

FOREWORD

AS EQUALS WITHOUT BEING ALIKE

Hon. Phyllis W. Beck

Today is a day to celebrate. It's a day of personal triumph for the graduates and a day of rejoicing for their families. To the graduates, like Olympian athletes, you've trained, you've mastered, you've performed — and today you collect the GOLD. Whether you realize it or not, Temple Law School — with its iridescent medley of students — has provided fertile soil for you to flourish as human beings and lawyers. With your fellow students, you have learned to live like equals without all being alike. Men, women, Blacks, Latinos, Asians have all been in the same battle — the object has been survival and background or color hasn't mattered — passing those exams have.

But I would be naive if I didn't mention one hierarchy that has obsessed you all — and it's real — that is grades. In law school there is the false notion that how you perform will somehow correlate with your later success as lawyers. That's just not true. There is no doubt that good grades will help you get your first job, but that's it. After that, it is how you perform on the job that counts.

In General Colin Powell's book, *My American Journey*, he describes growing up near Kelly Street in the South Bronx in New York City in a mixed neighborhood: Black, Spanish, Jewish, Irish and Italian. He describes himself as a "nice kid" who didn't succeed at anything. He says his inability to stick to anything was a source of concern to his parents as was his high school average of seventy eight. He joked that City College faculty handed him a diploma, uttered a sigh of relief and was happy to pass him along to the military.

I want to quote directly from General Powell. Although he talks about his education in New York, he could be referring to Temple University, and more specifically, the Law School.

"I owe an unpayable debt to the New York City public education system. I typified the students that CCNY was created to serve, the sons and daughters of the inner-city, the poor, the immigrant. Many of my college classmates had the brainpower to attend Harvard, Yale or Princeton. What they lacked was money and influential connections. Yet they have gone on to compete with and often surpass alumni of the most prestigious private campuses in the country."

Colin Powell found himself — maximized his potential in the military. While at CCNY, he drifted into the ROTC. That same drift principle is also applicable to the careers of most lawyers. Except for those in the fields of patents and tax, most lawyers drift into their life's work. They get a job

because the firm needs someone in bankruptcy or in government contracts or they “drift” into neighborhood practice because they prefer it or because they can’t get a job elsewhere. Then that becomes the lawyers’ life. The law student is unlike the medical student who, by her second year, has decided her professional life for the next forty years. “Drift” has certain advantages. While it’s unsettling, it’s also exciting, unknown and full of surprises. Let me assure you that you will find your way; you will get to where you’re going; so while you may feel a little uncertain today, years from now you’ll look back on today for all its glory and wonder why you were so worried.

Thirty years ago my family — my husband, my four children and my mother — sat where your guests are sitting. After studying for five long years I was awarded my juris doctor degree from Temple night school. I was the only woman in my night school class, and there were three women in the day-school class. After law school, as a woman I found the road was not well lit for me. As a matter of fact it was dark, full of pot holes, booby traps and barricades. I found as the years went by that social forces began to light and repair the road. I am an optimist. So, if you can’t see the road ahead clearly today don’t be discouraged.

I believe things will get better. I believe that as a society we can engage in honest debate, demonstrate mutual respect and basic civility and strive for social justice. We can live and work as equals without being alike. As Martin Luther King said, “We must recognize that we are all family And that is an identity that transcends race, culture, ideology and nationality.” I believe that during your career, you will see progress following Dr. King’s direction, and as a result you will be able to create opportunities for yourselves, your communities, your nation — and even perhaps, the world. As the years go by the road will be better lit and cleared for you.

I want to congratulate not only the graduates but all of the faculty, families and guests here today. You each have made a contribution to the lives of the members of this class. You have enabled them — in some way — to reach their goal and you deserve to share with them the honor of this day.

To the graduates, let me say you are indeed fortunate for the Temple Law School experience. You’ve been superbly educated by a first-rate faculty and in a richly diverse environment. You go forth prepared for the world as it really exists.

Today you and your guests have cause to celebrate.

As this ceremony ends, I hope you feel a little like Stuart Little in E.B. White’s classic children’s story:

He rose from the ditch, climbed into his car and started up the road that led toward the north. The sun was just coming up near the hills on his right. As he peered ahead into the great land that stretched before him, the way seemed so long. But the sky was bright and he somehow felt he was headed in the right direction.