



## Valedictorian Wins Religious Freedom Case

In 2008, Griffith, a co-valedictorian at Butte High School with a 4.0 GPA, was selected to speak at her senior class graduation. She hoped to use the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to communicate the following: “I didn’t let fear keep me from sharing Christ and His joy with those around me.... I learned not to be known for my grades or for what I did during school, but for being committed to my faith and morals and being someone who lived with a purpose from God, with a passionate love for Him.”



Predictably, her squeamish elders deemed that her spiritual testimony needed to be tweaked, because there was “a state law forbidding” religious references. For instance, “Christ” was to be edited to the benign “my faith,” and “for Him” was to be altered to the humanistic “of mankind.” Griffith declined the suggestions, and the academically accomplished student was told she could not speak at the Butte commencement.

But this young lady — no lamb — now has big-time bragging rights, winning the Montana Supreme Court decision after losing in a lower court. The latter ruling (rightly decided in this writer’s opinion), and the fact that her banned words have been disseminated to an even larger audience than originally planned, is an enormously gratifying victory for Griffith and religious speech.

Constitutional-rights attorney John Whitehead’s organization — [The Rutherford Institute](#) — argued Griffith’s appeal on her behalf. “I hope this sends a message to school districts across the country that students should not be treated as second-class citizens,” stated Whitehead.

Since Griffith has joined that group of elite Americans whose valedictory addresses spawned a successful lawsuit, one hopes that she will be inspired to remain a fearless soldier in the culture wars. If she ever needs a dollop of motivation to press on, she can always fire up her computer and catch the ubiquitous Peter Sprigg in action.

A long time ago, in a galaxy far away — 1975 to be exact — Sprigg, himself, starred in the role of defiant, but point on, valedictorian. This must have been before nervous Nellies (impersonating school administrators) vetted copy, because Sprigg actually got to deliver his contentious valedictory remarks to Fitchburg, Massachusetts, classmates, teachers, parents, and administrators.

Sounding almost like a shock jock, Sprigg railed: “I wish I could say that we have been challenged, stimulated, and inspired by Fitchburg High School, but I cannot. I wish I could say that college course



Written by [Isabel Lyman](#) on December 18, 2010

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students have been fully prepared for the world of higher education, and other students for the world of work, but I cannot. I wish I could conclude as the 1971 speaker did, that ‘the education offered is one of quality,’ but I cannot. ”

That *j'accuse* made such an impression on one 17-year-old graduate in the audience that he can still repeat those words, almost verbatim. (How do I know? I’m happily married to him.) Sprigg’s speech even rated an entire (largely complimentary) editorial in the [Fitchburg Daily Sentinel](#).

Today, Sprigg, who is an ordained Baptist minister and a senior fellow at the Family Research Council in Washington, D.C., regularly debates opponents on national television shows about human sexuality, the military’s DADT policy, religion in public life, and other contentious topics. When the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) recently named the Family Research Center to its ‘hate’ list, the organization singled out Sprigg as an “anti-gay” propagandist extraordinaire.

Once a provocative valedictorian, always a provocative valedictorian.

And, now, thanks to Renee Griffith, currently a sophomore at Evangel College, provocative words just received a little more protection.



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