**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**LARK WILL**

Parents, families, friends, teachers, priests, school administrators... We want to acknowledge you for your enthusiasm and involvement in supporting and encouraging this year’s seniors to realize their goal. Graduates of Bishop Kenny High School, you **MADE IT**!!! And now the fun begins.... as you move on to the next phases of your lives, the scenery will change, the climb to the next levels of achievement... whether they are personal, professional, or academic, will become steeper. You will find yourselves in new surroundings. You’ll learn how to navigate boldly to find your place on the landscape and your “**seat at the table.”**

Every year, as we evolve as a community and a society, conditions present themselves.... some issues are resolved while others provoke us to ask questions and look for more effective solutions. In a way, every aspect of life is a mathematic equation.... every challenge is like a science experiment, and every “**AHA**” moment has the force and power of a chemical reaction. The Will Family was so fortunate to have a patriarch that really cared about people and the inequities in the world. He dedicated himself to solving the puzzles that challenged equality and diversity.

Throughout his life, John J. Will was devoted to three things: his family, his love of science, and his belief in the power of women and the potential impact they wield. My father was definitely our champion... that is, he watched out for and guided, both my sister, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and me so that we had confidence, smarts, and the innate knowledge that we were capable of achieving whatever we set our minds to..... now if only those darned opportunities would materialize... A wise man once said, “If opportunity knocks and you can’t find the door, **BUILD ONE**.” John Will spent a fair amount of energy and ingenuity fighting for a level playing field... one in which girls had... and **have** the freedom and the respect to participate as completely as their male counterparts. Please don’t misinterpret this concept.... my father was equally respectful of boys, but for him it was about **representation**, sharing unique perspectives, getting a “fair shake,” and knowing that a gathering of diverse voices makes the sweetest music.... to all of the fathers, big brothers, and male influences present today, your encouragement of young women goes a long way and has a multi pronged effect.... validation for these bright young women, the chance for greater discoveries and more innovation in the STEM sector, and an authentic sense that **YOU, TOO**, are a part of a bigger, more positive shift in the workforce.

This last year has brought focus to an issue that is in the process of being exposed and addressed, and while no one.... that we know of... has yet to scratch their scalps while breaking through the glass ceiling, advancements have been made. There’s still of work to do. Tracy Chou, a software engineer at Pinterest, has said, “I have very personally felt the overwhelming loneliness, self-doubt, and frustration that often comes with the minority status of women in engineering. As much as I’d like to help others... avoid those difficult stretches... I’d like to. As a bonus, the more women (and minorities) that enter and don’t leave the field, the better it gets for everyone...”

This year’s recipient of the fourth annual John J. Will Science and Technology Memorial Scholarship is someone who has distinguished herself with her intelligence, inquisitiveness, enthusiasm, and thirst for knowledge. She possesses the qualities we encourage, and this year, we are very proud to present this award to Eliana Namen (**Do you want to mention that she is the first Hispanic recipient?**). The entire Will family congratulates you! We are eager to follow your academic adventures and we are confident that, with the future in **YOUR** hands, there will be positive changes that will, in turn, allow for other smart, innovative young women to **join the “party.**” Thank you all!