“The Hospitality of Writing”  
Mount Aloysius Speaker Series  
October 25, 2012  
Introductory Remarks of President Tom Foley

Best-selling author Thomas Freidman tells us that we live in an increasingly “flat” world where the technologies of texting and other 24/7 communication formats make “Beijing, Bangalore and Bethesda next door neighbors.” I happen to think we also live in an increasingly “divided” world, geographically, culturally, technologically, in terms of wealth and scarce resources, war and peace, education and illiteracy. We seem more often these days to incline to extremes rather than to common ground, let alone to what Martin Luther King described as a “single garment of destiny.” Words like “compromise” and “globalization” and even “diversity” are mostly now loaded terms with pejorative meanings.

And so last year, we focused our speaker series on “Civil Discourse”—the idea that how we communicate in person, in public and on the internet should at all times be responsive and respectful, without compromising our beliefs or the passion behind them. We brought 11 speakers to campus, sponsored 15 events around the theme—in the classroom, in our lecture series and even in the dormitory. And Mt Aloysius received national recognition for our emphatic approach to the topic.

This year, we come at the same problem—Freidman’s “flat” world and my “divided’ one—from a slightly different angle. In the midst of all that diversity of opinion—the “divided world” that I referred to—there is one constant. And that constant is change—maybe the only constant in your young lives.

The danger in a world so driven by change—24/7 driven—is that the sheer pace of that change—and sometimes the sheer non-sense and unfathomability of some of it—means we start to lose our place in the world, in our own world—in our haven, our sanctuary, our personal or safe place, our home—as we try to deal with these 24/7 “inputs.”

This 24/7 pace means that you are bombarded every time you open your laptop or turn on the TV. This 24/7 pace means that you can get overwhelmed with what Dean of Faculty Dr. Fulop referred to as the “look and lifestyles of the Kardashians” to the exclusion of what he called, in his Convocation remarks, a “liberated mind.”

This 24/7 pace means that in keeping up with all that information, all the political, fashion, and lifestyle exhortations that are directed at you (and at you personally with the technology that is now available to internet marketeers), the sheer effort of keeping up can cause you to lose your own place in the world, in your world.
And so this year, we focus our attention on a theme that responds we hope to all that constant change—“Finding Home in a Changing World,” which we symbolize with one word from among the four Mercy core values—and that word is “Hospitality.”

We have addressed the theme a number of times already this year—and the back of your program lists some of those efforts. Today, we embrace this theme of hospitality—“Finding Home in a Changing World”—with this Fall Honors Lecture on “The Hospitality of Writing,” delivered by two outstanding practitioners of the art.”

When I asked them to come, I wrote these words to them: “The idea here is that in an age where young people are being encouraged by their modes of communication to use fewer and fewer words in more and more impersonal ways to communicate with each other, we do not want to lose sight of the essential gallantry that is inherent in good writing. We would like to host a lecture on the “hospitality” of writing, on how good writing can open up new worlds of ideas, of geography, of feelings.” We are grateful that this husband and wife—32 years married-- accepted our invitation.

We believe that Pulitzer Prize winner David Shribman and Professor Cindy Skrzycki are almost uniquely qualified as a couple to speak to this topic--David because of your editorial writing work at the Post-Gazette and your superb handling of the Sunday editorial page in general (among many other responsibilities at the paper); and Cindy because of your role as a teacher of writing at a major university (and one who has just won an award in her profession from her students and colleagues). Thank you for coming to Mt Aloysius College.