

## Hamline Convocation Speech - August 19, 2002 - Bill Manning

Today you are possibly feeling expectant, apprehensive, excited. I sat where you are 27 years ago, and I felt more like bewildered, lost, scared.

Go back in time with me - a little over 35 years ago George Wallace stood on the steps of the capital in Selma, Alabama, and shouted for the world to hear "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." But thirty-five years after he made that pronouncement, the New York Times ran a photo of him sitting in a wheel chair holding hands in a circle of people. He was holding hands with an African American woman singing "We Shall Overcome." Imagine with me a conversation between a young African American couple in Selma, Alabama, 35 years ago when Governor Wallace made his declaration about segregation. The couple is sitting at their dinner table and the young black woman says to her husband that she could imagine a day in the future when one day she would join hands with George Wallace and sing "We Shall Overcome." Her husband tells her she is crazy. Yet, because imagined, it happens. In any situation it is important for us to think about hope, transformation and the long view. The power of hope can be turned to resolve. Possibly the

best example of the power of hope turning to resolve and transformation is Nelson Mandela. In prison for 32 years, yet he leads, forgives and transforms because of hope, vision and the long view.

You are about to begin a process of transformation. You may think my reference to the transformation that Nelson Mandela brought about as grandiose somehow as compared to a law school experience. But I believe that the comparison is not grandiose and that the transformation process that you are about to begin is huge and majestic. In 3 years when you graduate and pass the bar and are sworn in – you will become “Officers of the Court.” At that point you will have an overarching duty, beyond just a duty to your client. You will have an overarching duty to the System of Justice. In light of that overarching duty to the System of Justice, you will have the privilege, like no other profession has, of standing as selflessly as possible in the shoes of other human beings and giving them voice. This noble profession requires great preparation. Fortunately, you are in an environment with a tremendously seasoned, experienced faculty and with a Dean and other individuals in the administrative process who care about the transformative process on which you are about to embark. They prepare you in a meticulous and thorough way to stand in another’s shoes

and give voice. However, the most important part of the transformative process will be what you bring to these 3 years.

During the next 3 years, you will acquire a great deal of information. You will look back after 3 years and will have learned so much you will be astonished. But the most important thing you will learn is a method of critical thinking. It is a process of thinking about thinking. You will be thinking about great thoughts, laws derived from certain places. The very nature of the process of law school is reflective. Great thoughts have been brought down to us in the constitution, the bill of rights, the amendments to the constitution, the commerce clause, the equal protection clause, the origin of the constitution as provided in the Federalist Papers and so many other areas of the law. You will learn how a corporation has come to be formed in our society. How it is organized, why it is organized in a certain way, what are the duties of a public company vs. a private company, and so much more.

The way in which you will go about learning is very different from your experience in your undergraduate schools. At times it will be quite difficult because the process itself is new and altering. But as a result of that process you will experience the world in a different way than you do

today. You will better understand how the world works. When you go into any major city, you will have a greater understanding of what is occurring, not only in the legal world but also how the legal world interacts with the world of commerce, the criminal justice system and many other areas. You will be prepared to participate in a new and meaningful way.

Let me be so presumptuous as to give you some specific advice.

1. Exercise a lot and drink very little.
2. Value all people – your classmates, faculty, administration – they are a future network and will open many doors for you not only in these 3 years but thereafter.
3. Work hard for self-fulfillment, not for class rank or grades.
4. Stay alive – do things outside of the law to enrich your life.
5. Most important, develop an inner life. I do not want to say exactly what an inner life is – because it is so deeply personal and different for every person. But it is a process of inner reflection whereby a person can find oneself, or find joy or find the inspiration to act out of meaning. To talk in depth about what an inner life is would be a separate seminar. But why an inner life? You are about to embark on a profession where daily you are asked to give voice to someone else.

Not to give voice to yourself, but to stand in other's shoes as selflessly as possible and give them voice. This is an "inner process." It is not something you bring about or will into existence when you graduate. You begin now the process of preparing yourself for this noble profession.

Eldridge Cleaver in his very first chapters of his famous book *Soul on Ice*, tells how he was thrown into solitary confinement in San Quentin. At the time he was a young man full of rage for many justified reasons. His jailer one time in throwing in some food also threw in a book called the *Seven Story Mountain* by a Trappist monk named Thomas Merton. Cleaver describes his reaction: he had no intention of reading a book by an overweight white Monk, but there was nothing else to do. He picked up the book and to his utter amazement, found that Merton had written a description of Harlem that he found far better than anything he could have ever written. It was far better than anything he had ever read. Cleaver said he welcomed Merton into his cell with a bear hug. When he left prison he continued to quote Merton's description of Harlem. It dawned on Cleaver that somehow this Monk living in the hills of Kentucky, was in touch with something - was aware of something. It was a crack in the door

for Cleaver to begin to develop an inner understanding of outer events. I hope this talk provides for you in some small way an opening to think about the phenomenal importance of an inner life for what you will do in your profession as a lawyer. You will have the possibility of doing many things, but you will be successful only if you can really listen to what others want and then attempt to give their voice a reality. You will be able to incarnate a business whether it be for profit or not profit. You will be able to represent an indigent person from backgrounds and parts of the world for which you have absolutely no preparation or experience. You may represent a convicted murderer on death row or a corporation that has been accused of wrongdoing. A corporation made up of individuals. I suggest the only way you will be able to do this adequately is if you have begun some inner process during this training.

You are embarking on a path of discipline that demands that you think always about others first. Lawyers have been a part of many of the great failures in our society. Because they did not understand their overarching duty to the System of Justice or because they had only prepared themselves intellectually in law school, they were unable to stand up at the right time and do the right thing, i.e. Watergate, i.e. when tobacco

companies hatched a plan to lie to the world through the use of Madison Avenue and cover up documents. ENRON and Anderson lawyers were there assisting, guiding, helping in all their decisions. They could have made moral and right decisions for what the circumstances presented.

So consider the enormity of your undertaking, the excitement of it, the transformative nature of it. It is a life long journey. This is very different from being a stock broker or a sales person or a computer analyst or an investment banker. Those are all significant undertakings but not undertakings, that demand the same discipline in one's thinking or an inner transformative process.

In these next 3 years - challenge often. Always appropriately. But challenge. 15 years ago the word "stakeholder" was a new word. Today it has become common in the corporate vernacular. Stakeholders are those people beyond the shareholders to whom a corporation has a duty and a responsibility. But in the law, is a corporation's first duty to make money for its shareholders all too consuming? Should it be? Can we dream and hope for a day when corporations care first about the earth and all the people on it and make second the concern for profit? Is this possibly at the heart of some of the WTO demonstrations and clashes? Is it possibly at the

heart of some of the world conflicts we see going on today? Can the death penalty be outlawed? Should it be? Can homelessness be eradicated not only in this country but possibly in the world? Can hunger be eliminated not only in this country, but in the world? As the world is smaller not just because of CNN, we feel each other's pain. What is our response to AIDS throughout Africa? What is our response to knowing deep down that the earth is a being, that the Gaia concept is no longer an alternative idea? Form your ideals. Do not lose them. As we enter the 21st Century, we need a better world. The disparity between rich and poor is far too great. Capitalism has won. So how will it survive in a humane way and benefit the world and the have nots? As the richest nation on Earth, the United States provides only .1% (one tenth of one percent) of our national income to help other nations. That puts us in last place among the 22 industrialized nations of the world!

Let me talk with you in more detail about the person I consider to be the greatest lawyer who has ever lived. That person is Nelson Mandela. While Nelson Mandela is larger than life as an international figure, it is his inspiration that can be at work everyday for what may seem like small matters. Those matters can include representing an injured person and



doing so with real empathy, or appropriately settling a case when representing a defendant, or defending a person charged with a crime, or prosecuting someone charged with a crime and responding to the victims not just the job of conviction, or it may be taking on pro bono cases and assisting with issues related to child abuse or homelessness. President Mandela's life provides clear and penetrating inspiration. He grew up in a rural area of South Africa. He may describe it as an area in the "bush." He came from a regal background with deep roots in a family that was rich in history. He had a love for nature due to where he grew up. He went to one of the best boarding schools available to him in South Africa. His elders arranged for a marriage. But no, he would pick his own love. He broke the blood ties of heredity. With his thirst for freedom he went to Johannesburg in a society that required passes and he had none. He was immediately in violation of the law and worked every odd job imaginable. Eventually he determined to go to law school. He did so from a one room tin house with dirt floors. He walked 7 miles to do clerical work in a Jewish law firm, the only firm that would give him a job. He walked the 7 miles instead of taking a bus to save his money for candles that he could use for light to read his law books in the evening. He was taking a

correspondence course in the law because he could not be admitted formally to any law school. He diligently trained, formed his own thinking, became a lawyer and started the law firm of Mandela and Tambo. As his political activity increased, he and many others were arrested. He used his abilities as a lawyer to defend his colleagues and himself. In two different trials he saved himself from the death penalty by his meticulous defense and eloquent presentation. He continued during his 32 years of imprisonment to represent prisoners and to use his legal training. He is in my mind the greatest lawyer because he truly stood in the shoes of the other, and out of that ability, he eventually stood in the shoes of the oppressor. He saw their abject evil but he looked beyond it to their humanity and even to their divinity. All of this he described in his book, the greatest book I have ever read, *The Long Walk to Freedom*. He recognized their divinity, and then to the total amazement of the world, he redeemed his oppressor by seeing their evil and moving beyond it to the good. Inherent within his ability to see the good was an ever-flowing forgiveness, a forgiveness out of love. And through this incredible inner transformation, he went on to lead a country to forgive. It is the first time in human history as we know it that the majority forgives the minority

oppressor. If ever it was justified for 50 million black people to shove 5 million white people into the sea - it was here. Yet, an extraordinary constitution was formed in South Africa. How it was formed and what it says is something you can study. Because of what he has done and what he has accomplished, it is almost impossible for us in the West (a land that misinterprets "an eye for an eye") to really understand or appreciate who Nelson Mandela is and what he and others accomplished in South Africa. Mandela, who developed an enormously rich inner life, ultimately was in touch with the real laws of love, forgiveness and humility and he implemented them.

Don't be afraid to talk, dialogue and incorporate into your classes questions regarding what are the real laws? Historically they undergird our entire legal system. I couldn't begin to touch on them all but laws such as 1) do you give more than you take? 2) there are consequences for our thoughts and our actions - therefore think and act with consciousness and with a heart.

So let me leave you with a poem written by one of my favorite poets, David Whyte, that speaks about inner transformation. It goes like this:

It is not enough to follow the inward road conversing in secret,

It is not enough to see straight ahead to gaze at the unborn thinking  
the silence

belongs to you,

It is not enough to hear even the tiniest edge of rain. You must go to  
the place

where everything waits.

There one word will do.

One word or the palm of your hand stretching outward in the gesture  
of gift.

And now we are truly afraid to find the great silence asking so little,

One word,

One word only.

I wish you great success and I hope and believe that at Hamline Law  
School you will find great joy. Prepare yourself in the next three years so  
that when you graduate you have your palm stretched outward in the  
gesture of gift. Thank you. It has been a true honor to be with you as you  
start your careers.