



Commencement Address by Laura Garcia-Cannon '91  
May 24, 2008

If someone were to tell me 17 years ago when I was sitting where you are today, that I would be standing before the Saint Mary's class of 2008 as their commencement speaker, I would have never believed it... and I dream big. I am honored to be here today. Honored as I look at my fellow Gaels embarking on a new chapter of your lives, lives that for the most part, have pretty much been mapped out since you were about 5... kindergarten, middle school, junior high, high school, college, you've had a basic blueprint to follow in life - and much of that has been in class. Now you're out. Take a blank sheet of paper... it's up to you to write the script now.

How many of you are going to graduate school? How many of you have that first job? How many of you are going back to sponge off of Mom and Dad?

Some of you might not have any idea what you're doing yet. That's ok. You'll figure it out. It might be scary. I hope you'll find it exciting. If you haven't established that goal in life yet - you will. Find what you love, discover your passion and then, map out your plan on how to get there. Know that this institution and the people behind it and the hundreds of thousands of graduates who made it through, just like you will, we will all be behind you every step of the way. Gael's don't fail.

I knew I wanted to become a journalist since I was in high school. I knew my goal; I just had to figure out how to get there. Saint Mary's College was a big part of that plan. As a Communications Major this school really helped me come out of my shell, discover my voice, give me the confidence to know I could really become what I aspired to be. I can always say I started my career here at KSMC Radio 89.5. I was a news reader for many months before our advisor Ed Tywoniak helped me get an afternoon radio show. It was called "Let's Meet the Faculty" - I think only one roommate of mine actually listened to it. It was my early interviewing skills at their best - or quite frankly, their worst. Was I cut out to this? Could I become an anchor one day in San Francisco, the nation's 5<sup>th</sup> largest market? I can recall fondly the spring afternoon I was in the office of my Communications Professor Kusum Singh. She told me, "Laura, there is nothing you can't do. There is nothing you can't become." If no one has ever said that to you - let me say it to you now. There is nothing you can not do. There is nothing you can not become. Those words have stayed with me and guided me through the struggles of pursuing a career in television news. It's not always as glamorous as it looks. In fact it's never as glamorous as it looks.

I started my first job the Monday after graduating... I was a script runner for ABC News in San Francisco. I worked hard and got paid so little, I had a second job at an advertising agency in Lafayette and at times worked a third job as a hostess or greeter at a restaurant in Concord. I rarely slept, never saw my roommates or friends and couldn't even go home on holidays. If you think about it - there are no holidays in television news. It's always on. I remember holding back tears on the phone with my parents Christmas morning. I wanted to be with them, but I also had my goal to be a journalist, and with that goal there would be sacrifices along the way. I knew there were plenty of other graduates in the nation that would love to have my job. I had an opportunity at my doorstep. I needed to make the most of it. I had to keep my eye on my goal. My production assistant job was far from glamorous, I remember the pressures of running scripts down the hall, minutes before they were to make air, giving them to anchors seconds before they would read them and then ducking off camera under the desk where they sat. Night after night after night, I told myself I was paying my dues, I was paying my dues. But while paying those dues I was paying attention. I wasn't just organizing scripts, I was reading them. I was learning the skills of professional broadcasters. Whatever your job, take the time to learn as much as you can. Be a sponge, soak it up. Ask questions, don't be afraid. I was adding on to the education I received in the classroom at Saint Mary's. But I knew I wanted to be on air, and it wasn't going to happen in market five.

My first on air job was in Fresno. I had to leave my roommates and beloved Bay Area with the belief in myself that if I worked hard, I would return one day... never lose sight of those goals. I was a step closer, I could now call myself a reporter.

I made thirteen thousand dollars a year in that first on air job. I knew it was bad when I was doing an interview for a story with a spokesperson from PG&E about their low income assistance program. I'm holding the microphone, doing the math thinking... I qualify for the story I'm about to present on television!! I went home and signed up after the broadcast.

As for work, I figured I was getting paid in experience. I shot my own video, wrote my own scripts, edited them, and rushed to get them on air on time, because I then had to run studio camera or Teleprompter. I was a grunt. I was overworked, underpaid, but looking back it was the best thing for me. It was invaluable experience that no one could take away from me, and in the future no one could tell me when something couldn't be done. I had done it before - so I knew.

You may have to do jobs you don't want to do on the way to your goals. Sometimes wanting something intensely helps. It will give you that drive. I was willing to go places others were not; I was willing to work longer hours than others would. On the days I was just about beat, I'd remind myself that one day it would all pay off. Never give up. If you want something bad enough you can make it happen.

While you're at it, try to find joy in any job, you can't make life all about the destination, it's the journey. Bringing joy and passion and optimism is not what you get at the top, it's how you get to the top. You'll learn, you'll grow, and you'll change. Hopefully you'll

get to know yourself a little better along the way. I know you're great, but you'll become an even better person.

On the road to success...you may find yourself making sacrifices in other ways. Maybe not getting jobs that you think you should be yours. I applied for a position as a reporter trainee before I left San Francisco. I didn't get it. I thought I should have. But sometime you have to thank God for unanswered prayers. You have to have faith. I didn't know it, but a better job was waiting for me... that one that paid 13 thousand dollars a year! God has a funny sense of humor. But that job led to other opportunities and another and another. I always say when God closes a door he opens a window. You have to be a regular visitor in his house in order to recognize it. An optimist can see the good in anything.

Don't let others put you down. I was also told by a news director once, as my contract was about to expire, that I should get out of the business, or get behind the camera. He wanted me to become a producer. You will have people that will not want you to succeed, but listen to your inner voice, remember the desire you have now, to become what ever it is you want to do in life. Don't lose track of those goals, don't get discouraged. Press on. Instead of taking his advice to get out, I got to work, and got a new job. My old news director's jaw dropped when I told him I got a job at the #1 rated competitor in town. Oh yeah, I was making 22 thousand dollars a year (before taxes) I thought I was so big time.

I moved on a few stations from there, working hard, always learning, trying to become the best that I could be, along the way. An assistant news director once told me, before you ever think about moving on to your next job, make sure you're the best of at what you do in your current job. You can apply this to any career. Don't take shortcuts. Don't expect things to get handed to you. Work for it. You'll respect yourself more in the end knowing you worked for it --- And know, you'll make mistakes along the way. But remember – it's not how hard you fall, it's how high you bounce back. Life doesn't always go as planned, but it's up to you, how you handle it. You can throw in the towel, or you can adjust, move forward and possibly learn from it.

I eventually made it back to San Francisco San Jose. With icing on the cake I anchor the morning news for NBC with my husband. Sometimes we still can't believe we made it. In fact who knew I would ever even meet him? We met out on a story in Fresno, I was dating the competition. Separately, we had our dreams of anchoring in this market. It was a goal I declared when I was probably living in Claeys north or south... where ever Brother Mel was the resident director... and here's this guy from Colorado with the same goal. He left his friends he left his family he left his home state... got in a car with his roommate and headed west searching for a job in television. That's guts, that's wanting something so badly you'll give up everything you know to get it. That's stretching your self. That could be called foolish - his first job only paid 8,000 a year! But know there are hundreds of thousands of graduates just like you entering the workforce. How are you going to stand out in the crowd? Students just like you are getting in their cars half way

across the country. They are leaving the world they know behind. They want the same job you do.

How will you stand out above the rest? First of all, don't go into an interview second guessing yourself. Go in with confidence and faith because you are well prepared. That's what an education here has given you. I hope you paid attention in seminar! I really hope you didn't cheat on any tests! You're not going to give up, you're going to persevere. You are a Gael you have it in you to do whatever you want in life. I see a sea of success stories in the class of 2008.

The odds of it all coming together for my husband and myself, two on air people feels like a million to 1. We attribute it to hard work, perseverance, never losing sight of our dreams, and God – who by the way is a Gael. We've brought home 8 Emmy awards together... I love what I do and can't imagine taking any other path. But at the end of the day I also remember what I do, does not define who I am.

It is easy for that to happen. But life is short. What do you want to be remembered by, what legacy will you leave behind?

Some of the most rewarding times of my career, has been contributing to stories that don't just tell the days news, they do something about the days news. They help a single mother of a disabled child make her rent. They help a young boy break the cycle of poverty in his family by becoming the first to graduate from a Catholic Christian Brothers school in the heart of San Francisco's tenderloin called DeMarillac. I've helped a little old lady get back her life's savings back swindled by an unscrupulous con man, a con man that would later threaten my life, but that's an entirely different story. Remember you can make a difference, in whatever you choose to do in life.

Remember your roots. Remember you're a Gael. Remember the wonderful Lasallian traditions of this school and the Christian Brothers. I challenge you to continue to incorporate those traditions in your everyday life. Have faith in the presence of God. He is with you at all times. He will help plant that seed of direction in your life. Have faith and you will hear his voice. You will have many choices to make in life, some will be better than others, it is how you learn from those bad choices and celebrate the good choices that will propel you forward. Remember, it's not how much you make; it is how you make a difference. Never forget the poor – leave to serve putting the less fortunate before you. Build the inclusive community you think this world should have - into your own lives, neighborhoods, and families... and respect others. You will respect yourself in doing so.

Your learning and living the Lasallian way does not end here, I hope it's a part of who you are. Of what you are yet to become, and an integral way you choose to live your life.

Remember to give back. Remember others first. Thank your parents for all they've done for you. Today would be a good day to do that. Tell them you love them and thank them for supporting you.

Years from now when you drive down the entrance of the front of the school – I hope you have the same stirring feeling I do. This is home, it will always be here for you, and you have no doubt left your own imprint on this campus.

You are and forever will be part of the Saint Mary's Family. Consider it a network of support for the rest of your lives. I know you've made lasting friendships that will carry you through your entire lives. You will lean on those friendships in times of need, loss, hope, happiness and for some of you, love.

I know some will tell you you've just had the best years of your life, but my prediction for you my friends, the class of 2008, the best is yet to come.

Congratulations and thank you.