

## WHAT DO I BELIEVE

By Tim Guth '80

This short sentence seems simple enough. A student in grade school can easily read it. Only four uncomplicated words but in an increasingly complicated and confusing world, these four short words when combined together define each of us into who and what we are.

In essence, what we believe is what defines each of us, not our jobs nor our possessions because those are temporary things. They pass through our lives like the wind. Some would argue that your race and or nationality define who we are but that was an accident of our birth over which we had no control.

However, a person's belief makes each of us unique. Belief in something generates the energy and ideas that allow men and women to accomplish extraordinary things. But what do I believe?

I graduated from St. Olaf in 1980. I believe in different things now than I used to believe in when I was at St. Olaf. Not all things mind you, but enough important things that I even surprise myself occasionally when I am given a survey from one political party or the other and am forced to actually rank different national issues into priorities.

However, one thing I absolutely believe in comes from my experience in my profession and that thing is Evil. I didn't really believe that evil existed when I was at St. Olaf. Sure, I had the theological and Christian upbringing regarding the concept of evil when I attended parochial grade school and through confirmation classes.

But that was more an abstract intellectual knowledge without real experience. Having grown up in a small town in southeastern Minnesota combined with four years on the hill, I had never experienced evil personally.

That changed after I became a criminal prosecutor and then later as a criminal defense attorney. While I can say that in 23 years as an attorney specializing in criminal law, the vast majority of my contacts with criminal defendants have not been unpleasant and have given me some of my proudest moments, I can also say that I have met two truly evil people both of whom left a lasting impression on me.

What made these two men evil? I don't know. I can tell you that they weren't mentally ill as that term is legally defined nor were they lacking in the ability to intellectually reason and or converse with you on a number of subjects. But as a United States Supreme court justice once said about pornography (I know it when I see it), you know evil when you see it face to face and it scares the hell out of you.

My belief in the existence of evil has not made me paranoid nor has it made me timid. What it has done is given me the realization that every day on earth is limited and that your relationships with your family and friends are the most precious things on earth and that you should never treat your job, career or possessions more importantly.

The knowledge and belief in the existence of evil gives you the energy to defend the weak, vulnerable and children from the truly evil amongst us and also the ability to focus on what is truly important in our day to day lives and to live each day with purpose. That I submit is what we should all believe in.