

A Defiant Class
Communication Commencement Address
by Ian Bush '04

Four years ago, you couldn't turn on your television without being barraged by images from news and feature outlets and infomercials – all riding the heels of the explosion of cable.

Two of those images became indelibly – and perhaps inexplicably – etched in my mind.

The first was Ron Popeil, reminding us to “set it and forget it!” while hawking his *Showtime Rotisserie Oven*. Besides the fact that it was so ubiquitous, and the audience reactions so memorably contrived, that's the one I can't explain.

The second was a heavily-promoted, year-long series of reports on the evening news of one of the major networks profiling the high school class of 2000.

The network's executives came up with the idea that the first class to graduate from high school in the 21st century should be, by rule, extraordinary – as if by virtue of birth date, not *birthright*, we were the standard-bearers of a new dawn. Soon, other commentators and writers picked up on the “Class of 2000” idea and placed a harrowing call to duty on our shoulders: as the future of the world, our charge would be not only to secure the legacy of history, but also to forge a new era for humanity. We had to step up and become the new ‘greatest generation.’ But their blanket generalizations were woven with sarcasm, as if they already decided that we could never live up to the expectations they had for us – that our *defiant attitude, an attitude characterized by dissent, insubordination, and resistance, would lead to our demise*. Indeed, as one correspondent asked incredulously, “How could much good arise from a class defined by Columbine, a class preoccupied with violent or otherwise narcissistic video games and shows? At what price our future with the high school class of 2000 at the helm?”

Sure, the pessimism made for great ratings then. But there's a reason why you still see that rotisserie oven advertised, and why you don't see or hear much mentioned about our class now.

We – now the Villanova University Graduating Class of 2004 – don't make the headlines anymore like we did as the high school graduating class of 2000. Stories about us aren't advertised a great deal. The Villanova class of 2004 is, in the eyes of those news execs, a failure.

We're a failure because we didn't live up to – or, in reality, sink down to their expectations of us. To win viewers and readers, as Villanova Professor Matthew Kerbel writes in his book...“if it bleeds, it leads.” The more lurid, the more violent, the more dramatic stories are the ones that get the airtime.

We're a failure. And in that, we are a success.

In a word, we are...defiant, but not in the way the newscasters meant.

Right now, you're probably thinking about those who end up in the public safety blotter – they're the ones who are defiant. But let me talk to you about an alternative connotation.

I first learned of a different “defiance” from my parents. Not long before I was born, my mother was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Doctors told her bringing me to term would severely risk her chance of survival. But she was defiant. Her faith and love impelled her to go against her doctor's wishes. And my father supported her and selflessly cared for her every step of the way, as he still does. For me, no gift can ever match that of my parents, the strongest people I will ever know.

The devoted bond of family changed the meaning of defiance for me.

Our catalyst – since day one – has been the Villanova community.

While our professors may have been displeased when we showed up late for class or left our cell phones on, these were not the true acts of defiance our professors hoped to cultivate. Instead, defiance, however subtle and inconspicuous, was being taught in the classroom, and translated by us into daily life. Class discussions often boiled over to the realm of the extra-curricular – to a point where no sport, fraternity, sorority, or organization remained without the foundation of the values inherent to every Villanova man or woman.

Societal norms exist largely without direction. The principles *veritas, unitas, caritas* – revered by Augustine, adopted by the university, and lived by its community – provide clear direction, a roadmap for life.

If the norm of society is to treat any group of individuals or people with a lack of respect, dignity, or justice, then we *must* be defiant.

If the norm of society is to be discriminatory, bigoted, racist, sexist, homophobic, or class-ist, then we *must* be defiant.

If the norm of society is to discourage moral, pluralistic thinking, then we *must* be defiant.

If the norm of society is to devalue the work of those who strive for peace and justice, then we *must* be defiant.

Indeed, if defiance means dissent, insubordination, and resistance against these societal mores, then we *must* be defiant.

Winston Churchill said, “The world was meant to be wooed and won by youth.” We've courted the world with the values we've learned and practiced at Villanova. Now, she's

ours to win. If we are defiant – if we say the words and do the deeds, and thus make proactive our belief in the principles of truth, unity, and charity, ours will be a society won over – a society defined by dignity, respect, a love of knowledge, and a love of one another.

We are the Villanova class of 2004. Today, we set out to change this world, to make it proud, to fill it with awe. This day begins a story that might not fit the criteria for the evening news...but instead will stand the test of time.

Thank you.