

Lasallian Commencement Address

May 1992

Presented by: Angela M. Welter

Fellow graduates, faculty, administrators, parents, and honored guests. This is a very special day for everyone, and I am very honored to be presenting this speech on behalf of my graduating class. Many of us here completed graduation requirements for a bachelor's or a master's degree within the last few days. Others finished last summer or last fall but have returned to celebrate today. It is the graduates we honor. Today is our day. However, those of you with us also share the honor. Our families, our friends, and the faculty have contributed and helped us persist in the dream that this day would finally arrive. Today's festivities reassure all of us that the struggle, personal effort, and persistence were worthwhile.

As I thought about the remarks I might make, I was reminded of 1st Corinthians – 12: 12. "The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body." To me this quotation best describes what is happening here today. Although we might think differently, appear differently, or act differently, we all share the common experience of a Lewis University education. We are one student body. For this day forward, we will disperse, but we will continue to share a common bond – the challenge and rewards of receiving a private education in the La Sallian tradition.

What is the bond we share? It is the bond created through experiencing a truly nurturing community. This nurturing community, built upon a caring faculty, supportive family and fellow students, available extra-curricular opportunities, and La Sallian education, has brought forth the best in us.

During our time at Lewis, the faculty have displayed genuine concern. They have made themselves available often. They have become our friends. In my own experience, outside the classroom I have had faculty volunteer their time through study sessions, either individually or in groups. I am sure that many of you here know of this first hand, and we are grateful for this personal commitment of the faculty and their ability to be flexible to help us achieve. They have

encouraged our abilities, tested our strengths and helped us to overcome our weaknesses. Without them, we would not be here.

We also would not be here if it weren't for our parents, spouses, families, and others who, to use a Lewis analog, have been our co-pilots. They have encouraged us, supported us, and loved us through the good and the bad times of our lives.

As students of Lewis University, we are all members of a nurturing community that pulls us together as one. The support systems we have developed with one another have encouraged a foundation of tolerance and understanding that has led to many positive interpersonal relationships from which we have drawn. Although established in the past, these relationships are interwoven in to the present and will give us security in the future.

When I began my learning experience here at Lewis, I thought that I was all alone in my pursuit of higher education. I was unaware of the strong bonds that I would establish and how they would lead me to achieve the level of success that I am enjoying here today as a graduate. I am certain that many of you shared similar feelings but also found bonds of hope and experienced achievement.

Beyond faculty, family, and friends, another component of a healthy and nurturing environment can be found in extra-curricular activities. Such opportunities allow students to discover hidden talents and abilities., for me, it has been the debate team, for others it has been athletics, the theatre, honor societies, student government, cultural groups, departmental clubs, and fraternities, among the many opportunities. Taking part in these activities encouraged us, challenged us, and transformed us.

In the union with all the other parts, the entire nurturing community is reflected in Lewis University and the La Sallian education tradition as carried on not only by the Christian Brothers but also by all the members of the Lewis University community. This is witnessed by their shared values, their sensitivity to student, their dedication to education and learning, and their responsiveness to those in need. Because of this tradition, we have grown, together, as part of

one body and we have also been fortunate enough to receive both nurturing and many rewards that we would not have received at any other institution, either public or private.

Nurturing stimulates growth. This is as true in education as it is in careers, child rearing, marriage or friendships. Growth I have witnessed both in myself and in many of my fellow graduates includes increased personal maturity, more self-awareness, enhanced stability, a heightened ethical and moral perspective, an ability to think critically, and a genuine responsiveness to the needs of others.

We have not all grown in all these ways, but because of a Lewis Education, we have all grown. Lewis by providing us with a strong liberal education has encouraged our looking at ourselves boldly and honestly in the mirror of life to find we have changed from that examination. We have found that the clear result of a Lewis Education is that we have become less egocentric and more other-centered.

Being other-centered allows us to both nurture and understand other people. By serving others, we surely serve ourselves. Because of increased self-awareness, we have become better listeners and better friends. A growing number of us has already shown that we care to go beyond self-interest. We have participated as volunteers for University Ministry-sponsored events, offered tutoring services to other students, and counseled others who needed the compassion and understanding of another human being to survive. We have given hope to fellow human beings who had very little for which to hope. We have all achieved while at Lewis and have done a host of things that make our community proud – but none more than the willingness to go beyond personal goals to help others. It is that quality that will make our lives more than career or material successes.

We have matured in many ways—not only in knowledge, but also in character. A powerful predictor of maturity and later success is how accurately a person understands herself or himself. Because of our Lewis experience we now understand ourselves and our abilities better. We have developed a heightened awareness. We have stability, we do not fall apart easily under stress, and we feel more confident about who we are and what we have become.

Because of my experiences here at Lewis, I am now more assertive, more aware of myself, and not afraid to try something new. I am sure that this also applies to all of my fellow graduates in that throughout my course work I have noticed students becoming increasingly more aware and more confident about themselves. Our attitudes and beliefs have matured and changed. We understand others better and more compassionately – surely a strength necessary in the years to follow this commencement.

What kind of differences will the nurturing we have received at Lewis make as we commence from this spot? Again, from both my own experience, and that I can clearly imagine for others among the graduates, I see a life filled with individuals at peace with themselves, I see individuals of strong character, compassion, and love for their family and community. I see individuals who possess the knowledge to enter the world view of other people, to understand others deeply and compassionately.

Very soon each of us will be engaged in fulfilling the dreams for which our experiences at Lewis have prepared us – whether it be Business, Nursing, Law (as in my case), Theatre, Aviation, or the Arts and Sciences. We will face choices, encounter challenges, experience victories, and face moral dilemmas. We will view life as we decide to live it – a joy, a crusade, a mission, an opportunity to make the world a better place.

Our educators and our educational experiences have brought us together and taught us that which we will cherish for a lifetime. As we commence from this day, our lives will scatter in many directions. But, fellow graduates, remember that we are one, and that we all met here, experienced here, grew here, and became someone wonderfully changed here.

Congratulations and good luck to each one of my fellow graduates whatever you may do and wherever life may lead you!