

Dr. Bohlin, Fr. Rieman, Members of the Board of Trustees, Class of 2005, Faculty, Family and Friends. . . . Good Afternoon! It is such an honor and a pleasure to be here with you today to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of these 10 young women.

To the Class of 2005, I would like to say Congratulations! This is truly a triumphant moment for you! During your years here at Montrose, you have been challenged academically, taught to think critically, encouraged to realize the importance of, and the impact your education will have on your future. That you are here today, prepared to graduate, means that you have been equal to the task.

It's been several years now since my own two daughters were students here at Montrose. Back then; Montrose was located in a small school in Westwood. If you looked out the window, you would often see Fr. Dick out on the field teaching the 6<sup>th</sup> grade Religion class with a game of "Bible Baseball". Dr. Bohlin could be found in a classroom teaching English with her characteristic enthusiasm. Mrs. Tocci, Mrs. Keefe and Mrs. Noble were not yet on the payroll, they were members of the Mothers of Montrose, and I have wonderful memories of working alongside them planning activities and events for our daughters.

Although I see many changes, some things remain the same. I imagine you girls still lug around huge backpacks with mountains of homework inside. And I'm sure more than a few of you have tried to sneak by Miss Rice with your skirts rolled up and shirts untucked. I see many familiar faces here today from years past, and I believe I know why you continue to stay involved with Montrose. It is because you recognize the importance of educating the hearts and minds of young women, who will go on to live lives of leadership and service in our communities and in our world.

When Dr. Bohlin asked me to speak at today's Commencement, I have to admit, I was quite surprised, but I was also honored, because I know Montrose well and have always admired the dedication and commitment with which Montrose carries out its mission.

You, on the other hand, know nothing about me. So, I'd like to take a few minutes to tell you a little bit about myself, about why I've come to speak to you as a friend of Montrose and about my vocation as a Mother.

My ties to Montrose go back a long way. As a matter of fact, I first met Fr. Dick when I was about 7 years old. He was living at a beautiful residence in Boston called Trimount House. I come from a large family, seven brothers and sisters, and every year on Christmas Eve, my parents would take us to Trimount House for Midnight Mass. I remember they had this big, beautiful, sweeping staircase and after Mass, the youngest four of us kids would sit on the stairs and look at the grown-ups, all dressed up in their fancy clothes, eating exotic looking food at the reception. Well, in our young minds, remember, we were five, six, seven, and eight years old, we thought that since Fr. Dick was a Priest, God must have given him this house, and Fr. Dick must have been a very special Priest, indeed, because the house was even more beautiful than God's own house,

which, we assumed was our Parish Church in Milton. After knowing Fr. Dick for many years, I now know that even if he lived in a tent or under a palm tree, Fr. Dick would still be, indeed, a very special person and a very special Priest.

I first heard about Montrose through my brother and sister-in-law, Greg and Colleen Tocci. They were so enthusiastic and excited about this young school. Because we love, respect and trust Greg and Colleen, my husband, Maurice, and I listened to what they had to say about Montrose. It wasn't long before we were convinced to send our daughters to this school that offers something unique and special.

So, here I was, with a wonderful husband, three beautiful children and a nice home. I loved being a wife and mother. I felt blessed that I was able to be at home with my children. I thanked God every day for the graces and blessings He had granted us. Little did I know that my perfect world was about to be turned upside-down.

My son, John, was always a happy, outgoing little boy. He eagerly looked forward to his first day of kindergarten; and that is when the trouble began.

John struggled desperately in school. We had every kind of evaluation done. Although he tested high intellectually, he suffered from a severe language based learning disability. By third grade, John was sad, lonely, defeated. It was at this point that John realized that while he was still struggling to learn to read, the other students were now reading to learn. Unfortunately, the other students realized it too, and teased him mercilessly. They called him stupid and refused to let him play with them. At lunch and recess, he sat alone, humiliated, tears rolling down his cheeks and longing to go home. It was heartbreaking for Maurice and I to see John feel so hopeless.

There is no worse feeling for a parent than to be powerless to help their child. The pain and anguish we feel then they are suffering or struggling is unbearable. It is our nature to help and protect them. As a mother, I always thought I knew all the things I had to fear for my children. I've agonized over all the illnesses and injuries they might suffer. I've worried about strangers that might harm them. I've even fretted over the broken hearts they're bound to have. But never, not once, did I imagine that not being able to learn in the traditional way could be such a threat to my child's happiness. . . . could have so devastating an impact on how he perceived himself.

Lots of children have learning disabilities in varying degrees. Usually, they can be addressed in the child's school through tutoring, different curriculums or teaching the child compensating strategies. Even in third grade, the only word John could read or write was his name. John's disability presented a challenge to his school; they did not know how to help him.

Throughout all this, I asked God how I could help John. In the end, it was John who helped all of us. Although I had managed to find John an outstanding school that saw the potential and the ability that lay within him, the school was not nearby. Landmark, a small school on the north shore of Boston, is renowned for their success in helping

students with learning disabilities and dyslexia succeed academically. The obstacles in getting him there seemed insurmountable at first. It would mean driving a total of 250 miles every day. I was exhausted. I was constantly buying new cars and I had cell phone bills to rival the national debt.

John and I had to get up at 4:30 every morning, only to sit in traffic on Route 128. I would get him to school at about 7:45, then turn around and sit in traffic to go home. Once home, I'd throw in the laundry, do some grocery shopping, and as my mother would say, "waltz around the house with the vacuum". At 1:30, I'd get back in the car to pick John up. We would usually arrive home just in time to put dinner on the table, then, he'd do his homework and fall into bed so we could get up and do it all over again the next day. In the midst of all this, I decided what this family needed was a puppy. I don't know what I was thinking. . . . now, I could add walk the puppy, clean up after the puppy and replace what the puppy had destroyed to the list of things I had a limited amount of time to get done.

After several months of this, my conversations with God were less about me being thankful and more along the lines of "You know, Lord, this is not what I signed up for; I know there must be a lesson in all this, but all I've learned so far is that if it rains or snows, there's an accident or someone has a flat tire, the trip takes twice as long". This was after a few months, how would I ever survive 9 years of this?

What I eventually realized was that I was so caught up in how difficult my life had been made, that I didn't see the miracle that was occurring. Because John was blossoming. Slowly, we were getting our son back. By eighth grade, the little boy who used to sit alone on the playground, who sat friendless at lunch, who couldn't read or write, was starting to stand taller, to smile and laugh again. He had friends and joined teams. Best of all was the day when John came home and proudly announced that he was reading his father's favorite book, *The Old Man and The Sea*. I realized then that every minute and every mile of our journey had been worth it.

Getting up at what could reasonably be called the middle of the night and spending six or seven hours a day driving was difficult, but it was nothing compared to John's struggle. Watching this little boy get up hours before other children to go to school – to see the tremendous effort he put forth every day to master the very basics of reading, writing and math – to continue trying even after so much failure, well, it was inspiring. The lessons for me would not be found in my own struggle, but in John's. He taught my family so much about perseverance, sacrifice, duty, faith and hope. One of great lessons I learned through John's difficult journey is that every child, every one of us, has a gift. God's gift to John was the hope for happiness, the humility to say, "I will let you help me", and the faith to know that all God asks of us is to get up everyday and do our best. John also taught me that we all have limitations, as well. Your gifts and your limitations do not define who you are. What defines who you are is how you use your gifts, and that you don't use your limitations as an excuse to live a less full, less joyful life.

John has always dreamed of becoming a professional Chef. During his senior year at Landmark, he only applied to two schools. I pointed out to John that they were the top two schools in the country in the Culinary Arts field, that their programs included demanding academics, and each of the schools had an average of 3000 applicants and only accepted 42 students. I suggested that he might want to apply to a couple of other schools with less demanding criteria for admission. But John said, “No, if I don’t get in, then I guess that’s not where I’m meant to be”. Where does one so young get such wisdom, such faith? But he knew in his heart he had done his best, had tried his hardest. So then we waited and prayed.

In June that year, not only did John walk away from Landmark with acceptance to both of those culinary schools, but he also received the Outstanding Student Achievement Award as well as the Citizen of the Year Award. I can’t begin to express the joy and gratitude my family felt that day. In his quiet, humble way, John had shouldered a burden and walked a path that led us all to a deeper understanding of the human capacity for hope, faith and love.

My life is different now. John is living Florida doing an internship in a restaurant at a beautiful resort. My daughter, Renee, is getting married in August. My daughter, Jenny, is finishing her last year of college. Maurice still goes to work every day, because in his words, “Someone has to pay for this party”. The puppy is an old dog now, who spends his days going from the couch to the chair to the bed. The house is quieter; it seems bigger somehow. At times, I think I can hear the echo of the laughter and the tears of those years when our children were young. It certainly was a bumpy ride, but I’m grateful for the journey. For it is through this journey that I have learned a very important truth; that our children don’t really belong to us, they belong to God. Mothers are His special guardians, to whom He grants special graces and powerful prayers, to watch over them until one day they return to Him.

Helen Keller once said, “When God closes a door of happiness to us, somewhere He opens another. But we often spend so long looking at the door that has been closed, that we do not see the one which He has opened for us”. I learned from John to always seek the open door. I found, during those years, that behind one door was my wonderful husband, Maurice, who would get up and drive John for me on the mornings when I was just too exhausted. Behind another door were Renee and Jenny, who even during the most difficult times brightened my days with their joy and laughter. There have been other special people behind those doors; my brothers and sisters, Fr. Dick, my dear friends, Lyn, Colleen and Jan; my Godchild, Connie. Always look for the open door, the happiness you find will usually be in the form of someone who loves and cares for you. They will make you laugh, or share your burden; sometimes, they will just listen, and sometimes, that’s all you need.

In preparation for today, I wanted to get to know a little bit about you as a class, so I spoke with Dr. Bohlin, Mrs. Tocci and Fr. Dick, who know and care a great deal about you. After hearing what they had to say, I wish I’d had the opportunity to get to know you better. You sound like a remarkable group of young women. Dr. Bohlin describes

your class as “small but mighty”. Your intense spirit of service to the school has always impressed Mrs. Tocci. Fr. Dick is amazed by what big hearts you have. They told me of your maturity, your humor; that you care deeply for one another; they spoke of your ability to lead in a quiet, selfless way. It is clear that you have filled the hearts and brightened the lives of your families and friends; now we look forward to watching as you venture forth to brighten the rest of the world.

As happy as this day is for you and your families, it’s a bittersweet time, as well. In just a little while, you will accept your diploma and eagerly leave Montrose to pursue your dreams. But it is unlikely that any other school will offer the warm, caring, nurturing atmosphere that is unique to Montrose. I’m sure you’ve all recently spent some time reflecting on your years in school, and, more than likely, felt some anxiety and uncertainty about your future. But you can take comfort in knowing that Montrose has prepared you well. With the guidance, expertise and dedication of your teachers, you stand before us today – strong, confident, excited about your future and ready to face the challenges that lie ahead.

I suppose you could say the same thing about the thousands of other students across the country graduating this spring; but you have an advantage, because Montrose has seen you not only as a student, but also, as a child of God; and that is the Montrose difference.

Montrose’s mission, to educate women of character and faith, is truly a noble goal. But how does one teach and measure the development of character, or the depth of faith?

Well, Montrose has given you a start through your ongoing discussions of faith, hope, love, humility and so many other virtues. These discussions have fostered in you an awareness of the dignity of each human being. You have been encouraged to practice these virtues here in your school, in your homes and in your communities. The opportunity to attend daily Mass, or just stop into the Chapel to say a quick prayer or to receive a blessing, have helped you grow in knowledge of your faith and develop a deeper relationship with God. You have been encouraged to seek the truth in all you do and to make decisions based on a selfless love of God and others.

Today, as you leave Montrose for the last time, the promise and possibilities for the future are endless. In the years ahead, you may continue your studies in college, travel, join the work force, marry and raise a family. You will have days of happiness, peace and contentment, and, undoubtedly, you will experience times of trouble and sorrow. It is these difficult times that will be your true test of character.

I guess another way to look at it is if you think of the stained glass windows in a church. When it is dark, you can’t see the beautiful colors of the windows; but when a light shines through them, it is then that you can see how magnificent the windows are. If you are the church, then that light that shines from within you is your character and it will show the remarkable beauty that you possess. It will inspire others to find that light within themselves.

For, in the end, it matters not how grand a home you live in, but how many people you welcomed into your home; not what your job title was, but that you did your job to the best of your ability; not how many friends you have, but to whom you were a friend. Share your joy with others; face adversity with grace and dignity; accept the will of God with humility and faith. Listen to others with an open and generous heart. Do not hold onto anger and resentment; find it in your heart to always forgive. Look beyond yourself so that you may recognize what is finest in others, and encourage it; in that way, you will inspire them to become the best person they can be.

With knowledge and independence comes responsibility. You have spent the past 12 years seeking knowledge under the ever-watchful eye of your families and school. And though when you leave Montrose, you will continue to gain wisdom through further schooling and your life experiences, and, of course, you will remain in the hearts and prayers of your family, you will most certainly gain a much larger measure of independence. What that really means, aside from making more decisions on your own, is that you will have an influence on a greater number of people, whether fellow students, your boss or co-workers, your husband or children. This is an awesome responsibility and probably one of the most difficult things God asks; to live our lives in such a way that others will see Him in us.

And what of Faith? We have all asked ourselves, what is it? Do I have it? Do I have enough of it? Sometimes your faith will be strengthened, sometimes it will be tested.

There is a quote that says: “Sometimes the Lord calms the storm; sometimes the Lord lets the storm rage and calms His child”. What this means is that God is always with you. If you believe this, then you have Faith enough.

Take time every day for prayer – during times of joy, say thank you, during times of despair, say help me. Your daily conversation with God will give you strength, it will give you peace, and it will give you hope; and sometimes, that’s all we have.

You will often hear people say that you only need one person in your corner to make a difference in your life; one person that cares enough about you to help you find your way. Today, as you look around and see all those gathered here to celebrate with you, you can see that your corner has become rather crowded.

You have, of course, your families, those people in your life who have always been in your corner; who know you and love you best and have always been your champions.

There is also an extremely dedicated board of trustees, who have made your future a priority in their lives. Add to that an administration that works hard to make Montrose the unique and outstanding school that it is.

And then, there are your teachers and advisors, those that coached you on a field or directed you on a stage. . . with compassion and patience, encouragement and understanding, this extraordinary and tremendously dedicated group has been the key to

unlocking all the potential that lies within each one of you. They have never given up on you and not allowed you to give up on yourselves, even in the most difficult of times.

Fr. Dick and Fr. Joe are there in your corner, as well. You hold a special place in their hearts. You can be assured that you will always be in their prayers.

Don't forget that you have each other, classmates, friends, and confidants. You have shared so much, from the classroom where you learned to read and write, to the stage and fields where you sang and danced, laughed and played. You have encouraged and supported each other in times of heartache and sorrow; you have rejoiced and celebrated games won, opening nights, cast parties, wonderful achievements and so many accomplishments.

All these people have contributed to and been an important part of your Montrose journey. As you can see, a corner just won't do it anymore. It now takes an entire gymnasium to contain the people who care about you, who believe so deeply and so strongly that within each of you lie the potential and the hope for a happy, bright, successful future.

Kids are funny. . . when they're very young; they think their parents know everything. We rate right up there with Sesame Street, Happy Meals and Disney World. Then, when they get to "that age" – you know the age I mean – suddenly, we know nothing. It's amazing we manage to dress and feed ourselves! Every comment we make is considered a criticism – we are very uncool. And then, they pass "that age" and start to see their parents as wise, possibly even worthy of going to for advice.

It is not just your perception that has changed; your parents are wiser. It is wisdom born of pain and anguish, joy and hope. Because the story I told you today is your parent's story, too. It may have been a different challenge or heartache, but they have grown through their deep love for you.

I'd like to take the liberty of saying to you what I believe your parents would say if they were standing up here beside me; I think they would say that you have enriched their lives with your laughter and your tears, your struggle and your achievements. You have inspired them with your determination and strength. Watching you learn and grow and strive to be the very best that you can be has been a privilege and a pleasure. Wherever your go, their hearts will go with you; and whatever you do, whatever challenges you meet, remember this day and know that there is a whole gymnasium full of people who will continue to laugh with you, cry with you, cheer you on and pray for you.

Congratulations! I wish you all the very best in the future.