

8-28-2008

Convocation 2008 Address by Alumna Liza Talusan

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Recommended Citation

Talusan, Liza, "Convocation 2008 Address by Alumna Liza Talusan" (2008). *Convocation Addresses*. Paper 4.
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Convocation speech by Liza Talusan '97

Aug. 28, 2008

Thank you, Dean Bengochea, members of the Platform Party, President Higdon, faculty, staff, administrators and students here today. It is both a pleasure and honor to represent the more than 24,000 Connecticut College alumni around the world as we welcome you to our very special community.

I am sure by now you have heard time and again how important these next few years are for you – whether you are arriving as a new student in the Class of 2012, as a transfer student (which is how I began my Connecticut College journey) or as an experienced returning student. By now you've heard over and over again that these years will be the "best ones of your life," that "you'll make some of your closest friends during this time," and that "you'll engage in discussions you've never been able to have before coming to Connecticut College." Naturally, they are right ... and so much more.

But, I'm going to share with you something that I didn't learn at my Convocation 14 years ago. And while the faculty and administrators greatly inspired me during my years at Connecticut College, one of the most important lessons I learned about our community didn't happen in the classrooms, nor as a housefellow in Windham, nor while hanging out at Unity House. I didn't learn it as a member of the Williams Street Mix, and I certainly didn't learn it my senior year in the Cro Bar. No, what I learned about the Connecticut College community happened long after I graduated, years after I married my Connecticut College sweetheart, and even after we had our first child.

See, in August 2005, just three short years ago, my husband, Jorge, and I were busy chasing around our 2-year-old toddler, Joli. We were busy being young parents, young professionals, and trying live life to its fullest. We had carefully mapped out our lives while at Connecticut College and were following our plan to the "T." Then, one day, out of nowhere, our healthy 2-year-old girl who was just learning her ABCs, with an afro that added 4 inches to her height, was diagnosed with cancer.

Thanks to three Connecticut College alumni from the classes of '95 and '97, and with support from others in the Connecticut College community, people helped our family. We received letters and cards from friends we had known and professors who taught and inspired us in the classrooms. This community supported us when we could barely keep it together from one day to the next.

And, while Jorge and I were touched by the people we had known at the College, we were completely surprised by the outpouring of support from Connecticut College "strangers." Our e-mail boxes began to fill with messages that started with the phrases, "You have no idea who I am, but I am a Connecticut College alum," or "I know we have never met, but I am the mother of a current Connecticut College student." We received letters from women from the class of 1965, notes from parents and students from the classes of 2003 and 2004, and words of prayers from nearly every class in between.

In August 2005, we learned something about Connecticut College that we never could have understood when we sat in this room attending our own Convocation ceremony. We learned that being a member of the Connecticut College community meant more than being connected to people with whom we shared classes, commons rooms, and meals in the Burdick dining hall. The community included anyone who was a student, a friend, a parent, an alum, faculty, staff or administrator. But, we never would have foreseen that our definition of this community would include not only all of you here today, but also all

of those who came before both you and me, and all the people whose lives will be touched by Connecticut College in our future. The community that you will hear so much about both in the next few days and years is a community that is larger than you and I can ever imagine. And, as the Connecticut College community welcomed and embraced my family during its most difficult times, I know that during your time here, and long after you graduate, you will bear witness to the humanity, support, kindness and unconditional regard for the human spirit that Connecticut College not only embraces but also teaches us by example.

So, on this Convocation day, just one week before Joli, a 5-year-old, healthy and one-eyed cancer survivor, starts her first day in kindergarten, it is my privilege to join the many others who have already welcomed you to Connecticut College. But more importantly, it is an honor to welcome you to a community committed to supporting you no matter where your life journey takes you.



The Talusan-Vega girls