

**Denise San Antonio Zeman  
President and CEO, Saint Luke's Foundation  
Commencement Remarks  
Case Western Reserve School of Dental Medicine  
Sunday, May 17, 2009  
Church of the Covenant**

*"Congratulations! Today is your day.  
You're off to great places.  
You're off and away."*

This quote, from that great philosopher Dr. Seuss, begins one of the good doctor's poems, "Oh the Places You'll Go," and I can think of no better way to begin our time together on this, the day that begins *your* journeys to great places.

When Dean Goldberg invited me to speak to you today, I was both humbled and delighted. My association with the Case Western Reserve School of Dental Medicine and your Dean dates back to my earliest days at the Saint Luke's Foundation. Just prior to my arrival, our foundation had declined a grant request titled "Expanding the Frontiers of Oral Health Research." At that time we were a brand new health foundation, still trying to figure out how and what to support in the neighborhoods historically served by Saint Luke's Medical Center. I think it's safe to say that back then we simply didn't get quite it. But being the diligent steward of this school that he is, the Dean was not daunted by our lack of sophistication, and it was not long before he returned with Dr. Lalumandier to see if the two of them might be able to help educate us on the connection between good oral health and the health of the community. They had an idea - actually a very good idea - and convinced us to fund a pilot project that would bring dental care directly into a select number of elementary schools in our target neighborhoods. They named that request simply "Teeth Sealant Program for Children"...and happily for all of us, we got that.

That important interaction, and numerous interactions since, have resulted not only in a strong partnership between the Saint Luke's Foundation and the CWRU College of Dental Medicine...our relationship over the past 10 years has made us better health grantmakers, and for that we are very grateful. It helped us embrace the concept that good *oral health* is essential to *good general health and well-being*. And ultimately Dean Goldberg and Dr. Lalumandier inspired us to support their efforts to transform the way Cleveland's children obtain the oral health care and education that they deserve, while simultaneously serving the mission of the Saint Luke's Foundation *to improve and transform health and well being in our community*. And today, every child enrolled in the Cleveland Metropolitan Schools has the opportunity to experience good dental health at the hands of the faculty and dental students from CWRU. Their lives and their health have been transformed.

Transformational change and vision - like that which led to the Healthy Smiles Sealant Program – is grounded in the strong belief that change can and will happen...sometimes for a reason...sometimes for a season...and sometimes for a lifetime. You see, in addition to being an avid Dr. Seuss fan, I am also a big believer in the philosophy behind a piece written by Drew Chalker called “Reason, Season and Lifetime.” In this piece, Chalker notes that *“People always come into your life for a reason...a season...or a lifetime. When you figure out which it is, you will know exactly what to do.”*

For the past four years, some of your classmates, faculty, staff, patients, colleagues and others you have met along the way have been in your life for a reason...to meet a specific need; to help in some way; to get you through a difficulty; to provide guidance and support. Some of these people might be in your life for a long time to come, but for others, these relationships might be coming to an end. Perhaps some of the people you’ve encountered along this journey were there to teach you an important lesson or a technique that you will use over and over as you pursue your career as a dentist. Maybe they taught you something that will give you a distinct advantage over others in your field...a leg up if you will.

Dr. Seuss has something to say about that as well, when he says *“You won’t lag behind, because you’ll have the speed. (That advantage) You’ll pass the whole gang and you’ll soon take the lead. Wherever you fly, you’ll be best of the best. Wherever you go, you will top all the rest”*

Or maybe YOU have been in someone’s life for a REASON...a clinic patient whose pain you relieved, or a child who was inspired by the fact that you gave him his first toothbrush of his very own...you “do what you do” and then...in THEIR life... your work is done...YOU were in THEIR life for THEIR reason.

My hope is that whatever experiences you have had during the past four years that have made an impact on you will become a part of your practice, and that when someone down the road asks you to help someone in need of help, you will remember that perhaps THIS is YOUR CHANCE to be in someone’s life for a REASON.

Then there are people who *come into your life for a SEASON... it is because your turn has come to share, grow or learn...kind of like the “season of Dental School.” People who come into your life for a season may bring you an experience of peace or make you laugh. They may teach you something you have never done. And they usually give you an unbelievable amount of joy.”* And of this joy, Chalker says, *“Believe it! It’s real! But only for a season, and like spring turns into summer and summer to fall, the season eventually ends.”* During these past four years of incredible hard work, sharing, growth and learning, you have achieved a level of educational attainment that few can claim.

In fact, today's Plain Dealer carries a touching story of a man named Leonard Czartoryski...a man who, 63 years ago, had a dream of becoming a dentist. After serving 3 years in the Navy in World War II, he returned home and enrolled at John Carroll University in the summer of 1946. He worked days and went to school nights in pursuit of his dream. When he was about to graduate in 1956, he began to apply to dental schools, and was teased about his ethnic last name, and heard questions that stung, such as "Who would go to a Polish dentist?" The article says the teasing bothered him, but did not stop him. He went on to buy a JCU class ring and wore it proudly, even though it would be 1956 before he finished his coursework. Then, the realities of Cleveland weather and an ugly twist of fate hit him...a snowstorm kept him from his last final exam. The instructor did not believe him and made fun of his ethnic last name. Leonard would have to take the entire course over...something he just could not do. In 1956, immigrants tended to accept fate, and Leonard quit. He removed the ring, and even Anglicized his name so that his children would not have experience this kind of prejudice. He put the ring away, and for the next 30 years Leonard worked hard to raise his family who grew up hearing the story of their dad who almost finished college ...almost fulfilled the most important first milestone in fulfilling his dream of becoming a dentist. Several months ago the president of John Carroll was informed of Leonard's story in the hope that the university might consider awarding Leonard an honorary degree. The request did not fall on deaf ears...but an astute university official matched Leonard's transcript with the requirements of the college of arts and sciences from 1949 to 1956 and discovered that although Leonard did not have sufficient credit to earn a pre-med degree, he did meet the requirements of a degree in sociology. So today, as you receive your degrees as dentists, Leonard's son is standing in for his father, now too frail to travel, to accept his diploma with a degree from John Carroll University...and Leonard, whose ring finger is too calloused and swollen to bear the class ring, now wears it proudly on his smallest finger. And today I ask you, the Class of 2009 from the Case Western Reserve School of Dental Medicine, you who have fulfilled your dream of becoming dentists, to pause for a moment and think about the story of Leonard Czartoryski...a story of a man who dreamed of standing where you stand today...but a man whose seasons of life have taken him in different directions...but whose dream of earning a college diploma will become a reality today, giving him and his family, the joy of a dream fulfilled. (PAUSE)

Hopefully you too have also experienced some moments of pure joy with your colleagues and friends. And although your SEASON of Dental School is about to end, I can almost guarantee that over time, you will miss the people with whom you have shared this season, and you will look upon this time as a season well spent.

And soon you will be out on your own...in practice, the military, making profound discoveries in research, or continuing on to specialty training....beginning a

whole *new* season....one in which those who accompanied you in this season will be long gone.

If Dr. Seuss were here, he might say *“And when you’re alone, there’s a very good chance, you’ll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won’t want to go on.”* But go on you will, because you have had the best possible foundation, and you have prepared well for the seasons ahead.

And finally, somewhere along the line, you will experience those people who will be yours *“for a LIFETIME.”* About these people Chalker says *“Lifetime relationships teach you lifetime lessons; those things you must build upon in order to have a solid foundation. Your job is to accept the lesson; love the person; and put what you have learned to use in all other relationships and areas in your life.”* And I will add that if you truly learn from your lifetime relationships, you will succeed...and Seuss would say *“And will you succeed? Yes you will indeed! Ninety eight and three quarters percent guaranteed!”*

Just as our foundation has been enriched and made infinitely better by our longtime relationship with your School of Dental Medicine, so too will your life and your career be enriched by the lifetime relationships you have made while here, and those that are out there waiting to be made.

I am a member of the Holy Rosary Church community right here in University Circle, and every Sunday Father Racco begins services by welcoming people to church. His words are almost always the same, and they never fail to touch my heart. He welcomes people who are visitors for a joyous occasion, and he also welcomes people who are there because of someone receiving care and treatment at a nearby healthcare institution, reminding them that they, their loved ones, and their caregivers are all part of the prayer life of the Holy Rosary community. And regardless of your faith tradition, for the past four years, whether you knew it or not, or whether you even wanted to be there, you were remembered in our prayers. You have been in our life for a season, and if you choose to stick around, you can be there for a lifetime.

Dean Goldberg and I spoke at length about the purpose of a commencement address. He said that it is one last time to say the things you have been trying to say for four years. He said that it is like when your kids start driving and you say “Don’t speed,” or when your parents are nagging and you say “whatever.” So I will close as I opened, with words from Dr. Seuss: And so...

*“Be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray  
Or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O’Shea,  
You’re off to great places*

*Today is your day!  
Your mountain is waiting  
So...get on your way"*

And so, today, we honor you, we salute you, and we offer you, your families, your professors and the dental community our sincere and heartfelt congratulations!