

Harvard Law School Graduation Speech

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Well, class of 2014. . . wow! This is it! You made it!

Today you are officially graduates—alumni—of the Harvard Law School. Congratulations! Every student graduating today has traveled a remarkable journey to reach this moment. You persevered; you debated; you served; you soared. You have made the law yours and the world will be better for it.

Graduates, you know this day belongs not only to you but also to your family and friends. Parents, grandparents, siblings, children, romantic partners, pals—you know who you are—I salute you! You loaned us your cherished ones. Your support, your encouragement, your love have brought us to this fabulous moment. Graduates, please stand—let’s give your family and friends a standing ovation!

As we celebrate, we have had many speeches, and I promise mine will be short. I am reminded of the story Erskine Bowles, former president of University of North Carolina, told after a colorful uncle passed away. The widow talked with a reporter who was writing a tribute for the local newspaper. The reporter produced a 5,000 word draft, and then phoned the widow to say “By the way, my editor wants me to tell you that it will cost you 50 cents a word.” “Oh no,” she said. “Let’s make it very short.” She paused, and said, “Just write: ‘Sam died.’” The reporter

called back shortly and said: “The editor says there’s a 5 word minimum. What else would you like to say?” The widow thought for a minute and said, “Sam died. Cadillac for sale.” So in that spirit, I will try to make every word count.

Class of 2014, when you arrived, I told you that we searched the world for you. Now you are even more extraordinary. You seized the opportunities and you invented new ones. You demonstrated stamina and creativity. You read and wrote late into the night; you forged teams for study, work, and fun. You refined interviewing techniques, research, arguments—including those presented in the Law School Parody. You offered constructive advice to those like me who will stay after you leave. You made the Haas Lounge hopping with conversation and *pretend* studying.

You edited academic journals and kept people in their homes despite foreclosure. You devised award-winning law reforms for the new mayor of Boston, advocated on behalf of wounded soldiers, and devised tools for schools to protect student privacy in an age of electronic data collection. You defended survivors of domestic violence, improved management of diabetes using state and federal laws and practices. You surveyed intellectual property rules to protect the works of indigenous artists in Australia and produced go-to blogs on corporate governance, labor law, anti-corruption practices, and law’s role in warfare.

117 of you traveled to 65 countries as part of courses, clinical work, research, and summer public service. You tackled issues of patent law to improve access to HIV/AIDS medication in South Africa, antitrust regulation in Brazil, and child marriage in Bangladesh. You examined the role

of historians offering evidence before the Cambodian genocide tribunal and studied the treatment of sexual orientation and gender identity within the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. Your responses to disasters both local and around the world—and your ability to live all day and night in the Wasserstein Caspersen Clinical building—were extraordinary. You created organizations and breathed new energy into old ones—like the Community Enterprise Project's growing economic development in low-income Boston communities.

Your pro bono service was outstanding—amounting to 341,951 hours, at 590 organizations, in 48 countries and 43 states! I ask all who performed pro bono service to stand! You are upstanders! You all leave Harvard Law School and communities beyond us better because you've been here.

Soon we'll give you a tangible acknowledgment of your work and accomplishments. I will hand each of you a diploma. Well, to be utterly precise, as you have learned to be, I'll hand each of you a leather case that is currently empty. After shaking hands with me, you'll exit the stage, have a photo opportunity, and pick up your actual diploma. Please savor your achievement!

We have time for just one more moment of law school, one more lesson. It is this: Use your powers of imagination along with your powers of analysis.

Imagination may seem a quality belonging to inventors and writers of fiction more than to lawyers. Yet, with imagination, you can brainstorm ways to enlarge the pie rather than simply divide it when you negotiate a business deal, or settle a divorce case. You can imagine how the

Internet should be governed when viewed in terms of property, free speech, or public trust. One of our alums, while working as a law firm associate, gazed out his New York City window as he pondered how to help a client lower his tax exposure. Across the water, he saw New Jersey—and thinking about options, he proposed that the business move to New Jersey—which it did, saving considerable taxes along the way. Lawyer Elisabeth Mason had an idea to connect individuals to services for which they are eligible. Now Single-Stop USA's digital tool and partnerships with colleges and organizations cut through tangled bureaucracies.

Imagination matters especially in the midst of failure. Last year, the Boston Red Sox imagined success, and came from the bottom to the top, and relied on teamwork, not superstars. When Red Sox CEO Larry Lucchino and his general counsel, our grad David Friedman, talked last month on campus, they both emphasized the power of imagination, teamwork, and critical thinking—tied to their legal training. Let's hope something similar works this year! And not long ago, a law professor in China launched the idea of “guiding cases” and sparked a new approach to building predictability and consistency in the work of judges.

Imagination is usually understood as the domain of artists. My daughter, Mira Singer, has written over the past year a series of short stories taking place in an imaginary location away from normal time and real places. This "Out of the Way Station" at times appears like a bar, or other times a beauty shop, depending upon who is minding shop. It is a gathering place inviting a few people at a time from across human and fictional worlds. They suddenly find themselves there when facing a difficult obstacle in their own lives. At the Out of the Way Station, they receive the care and sympathetic ear of a bar tender, or hair dresser /manicurist. They also have the

chance to talk with fellow travelers. The station is magical so people who speak different languages can comprehend each other. But it can take a while for them to understand one another's world views and experiences. Characters ask each other what brought them to this place. As they share the problems that prompted their journeys out of time and place, they brainstorm options and evaluate choices. They can then opt to return to when and where they were before or they can open another door and try a different and unknown world. Either way, the characters are bolstered by the time out, renewed by the care and attention, and stimulated by learning about themselves and their fellow travelers' worlds, problems, and opportunities.

Of course I tell this to you as a proud mother; keep your eyes open in the future for works of fiction by Mira Singer, as of last week, a college graduate! Any publishers out there, give me your card. Meanwhile, graduates, I thought we all might find a metaphor for your time here at Harvard Law School and for your destinations to come.

Graduates, your faculty and staff here hope that for you this school has been more than buildings and even more than classes and tests, clinics and papers. Harvard Law School is a gathering place joining people from across many worlds. It is a station where we discuss and examine challenging problems, where we converse with our fellow travelers, and yes, sometimes find sympathetic ears, care, and attention. And because of the magic of the place and the magic of our enterprise, people speaking different languages come to comprehend the words of their companions. It may take a while for us to understand one another's world views and experiences but we do discuss what brings us to this place. We come to share the issues of our collective futures even as we face our individual paths. We brainstorm options and come to understand our

choices. Some of you will return to when and where you were before; others will walk through new doors to new worlds. Bolstered by the time out, renewed and stimulated by learning about yourselves and your fellow travelers' worlds, problems, and opportunities, you will soon depart to law firms and clerkships, nonprofit organizations and businesses, to teaching, or still other steps of self-invention.

Whatever you do next, and after that and after that, here is the opportunity and challenge to come:

Can you create for your colleagues, collaborators, and clients a gathering place joining people from across differences? Can you create safe spaces to examine challenging problems? You will need to earn the trust of others. How? It helps by being trustworthy. Can you converse with others on their journeys even when they are adversaries or competitors? Can you create a station away from the mess that brings clients to you? Can you offer sympathetic ears and attention and enough of a common language to enable you to understand the world views of others, and to help them understand yours? Can you brainstorm options and open new doors or return home to see it anew? Can you strengthen others by listening, by taking apart problems and opportunities layer by layer in the landscape of law, business, and non-profits transforming in this globalizing time. If you can, then the rule of law, insights from the past, and imagination of the future will afford magic and meaning for you and for those you assist.

Because now it is your turn. You, the Harvard Law School class of 2014, will be counsel for the situations to come. You will define law, business, policy, and leadership. Will you take risks, grab challenges, and imagine new approaches to tough problems? Will you question

assumptions? Your influence reflects what Harvard Law School is, who you are and who you will become. There is no greater assemblage of talented, promising, motivated individuals anywhere in the world than the Harvard Law School Class of 2014. I ask you to use your influence to better your communities and the world; I ask you to dig deep into your talents, take risks, make a difference. I also ask you to stay in touch with us, as we will miss you!

We searched the world for each and every one of you—and you have exceeded our hopes.
Congratulations, class of 2014!