

Peter Cassidy Acceptance Speech – April 29th, 2008

Good evening Reverend Father, Trustees, Members of Senior Administration, Presenters, Guests, Family members and most importantly, Student Honourees.

Thank you very much Mrs. Gicante for that fine work of fiction and your good advice over the years, most recently on the development of this address.

I would like to thank Anita Rodrigues, a former colleague from John Paul II for presenting me as a candidate for this year. Anita typifies the many professional friendships that I have come to enjoy in my work in teaching. I have, in my career, been in a rather large number of schools and that has allowed me to meet many memorable students and colleagues. My parents, on the other hand, think I have trouble keeping a steady job.

Congratulations to all of the student recipients for this year and thank you. I have come to look forward to this event because I find it so rejuvenating for me as a teacher. Each of you has made a significant contribution to the life of your communities and you are an inspiration to the students and the adults in your schools. I wish you continued success in school and beyond.

Like many of you, I suspect, I am more than just a bit uncomfortable being singled out like this. My reasons are simple:

First, I am being recognized for doing something that I absolutely love.

Second, I am a person of rather humble abilities but a lot of good fortune.

You see,

I was an average scholar

I was a very average athlete

and

I can't sing or dance.

I guess you can decide how I am at making speeches

I do think that I have always tried to do my best, have sought to embrace the leadership opportunities as they have become available to me and never stopped learning. I have also tried to stick close to my Catholic Faith

Catholic Education has provided me with ongoing opportunities for leadership and growth, including service as principal of my former high school in St. Thomas. If you count the time I spent as a student and the twenty-three years as a teacher and administrator, that makes ...

153 years that I have spent in Catholic schools in my life.

I was really average at math as well.

And in all the time that I've spent in Catholic Schools, my Catholic Education has never really stopped. I just traded my classroom desk for a high school locker and finally a Principal's office.

Tonight, I would like to share a few thoughts with you, the student award recipients, fully conscious of the fact that I stand between you folks, the table of deserts out there and the Stanley Cup playoffs. I would like to pay tribute to some of the many people who have contributed to my ongoing Catholic Education and frame it in the context of some of my favourite images from the Bible and my Catholic upbringing.

As a teacher, I have always been mindful of two simple images from the New Testament; the lamp under the bushel and the mustard seed. Both of these stories speak to me about releasing untapped potential, which is the essence of we try to do every day as teachers. I am pretty sure that many of you are here tonight as a result of someone giving you an opportunity to let your light shine in school. In many ways, we are all like the tiny mustard seed. No matter what point we are at in our lives or the magnitude of our achievements, there is always room to grow and potential to be released. Thanks to the many teachers and colleagues who have helped me to realize my potential through Catholic Education and I hope that I have been able to do the same for others.

The Apostle Peter

It has always been a curious coincidence that I share my name with Peter the apostle because we seem to have a fair bit in common. Despite being chosen by Jesus for the important job of serving as the first Pope, Gospel evidence suggests that Peter was endowed with a healthy dose of human frailty. I feel a great kinship with Peter because, despite my sometimes misplaced enthusiasm and predisposition for sticking my foot in my mouth, people throughout my life have shown more faith in me than I have had in myself. They have provided me with guidance and encouragement and this has made all the difference to me.

I guess that's God's plan for each of us. He accepts our humanity and is always prepared to give us a second chance.

The Guardian Angel

When I was a little kid, my mother described how each of us had a guardian angel who would keep us safe and out of trouble. Now this came as a particular source of comfort prior to the invention of the goalie mask and the bicycle helmet.

I have come to realize as I have grown that there is actually a legion of guardian angels who have been keeping a very close eye on me throughout my time in Catholic schools both as a student and teacher, they just happen to have human forms. I would like to thank a few of them for their particular contribution to my Catholic Education.

I am grateful to a number of the Sisters of St. Joseph who were teachers of mine and who founded St. Joseph's High School. I found many of them to be wonderful models of a faith-filled life, brilliant and very cool. I loved school thanks to the encouragement of so many dedicated teachers who served also as coaches, play directors and club advisors. Every time I enter the gym at St. Joseph's, I am reminded of Tommy White, who coached me in basketball despite the fact that I never scored a single basket in a game as I recall. I did accumulate a rather high number of fouls.

In the adult part of my Catholic education I have been very fortunate to work with a great many people who are very dedicated to the service of Catholic Education. I would like to think that I share this honour with them in recognition of their collective contribution to the lives of our students and to my professional growth. I would like to thank two very special individuals for their mentoring in my teaching career. Mentoring is what they call guardian angels in ecumenical Human Resources offices.

The first person is Carolyn McDonald who works in the program department of the school board. Carolyn and I worked together at John Paul II and she continually advises and encourages me in my role as a Catholic educator. Carolyn is a master at seeing the light in people and then encouraging them to share it and she has done that for me and others on many occasions. You students would not know it but you

have all benefited from Carolyn's tireless efforts in our Catholic school system.

I would like to pay particular tribute to my former boss, Mr. Jim Costigan. Jim and I worked together for many years at John Paul II and St. Joseph's. Jim encouraged me to develop my leadership potential, provided sound advice throughout our years together and has engaged me in discussions about every topic under the sun. Jim has been a source of good counsel and support to me as a teacher, department head, vice principal, principal, father, friend and even the complex science of golf. On a night when we celebrate achievements in our Catholic school system, I am proud to share the names of these two individuals with you. I hope that you young people are lucky enough to have such wonderful teachers and mentors in your lives.

My greatest source of support is my family. My own children are each blessed with their own unique talents and gifts. I try to encourage them to take a few more risks than I did when I was their age and I take pride in their exciting and varied achievements. My wife Susan is a brilliant example of an active Faith, and a darn good French teacher as well. She has always supported me in my work and life and I am very grateful to her for that. I realize that the notion of angels buzzing around might seem a bit hokey but I believe very strongly in the notion of the guardian angel. Never doubt your mother when she tells you something.

As a final thought, I would like to call upon perhaps my favourite phrase from the Bible as it has been a source of guidance for me in my life. It is from Paul's second letter to Timothy and I think it's a good bit of travel advice as you journey through your lives. Fight the good fight, finish the race and keep the faith.

Fight the good fight. Don't shy away from fighting for what is really important to you including the Catholic values that are being taught and practiced in school. The world is crying for justice and young people like you can do much to answer those pleas.

Finish the race. You all have much to look forward to in your lives and they are truly full of promise. Make sure that you keep your enthusiasm, embrace all of the wonderful opportunities that come your way and test yourself when you can.

Keep the Faith. My Catholic Faith has been a great help to me and I am proud of my Catholic heritage. Try to work through the periods of cynicism and hard times and work to keep a healthy faith. It has helped me and my family in our lives. For you parents, your children need your support in their Faith development.

So you see, my Catholic Education has never really stopped. Throughout my year as a student, teacher and administrator, I have been blessed many times with countless opportunities for leadership and growth and I am very grateful to the many students, teachers and

professional colleagues who have helped me in my ongoing Catholic Education.

Congratulations to our student award winners for your achievements so far and I hope that your time in our Catholic Schools is as rich and rewarding as mine. I wish you continued success and blessings in your lives. Thanks to the Board for this recognition and thanks to all of you for your kind attention.