

Excerpts from the Commencement Speech

The commencement speaker for the John Rutledge Class graduation on Saturday, May 13, 2000, was Anthony H. Gair, a Cooley Board member and partner in the New York law firm of Gair, Gair, Conason, Steigman and Mackauf

“S ince I am, as all of you will momentarily be, a graduate of Cooley, I would like to briefly tell you what this school has meant to me.

Twenty five years ago, I was living in New York City with my wife, Teri, and our young son, Daniel. At the time, I was driving a taxi. With some not-so-gentle prodding from my wife, I took the LSAT.

The results of that test, which I now forget or at least choose to, did not cause law schools to actively, or in any other manner, seek my presence. I thus scoured the pages of the law school directory, looking for a school which might recognize my well-disguised brilliance. In doing so, I came across the Thomas M. Cooley Law School. I remember to this day arriving in Lansing in the late fall of 1976 and driving past this building and thinking, this is where I will spend the next three years of my life. Three years that turned out to be three of the happiest, most stimulating, and rewarding years of my life, that provided a foundation for what to-date has been a successful, and more importantly, thoroughly enjoyable, career.

That foundation was provided to me, as it has been to you, by the wonderful, dedicated professors, many of whom are here today.

When I walked across this stage over 20 years ago and out of Cooley Law School for the last time as a student, I did not take the opportunity to thank them.

When, as a young lawyer arguing a motion, a judge said to me, ‘so what’ I understood what Pete Jason had been doing. I have come to understand what Phil Prygoski meant when he told me you won’t remember the names of most of the cases, but you’ll remember the theory and basis of the reasoning.

Being a trial lawyer, I will always remember how my friend Dave Cotter bent the rules to give me the opportunity to try out for the National Moot Court Team. My partner and I had won in the first round, and when it came to argue in the afternoon, he was nowhere to be found. I prevailed upon Dave to let me argue both sides of the issue so that at least I could be considered for the national team, which I was fortunate enough to be named to.

I well remember Bill Weiner explaining the fruit of the poisonous tree, to Stockmeyer and the intricacies of contract law, and Ron Trosty on how to pierce the corporate veil. Every

time I try a case, I am secure that I know the basic rules of evidence, thanks to Elliot Glicksman. I have fond memories of all of you.

What does it mean to be a lawyer?

If you think that the practice of law is an easy way to make a lot of money, you will be sorely mistaken. It is not a 9-5 job. In fact, for the successful lawyer, it is not a job at all, it is a way of life.

This is not to say that you cannot make a lot of money, you certainly can. But that is a by-product of dedicating your whole being to the representation of your clients and knowing that you did all you could, whatever the result.

Last year I received this letter from a client I represented in a medical malpractice action. I don’t read it to be self-laudatory, but only to show you what your hard work and dedication mean to your clients:

‘This is a fan letter — you are super! You so brilliantly guided me through my own deposition — and now I’ve read through your session with the doctor. You’re really a master — so smart, so focused, so compelling! I’m bursting with respect and admiration for you! Thank you for everything!’ To me that is success.

When you are working on a case, remember it is not your case but your client’s case, in whose best interest you must always act to obtain a successful result for the client, not necessarily yourself.

Cooley Law School has given us all the opportunity to be lawyers, good lawyers. Dean Mulligan, in another speech, regarding law school admissions given some 35 years ago while he was still Dean at Fordham Law school, said:

‘Maybe the *summa cum laude* Eagle Scout whose aptitude is near genius will never want to represent clients who are in trouble and need help. College transcripts cannot always indicate motivation or inspiration; testing procedures cannot measure the qualities of heart and spirit essential to the lawyer.’

The friendships I have made at Cooley are ones that will last a lifetime. One of the most rewarding aspects of law school has been the meeting of people with backgrounds and views far removed from my own, and being able to consider those people my friends. I doubt that I will ever again have that feeling of camaraderie.” ■