

Brian M. Sax Prize for Excellence in Clinical Advocacy
April 17, 2006

Speech of Sax Prize Winner Amanda Parks

Thank you all for being here.

I am truly humbled by this honor.

When I look around at the tremendous work that the other students and Clinics have been doing at the East Bay Community Law Center, the Domestic Violence Clinic, the International Human Rights Clinic, and the Law and Technology Clinic, I know that I do not stand up here alone. I stand alongside all of you and I share this award with each of you.

I'd like to thank the Sax family for instituting this prize to recognize the important the work that Boalt Clinics are doing and I'd also like to thank the prize committee.

And to my fellow students in the Death Penalty Clinic, working with you has really been my pleasure. Your boundless energy and commitment to our clients is inspiring.

And most importantly, I want to thank the people who never get awards for their work but probably deserve it the most. Thank you to Lis Semel, Chuck Weisselberg, and Ty Alper for founding and maintaining the Death Penalty Clinic. I am inspired by your dedication and passion to your work, to the students, and, most of all, to our clients. You play so many roles – attorney, professor, supervisor, mentor, and, I'd like to say, friend. You have always treated students as equal members of the legal team – teaching us the tools and giving us the responsibility to make strategic decisions that are important to our cases and our clients. Thank you for trusting me with that incredible responsibility. You are really the **true believers** and I only hope that I can walk in your footsteps. Please join me in applauding them.

I am grateful for this award but, I must say, the work itself was the true prize. During my time in the Clinic, I have had some truly extraordinary experiences. I've built a relationship with a client that means more to me than I can say. I've been to conferences where I met icons in the criminal and death penalty defense community. I had the chance to meet and interview people who told me about things I had only read about in history books. And, of course, I did plenty of legal research and writing. Some of these experiences I expected – like the research and writing part – and others I could have never dreamed of. For example, I have learned to navigate around Alabama. In fact, I bet you could drop me anywhere in the state with a map and I could find my way ... to

the airport and back to California pretty quickly. All joking aside, even my worst day in Alabama was more rewarding than any single day in law school.

During my time in the Clinic, I also became a part of a movement. This is not the Clinic's mission, but my experiences in the Clinic unquestionably shaped my thinking. It is a movement fighting for fairness in the criminal justice system and to end the death penalty in this country. It is a movement full of dedicated and concerned attorneys, activists, investigators, and the families of murder victims and incarcerated people. While we are still in the minority, I know we are right and the system is wrong. And I believe that we will eventually win our fight.

Most of all, I am deeply humbled by our clients, whose strength and resilience simply amaze me. Our clients have such courage that they trust law students with their cases, their families, and literally with their lives. And I have learned so many things from them. I have learned to finally appreciate poetry. I have learned the true meaning of courage. And more than anything else, I have learned that a person is so much more than the worst thing he's ever done.

I want to introduce my next remarks by saying that I have been taught to be vigilant about protecting the attorney-client privilege and that no waiver of the attorney-client privilege is intended when I tell you I know that our client's favorite poem, which is by Langston Hughes. The poem is called "Still Here" and I think it exemplifies the kind of personal strength that our clients have so I'd like to share it with you. Mr. Hughes writes:

I been scared and battered.
My hopes the wind done scattered.
Snow has friz me,
Sun has baked me,

Looks like between 'em they done
Tried to make me

Stop laughin', stop lovin', stop livin'--
But I don't care!
I'm still here!

Ironically, today is our client's birthday. It is ironic because, on this day meant for celebrating his life, he is sitting on death row in a State that is desperately trying to kill him. I hope you will join me in celebrating his life today. And in wishing him a lifetime full of birthdays yet to come.

Thank you.