

Miracles

Jun 20, 2016

The following remarks were made by John Luth '74, founder, CEO and chairman of Seabury Group, to the Holy Cross Leadership Council of New York at its annual dinner on Monday, June 20, 2016 at The Pierre, New York, New York. Luth was honored by the Council for his extraordinary dedication and generosity to the College. [Learn more about the Holy Cross Leadership Council of New York](#) »



John E. Luth '74

It is truly a great honor to be here as tonight's honoree.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce my immediate family members attending tonight's dinner:

My, wife, **Dr. Joanne Chouinard-Luth**, who truly is the love-of-my life and my partner in making our donations to Holy Cross. Jo was my college sweetheart, and after an unfortunate miscommunication we broke up, but were reunited 38 years after not communicating or knowing

of each other's whereabouts. We were reunited by a classmate who was her boyfriend before me, and I proposed to her on the 40th anniversary of our first date. We have been married for 2 ½ years now.

Cecile Chouinard (known as "CC") — my 95-year-old mother-in-law (CC and her late husband, Roger, were always an inspiration to me)

Ann Luth, my 92-year-old mother (Ann, together with my father, the late Louis Luth Jr. (or "Lou" to all who knew him), have always lead by example in their religious convictions and generosity to the church and others)

My children, **Hamilton**, who will be a freshman at Manhattan College this fall, and our twin 13-year-olds, **Avery** and **Martha**

And among my nine siblings, five are present tonight:

My oldest brother, **Louis Luth, III** from Norfolk-area, Virginia. Louis is a retired metallurgical engineer — he used to build the very large propellers that go on nuclear submarines.

My second-oldest brother, **Dr. Gregory P. Luth**, and his wife, **Shilin**, from San Jose, California. Greg owns his own structural engineering firm, and he is the lead structural engineer for Apple's new headquarters building as well as Telsa's Gigafactory.

My third oldest sister, **Mary Kurre**, and her husband, **Ken Kurre**, from St. Charles, Missouri, where I grew up. Mary is a retired nurse.

One of my younger brothers, **Gerard**, and his wife, **Kathy Luth**, from Olathe, Kansas. Gerard is one of those smart programming guys who helps utilities around the country figure out how to bill you.

One of my younger sisters, **Agnes Densmore**, from Plymouth, Massachusetts. Agnes is a renowned midwife in the South Boston community, having delivered well over 1,000 babies in her career.

I would like to thank all of you for coming out tonight to support this annual dinner of the Holy Cross Leadership Council of New York and its efforts to provide summer internships to students. As you heard previously, the Leadership Council began its work in 1997. ***We have more than 440 attending this dinner, and through your generosity, as well as many who could not be here with us tonight, together we have raised over \$590,000.*** Both new records!!

I am especially grateful that my partners and clients of the Seabury Group came out in support tonight. And I believe together with my family and friends, they total 148 strong!

I founded the Seabury Group 21 years ago this month, and I am proud to say that we will shortly reach a milestone of signing our 1,300th engagement — with more than 300 clients in over 60 countries around the world. Our success is due in large measure to my partners. They are simply an extraordinary group of individuals who have defied the odds over and over again. And, in doing so, they have looked past my many entrepreneurial failures and foibles.

My education at Holy Cross was truly transformative — and I owe a debt of gratitude for the rest of my life to the Jesuits. My years on Mount St. James provided me with the intellectual and moral foundation that has given me the tools to succeed in a fast-changing and uncertain world. Holy Cross was the last formative experience that was as once rooted in — and distant from — my familial environment back in Missouri.

I am profoundly biased in my belief that colleges should educate the whole person — intellectually, morally, and physically. For those not familiar with Holy Cross, here are a few facts:

It was established in 1843 as the first Catholic college in New England originally all male, it became coed and enrolled its first women in the fall of 1972 as both freshmen and juniors — therefore my class of 1974 graduated the first women who transferred in my junior year — a number of whom are here tonight. During my years at Holy Cross, **Fr. John E. Brooks, S.J. '49** was president of the College, serving from 1970-1994. That was the longest tenure of any president of the College. John Brooks famously went up and down the east coast after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., to recruit 20 African-American men to study at Holy Cross. Among them, were:

- **Clarence Thomas**, the future Supreme Court justice (with whom I had the privilege of serving on the College's Board of Trustees);
- **Edward P. Jones**, who would go on to win the Pulitzer Prize for literature;
- **Theodore Wells**, who would become one of the nation's most successful defense attorneys; and, of course,
- **Stan Grayson**, former Deputy Mayor of New York City, who was pointed out earlier this evening as being in attendance tonight, a prior honoree of the Holy Cross Leadership Council Dinner, and who, coincidentally, was my RA in Healy dorm my first year on Mount St. James.

Along the way, Fr. Brooks and his successors, and in particular Fr. McFarland, laid the foundation for continuing the College's mission by becoming one of only 39 colleges and universities in America that adhere to a "**need-blind**" / "**meets-full-need admissions**" policy. Today over 25 percent of the student body are of a minority background.

For that reason, the funds raised by tonight's dinner go directly to support Holy Cross students who are decidedly neither wealthy nor "connected" particularly when measured relative to students at other prestigious undergraduate programs.

I know from my own experience that without the support of others, the odds are long to get into a great institution like Holy Cross — and even longer in getting started with a good job.

My own beginning was decidedly a modest middle class upbringing. My father was the head of maintenance for my mother's family's trucking business. But most days he was dressed in overalls, covered in grease, working below a hoisted tractor trailer. For those reasons I was certainly not destined to attend a private college, much less one far from Missouri.

So, how did I get to be standing here before you tonight?!



John Flavan '53

Pay It Forward

*Beyond my wonderful parents,
John was my "first miracle."*

~John Luth '74, June 20, 2016

John Luth '74 came to Holy Cross with help from his friend and mentor, John Flavan '53.

Learn more about John Flavan and how his generosity inspired the largest gift in the College's history »

Well that is too long of a story to tell tonight ... But it comes down to the kind actions of one man: **John Flavan**, class of '53, who gave me the encouragement and financial support necessary to attend Holy Cross. Beyond my wonderful parents, John was my "first miracle."

A little known fact is that John Flavan provided more than two dozen men and women the financial support to attend private high schools and colleges and universities around the country. His generosity started with me. Years later, when I had the resources to repay his generosity, he refused, and instead told me to "pay it forward."

An internship program supported by Holy Cross alumni did not exist when I attended Holy Cross. When I graduated from The Cross, I was extremely fortunate to matriculate directly into Wharton's MBA program. I say "fortunate" as 1974 was a recession year, and with significant debts and no connections to get a job in the east, I am not sure what I would have done in the alternative!

So when it came time to “land an internship” between years at Wharton, I found I was one of only a handful of Wharton grad students without any directly relevant internship experience. I cannot tell you how profoundly difficult it was finding an internship that summer!

Ultimately, I landed an internship at the First National Bank of St. Louis working for a wonderful man — **Robert Schmidt** — who shortly thereafter would end up in New York as Treasurer of the American Express Company. Bob’s generosity in taking a “risk” in hiring me as an intern was another “miracle” in my life.

I credit that internship, along with my Holy Cross and Wharton educations, as leading to my first job as a financial analyst in the corporate finance group at Exxon corporation’s world headquarters. That in turn led to other careers at Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company and Continental Airlines.

But, there were other “miracles” in my life – not the least of which are my children and being reunited with Joanne 38 years after last seeing or corresponding with her.

The point of all of this is that each of us has an opportunity to make a difference in other peoples’ lives by perhaps working a few of our own “miracles” for others. In that spirit, I encourage all of us to make a renewed effort at establishing internship programs at our firms to assist the generations coming behind us.

For the Holy Cross interns in the room — and my own children — I would like to leave you with the following quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

“The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.”

And for the rest of you, I offer up one of my favorite quotes by Albert Einstein:

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Ladies and gentlemen, while I realize Einstein was referring to a more global cosmic set of miracles, I like that quote because it is a reminder to me of how miraculous my own life has been.

Saint Ignatius, in his many writings, urges us “to live life for others.” Those teachings are the very essence of our *alma mater’s* modern motto, which is — “to educate men and women for others.”

Jo and I believe we are at the very beginning of a wonderful journey – and, God willing, we hope to work in partnership with many of you for many years to come.

In closing, I would like to say a “special thanks” to my immediate family and partners at Seabury for bearing with me on this pilgrimage.

And thank all of you for your support and generosity!



COLLEGE OF THE
Holy Cross

College of the Holy Cross

1 College Street, Worcester, MA 01610 • [508-793-2011](tel:508-793-2011)

© 2015 College of the Holy Cross. All rights reserved.