

**Remarks of James M. Maloney, January 25, 2018, on accepting the  
Fort Schuyler Maritime Alumni Association Dedicated Service Award**

© 2018 James M. Maloney  
Permission to reproduce this text is given freely.

They say I've got seven minutes, so I brought my own stopwatch, and gavel. [THUMP]

Thank you, Ted, and thanks to the Awards Committee and the Alumni Association Board for this honor. Congratulations to my fellow Maritime College alumnus, fellow Fordham Law alumnus, and fellow maritime lawyer, Michael Chalos.

Ted said something about me walking on water. I don't think so. I just try to keep my head above water. I find it's easier to breathe that way.

But I want to tell you about a time when I was really in over my head. That was back in the year 2000, before I was, before I was ever a member of the Association Board. I decided that it would be a good idea then to sue SUNY. You see, back in the 1950s, the United States sold the land and buildings at Fort Schuyler to the State of New York for one dollar, and New York got all that great waterfront property basically for free because New York agreed then and there that it would [QUOTE] "continuously use the property . . . as a maritime school, devoted exclusively to purposes of nautical education and for no other purpose." That's exactly what it says in the deed. So as I saw it back then, when SUNY announced around 1999 that it was going to start making nautical education optional for students, that it was going to start recruiting non-cadets to the Maritime College who would presumably not be trained in seamanship and leadership, well I figured New York was possibly, you know, breaching the terms of the deal. And since I had just come out of law school and I was still very naive, I thought, well, I'll just march into federal court and seek a little justice. I'll just get a federal judge to decide whether optionalizing nautical education would violate the terms of the land grant. I couldn't get anyone else to join my lawsuit as a plaintiff—not the alumni association, not the Marine Society of the City of New York, not the United States Department of Justice, so I just went ahead on my own. I felt very strongly that it was something that needed to be done, and so I started the case.

I didn't succeed. But I tried really hard. And I will say this: when you put everything you have into a fight and still get your ass kicked really badly, you learn a lot.

As a matter of fact, we mainly learn from our failures, not from our successes. My wife Debbie is very fond of saying: "Experience is what you get when you don't get what you want."

So I've been really lucky. Thank you.

And I've been really lucky, I've gotten a lot of great experience.

Seriously, I have been very lucky. I'm not complaining. One very fortunate thing that's happened during the last few years, you've heard already, I've had the opportunity to teach as an

adjunct in the GBAT Department up at Maritime. And so I've had a chance to be on campus, and to see how the school is functioning with the new non-regimental students there. Most of my students are non-reg. And many of those students are very bright, and many are very motivated, and they're all very polite and respectful, and overall, they're a great bunch of students to teach. I think you see the irony in the fact that I'm now teaching, and enjoying teaching, some of the very students that almost twenty years ago I tried very hard to keep out.

And this brings me to my main point. As they say in the Middle East, the camel is the tent. The new students are here, and they're going to keep enrolling, and keep graduating. And, as Albert Einstein once said, individuals should not be held responsible for the acts of their governments. We can't hold it against these new students that it's no longer "exclusively nautical education" at Maritime. We not only have to welcome them into our association, but we should also help to bring them something extra while they're at the school. We all know that what you learn in college is not limited to the courses that we take for credit. I've found that many of these new students are very interested in learning about seamanship and leadership. They see the training ship sitting there, but they hardly ever get a chance to get aboard it. Some actually switch to license programs because they have that interest, but the rest would benefit greatly if there were extracurricular programs for "inclusively nautical education," even if the school isn't committed to "exclusively nautical education" any more. But to do that well is going to require outside help. SUNY isn't going to do it alone, and that's where we come in. And now for the really good news.

The new seven-year strategic plan for the Maritime College, which was just released last month in draft form, calls for more alumni participation, including mentoring and teaching. That was mentioned already by Admiral Alfultis. And one of the top priorities, listen carefully, is [QUOTE] "Expand leadership development opportunities, and promote their benefits to all students, regardless of their programs or career plans." That sounds to me like the beginning of "inclusively nautical education" for all students. In fact, if you read this plan carefully—and kudos to the Admiral and everybody who put it together—if you read this plan carefully, I think you'll find in it a characteristic that Jose Femenia has always been fond of talking about: synergy. The quality of the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In fact, when I first looked at the new strategic plan, with its goals of building a culture at Maritime that is multi-cultural, and environmentally aware, and includes leadership training for all students, I was struck by how much it parallels the good seamanship and good shipmatehood ideas that I wrote about in my very, very, very long letter to the faculty, which I printed up and hand-delivered to all the faculty mailboxes back in February of 2000, before I'd even learned about the land grant, let alone started a lawsuit. That letter's online, by the way, and you can find a link to it on my SUNY Maritime bio page.

Anyway, I'm very optimistic about the future of the school, and about the role this organization can now once again have in helping to shape that future. Here's a closing thought for you: the alumni association was formed in 1903, so sometime in 2017 it became 114 years old. If you do the arithmetic, you'll see that that's a million hours. I find that interesting because we measure running time on marine engines in hours, even when the numbers get very big. So this engine of ours, this alumni association, has now been running continuously for over a million hours. And a month ago, that engine got reconnected to the vessel it's supposed to help power. And so now, we can finally say that we are doing that thing that my friend and mentor Joe Gerson used to write when he signed his letters. We are steaming smartly as before. Thank you.