

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
December, 2008
Presented by: Gina Salvatore

Good afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family and friends.

I would like to congratulate all of the graduates today. We are all here for the same reason and that is to celebrate our grand entrance into the world as college graduates. When I was first interviewed to become the Lasallian speaker, I quoted singer Rhianna saying, "Live your life!" Maybe that wasn't the smartest decision. My best friend asked me why I couldn't have quoted a saint or someone like Ghandi. The more I thought it over, I do believe Rhianna. Graduates: We must live our lives to the fullest! St. John Baptist De LaSalle, the founder of the Christian Brothers who sponsor Lewis University, was an ordinary person just like you and I. His first path in life led him to priesthood. However, this is not what made De LaSalle truly happy. Therefore, it was no surprise to those that really knew De LaSalle when he gave up his position as a priest. He then formed a new community of religious teachers in order to educate and serve the poor. De LaSalle had found his personal calling in life. I too share a similar story.

Whether you were eighteen, thirty, or fifty, when you first embarked upon your Lewis University experience, it most likely brings memories filled with butterflies in your stomach. What are your first memories of coming to Lewis? When I came to Lewis two and a half years ago, I was a transfer student from a community college. I chose to complete my Bachelor's degree here because of my attraction to Lewis' nursing program. I also knew that I would not simply be a number in any Lewis classroom. I moved into Mother Theresa Hall and was stuck living with five strangers. I was frustrated, doubtful, and very nervous. I had the attitude that I

would go to school during the week and come home every weekend. As the semester progressed, however, these girls became my friends. We were from all walks of life: each with a different story, but the one thing we had in common was our association with each other and the Lewis community. I learned things about culture and life that couldn't be taught in any Lewis classroom. These girls, these new friends, became my family away from home. We shared birthdays, clothes, laughs, tears, late night study sessions, and much of our time at Lewis together. Just like any family, these girls were my support system. My family at home supported me during my transition into college. My family at school and home supported what was about to become my next transition in life.

Many of us can relate to having that one faculty or staff member who served as a mentor. For me, that person was Dr. Arthur Horton. Dr. Horton told me "life was about choices". I will always respect and admire the profession of nursing, but it was not my calling. Therefore, I know I made the right choice when I changed my major to Social Work. The professors at Lewis have given each of us the foundation to take from every class a lesson to use as we begin our professional lives. My final semester at Lewis I spent interning at Guardian Angel Community Services as a Sexual Assault Victim Advocate. Every time I get paged to a hospital, I know there is a victim waiting on the other side of the hospital door for help. The real world can be an intimidating place for a student. Opening that hospital door is stepping into the real world. I do it day after day, but my instructors gave me the confidence to know I will be okay with whatever comes at me when I open that door.

We all come from diverse backgrounds. Some of us might be transfer students from a community or state college. Some of us might be graduating earlier than expected. Others, like myself, may be graduating late. Some might be going onto graduate school, while others may

already have a job lined up. Our stories may be different, but we're all associated with Lewis because of the values developed in us by the faculty and staff through the spirit of the Lewis mission. This association has caused us to form a close-knit community within Lewis University that has given us friends who became a family, teachers who became mentors, and classmates who challenge us to achieve excellence. We should all be so lucky to have a community like this at Lewis University.

Graduation brings great responsibility. Saint John Baptist De La Salle dedicated his life to serving others. We, too, are called to contribute to society. Whether we serve as social workers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, accountants, teachers, journalists, police officers, we all have the opportunity – and the responsibility- to give back. So much of this year has been spent talking about bringing about change. We, Lewis graduates are the future. Let us use this new found knowledge wisely so that together we can help make the world a better place.

Don't change who you are or ignore your dreams to be what others think you should be. When I quoted Rhianna, I was just being my true and real self. I will graduate from Lewis, living the life I want to live and I am asking you to do the same. So, although your story might not be the same as mine, and you might not have walked through the same path or encountered the same obstacles, we are all here because God wants us to be here. Lewis gave us friendships, inspiring teachers, mentors, memorable activities and events, and most of all, knowledge that we can take into our next path of life. Each individual graduating today will take something away with them from their Lewis experience. But mostly, you take away new understandings about yourself, the people in your life, and God. An instructor once told me "Time is a holy mystery meant to be experienced, not understood, and certainly not controlled." So, it may take some time before our dreams come true, and we may be led on different paths

along the way, but Lewis University will be our footprints in the sand, guiding us onto our next journey in life. Be open to that journey! As we leave here today, don't wait for extraordinary things to happen, because in your anticipation you will miss out on the beauty of life. Live in the present. Keep an open mind, work with God, and allow him to work with you. Congratulations Graduates!