

orientation remarks of genyne edwards

The Law School holds an orientation for new law students before classes begin in August. This provides an opportunity for the new students to be welcomed to Marquette, to law school, and to the legal profession. This year, for example, D. Michael Guerin, L'74, President of the State Bar of Wisconsin, addressed the students on the first day. The orientation concluded with the Dean's Reception at the Milwaukee Public Museum on August 19, 2005.

At a short program preceding the reception, Genyne L. Edwards, L'00, addressed the future Marquette lawyers from her perspective as a relatively recent graduate. In introducing Ms. Edwards, Janine Geske, L'75, Distinguished Professor of Law, noted her work in private practice, in the community, and, most recently, as Deputy Secretary of Tourism for the State of Wisconsin. Ms. Edwards's remarks follow.

Good evening. Thank you, Professor Geske. I would like to begin by recognizing my childhood friend, Dalynn Brookshire, who rarely has the opportunity to hear me speak but is here with me today. I also would like to thank Dean Kearney for providing me with the opportunity to address you this evening.

It is an honor to be here to share a bit of my story with you. It is an honor because eight years ago I sat where you sit today, waiting to hear some words of encouragement to quell the apprehension I had about the new chapter in my life.

Like you, my heart was racing, and I was excited to be one of the few people in

the world chosen to make such an important journey. That aspect of the matter is a vague memory. But it's hard for me to believe our graduating class of 2000 celebrated our five-year reunion this year—for the rest of law school seems like yesterday.

Let me step back for a moment to place my remarks in context. Born and raised in Milwaukee, I am the first attorney in my family. I therefore understood what the law school endeavor meant not only for me or even my family, but also for the Milwaukee community that had witnessed my growth and that had seen me leave for college and return.

In preparing my remarks for tonight, I recalled a statement by Oprah Winfrey, which I'd like to share: "I've come to believe that each of us has a personal calling that's as unique as a fingerprint—and that the best way to succeed is to discover what you love and then find a way to offer it to others in the form of service, working hard, and also allowing the energy of the universe to lead you." I selected this quotation because I individually connect with the ideals of having a personal calling, service, and working hard.

Like many of you, I decided to go to law school because I wanted to help others and effect meaningful change in my community. I'd always been very passionate about music and the arts, and I felt that a law degree would open a path for me to work with artists. Little did I know that law school would do more than provide a path to an exciting career. Law school has been one of the defining events of my life. The experience truly forced me to face a number of insecurities and gave me the inspiration to speak up for others and myself.

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As someone who had spent a few years in corporate America between college and law school, I was able to enter law school with a clear understanding of both why I was there and what areas interested me most. In the fall of 1997, I entered Marquette Law School, knowing full well the purpose and rationale for my pursuit.

Even with this understanding, my first year was not what I expected, nor was it easy. During the first week, I walked into Professor Greg O'Meara's office in tears. I told him that I felt I had made a terrible mistake, that I didn't think I'd fit in, and that I wanted to leave. Thankfully, he talked me out of leaving! For things gradually got much better—especially after I realized that other students didn't know any more than I did.

But still, I remember the first year as being terribly isolating for me. Unlike undergrad, where I built strong relationships and formed a close bond with a small group, law school wasn't a close-knit community where I had tons of friends. It is not that my colleagues and the faculty weren't friendly, but I learned that the law school experience is profoundly personal.

It's extremely personal because you'll quickly appreciate that law school becomes a quest for individual growth and development. Why? In law school, one of the most important insights you'll gain is that there is no single formula that defines the path to personal success.

We all have different goals and priorities, so different aspects of your legal training will make you feel good about yourself, and, of course, a few aspects will make you feel bad or insecure. Most importantly, in law school you appreciate that people have different natural strengths and weaknesses.



Genyne Edwards and Prof. Janine Geske

Each of you possesses unique qualities, and therefore your experiences are valuable, just as much as the next person's. Learn to be aware of your own assets, but also to be humble to acknowledge the expertise of others. Law school isn't "school" in the sense that you go to be taught. Instead, students convene to learn from one another and, together, are trained as the legal thinkers of the future.

I'm sure that in orientation you were told that this semester you will be studying contract law, torts, criminal law, and legal writing and analysis. The law is complex, and law school will be difficult. Practicing law after you graduate will also be demanding. The rumors you've heard do have some basis. However, the extent to which the complexity of law school becomes overwhelming is often a personal choice.

In my experience, law school becomes especially burdensome when you place impractical expectations on yourself and your learning curve.

The personalities of students who enter law school often make for a lot of self-inflicted anxiety to perform

well, to appear astute before classmates, or to astound others. Much of this posturing is unnecessary, because all the other 1Ls will be having the same experience—transitioning to Marquette Law School and acclimating themselves to the teaching styles and the way classes are conducted.

During my second and third years of law school, I began to understand that with hard work (trust me, lots of it) this personal quest could be accomplished. The vast majority of the course work during these years is elective, and you'll be permitted to develop a course progression tailored to your individual interests.

I remember being thrilled about finally reading material that I was engrossed in. I became engaged. I even Am Jur'd my Copyrights class!

My advice to you is to use these upper-level years to experiment with your reactions to different types of law. Take advantage of the programs and services the Law School provides. Find internships and community service opportunities that will allow you to build quality relationships and gain confidence in your knowledge and skills.

Try to get the best idea possible of your legal interests during your three years of legal study.

For example, during my third year, I interned at the Milwaukee Art Museum. True, a museum is not a law firm, but I learned a lot about how the law interacts with the arts and with museum administration.

Finally, keep your mind open to different areas of

the law and how you might use your legal education to challenge yourself. After graduating, I practiced business law for three years. Following my love for music, I decided take a year off to develop a music conference for local artists. After the conference, I worked at the YWCA in public policy. Finally, I ended up where I am today. Five years ago, I would never have guessed that I'd be working in the travel and hospitality industry. I share these experiences with you not to impress you, but to demonstrate that there are many ways to be a good

Marquette lawyer.

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I'm often asked why I went to law school, if I don't practice law. I always answer that, although I'm not actively practicing, I use my trained legal mind every day. In my current role as a public servant at the Department of Tourism, I manage a budget of 15 million dollars and oversee a staff of 45. Every day I problem solve and analyze situations to make difficult decisions that affect people's lives.

Many say that a legal education teaches the uninitiated "how to think like a lawyer," but I am not sure that there is any such thing. Thinking like a lawyer primarily means thinking logically and precisely.

I cannot impress on you the importance of volunteerism and community service. I was able to distinguish and establish myself in my legal career early on by serving others. Many of my personal and profes-

sional successes and the numerous opportunities presented to me have been a direct result of my volunteer work.

For me, the most rewarding times in my public service career have not been centered around the prestige and visibility that my position affords me. Rather they have been centered:

- around serving at-risk youth through my work with Urban Underground;
- around meeting with artists in Milwaukee who need more promotion of their talent and work;
- around sharing my story and mentoring students of color who are at Marquette Law School;
- and now more recently around helping residents in Wisconsin easily access state government and its services.

Whatever I accomplish in the realm of public service, I owe in no small degree to my training at Marquette Law School—where I saw faculty and alumni actually committed to the Jesuit tradition and caring for the whole person. As a member of the Law Alumni Association Board, I can say with confidence that Marquette has many resources available to contribute to your success.

After graduating from Marquette Law School, and for the rest of your lives, you will embody the spirit of service to others. It is no exaggeration to say that your individual legal careers will help to light the path. For the spirit of service endures to cast its glow of inspiration and caring.

Permit me a few words in closing. As you move onward through your first year, I'd like for each of you to remember that your experience will be based on your perspective. You may not always be the top of the class; you may not always be selected for every internship or clerkship; you may not do as well in some activities as others.

Then again, most likely you possess within you many talents and gifts that others admire, including many people in your life who care very much for you. Some of those people are here sitting beside you today. Realize the many things you have to be proud of and the many things in your life for which you should be thankful.

In my view, at the end of the day, your law school success is not dependent on the legal training per se, but the way you view yourself and interact with the world. Again, it's a personal journey.

As a new member of the esteemed Marquette Law family, I'm here to remind you that—even though it's personal—self alone can never form the basis for a truly satisfying existence.

You are here today because you care about society as well as success.

You should leave several years from now, knowing that society's highest values will not be calculated in dollars and cents, but in service to others.

Allow the universe to lead you!

Congratulations, 1Ls, and all the luck in the world!

Thank you very much. •