room. Her eyes stopped on one little blonde haired girl sitting alone. She told me to go see if that girl wanted anyone to sit next to her. Apprehensively, I gave my mom a hug and a kiss and made my way across the room of noisy, crazy first graders to sit next to the girl I now know is Elizabeth Wallace.

After a few very long minutes sitting in silence I leaned over and said, 'Did you know we have the same shoes?' She replied, 'Uhh, yeah, I know.' After that first meeting we have been inseparable. Even though we are best friends we have many differences. She is amazing at almost any sport she tries. She plays basketball, softball, and runs cross country.

Also, she [was a tumbler and] used to play soccer... My main sport or hobby is dance. She is more into the hardcore competitive sports, whereas I am more into the lyrical and graceful sports. Even though we may have some differences, we also have some similarities. We both love to play the guitar. In fact, we both take lessons from the same person.

Every day after school we go to each other's houses and hang out. We would not be able to survive without one another. Elizabeth is my best friend and always will be. Even though we may get into fights and arguments occasionally, we still will love each other forever."

Let me add before going on that when I asked Jennifer if she would give me a copy of this essay to include in my speech to you she emailed me and said, "**I'm not very happy about u reading it in front of everybody but ill live....ok bye.**" But I promised her I would show the speech to her first and get her approval and I have. My older children tell Jennifer that having your life shared with an audience is just one of the risks of being a Galligan.

But, what does Jennifer's essay have to do with us? Several things I think. In it Jennifer describes and owns how nervous she was facing change. But she also shows us just how wonderful and promising change can be. Change introduced Jennifer to one of the best friends she will ever have. Think about it, those types of relationships are ahead of you here. You will meet people who are like you, but you will also connect with many more people whose talents, perspectives, and backgrounds are different from your own. There are people you will meet here who will change and enrich your lives and who will become part of you forever.

Of course, meeting great people is just part of the wonderful transition you will undergo. You will explore ideas, activities, athletics, service to others, and so much more. You may even discover what it is that you want to do with your life.

Think of the scene in our summer reading book, *The Kite Runner*, where Amir, the narrator, writes his first story and reads it to Hassan. The narrator knows as that happens that he has found something, writing, that will be his life's work and one of his life's loves. The scene is

more complex than I have let on, but I am accurate in saying that the love of writing and storytelling is something Amir realizes when reading that first story to Hassan.

The same thing happens in the book when Amir's wife to be, Soraya, describes how she taught a woman to read and then decides to become a teacher. She found her life's work; she found a profession that mattered to her. Imagine, that may happen to you here. Allysa LaBelle, one of our commencement speakers last May, said, "Regardless of how we found our way to campus, Colby-Sawyer had an impact on us in a way we will never forget. We have each been guided by our professors, staff members, coaches, our friends, and anybody we happened to meet along the way... At Colby-Sawyer I found space for my voice."

So, don't be afraid of change. It opens the door to new experiences and relationships, greater knowledge, and enormous personal growth. Just having the chance to articulate some of my own fears aloud to you today and to see that neither you nor I are alone has made me feel better. The change you and I are going through now presents us with wonderful opportunities. I know we will take advantage of them.

But, I have left a part of Jennifer's essay hanging and you know it. Recall that she said she and Elizabeth are inseparable and could not exist without one another. And, now Jenny has had to move away from her best friend. They have separated. Sadly, saying good-bye or at least, see you later, is a part of life, too. And honestly, even though Jenny and Elizabeth may be in different parts of the country, they will always be a part of one another. And besides, Elizabeth has already come to New Hampshire to visit and she loved it here, so hopefully she will be back again and again.

In the meantime, there is always e-mail, cell phones, and instant messaging.

So, the convocation program says and the custom provides that I am supposed to charge you, meaning to give you orders or suggestion. Let me continue my theme and charge both you and me. Let me charge us to embrace the change that is about to come. Change is good.

But, as we embrace that change, let me also remind you and me that the people we are today and the people we love today will always be part of the people we become. So, as we face the future and the change it brings, let us also recall and be grateful for who we are and how we got here. Have a great year and a great time at Colby-Sawyer! We are already better because you are there. Thank you.

Now, some directions. Let me ask the Class of 2010 to please follow those of us on stage out of the tent after the program. Follow...that means please let us go first. As you, Class of 2010, exit the tent, you will pass through a double line formed by the platform party, trustees, faculty and staff. I then ask you to meet with your orientation groups on the lawn. I invite family members and friends to please remain in the tent for the family and parent orientation session. Now, let me ask you all to rise for the recessional.