

**Occasional Address
at the Graduation Ceremony
University of Canberra**

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I congratulate all of you who have graduated today. It is a special time for everyone here, not just because Graduation occurs in this special place and with each graduate's family as honoured guests, but because it marks an end and also a beginning. It is an end of one phase of your life and the beginning of the next. That is so for me, too. This is the last University of Canberra Graduation Ceremony at which I shall be present as Vice-Chancellor. It marks the approaching end of more than eleven years of my life in that role, and heralds the beginning of a new phase in that life. Like most of you, no doubt, I do not have a clear sense of all that will be part of that new phase. Like most of you, again, I am experiencing a mixture of emotions — some sadness at the approaching conclusion of what has been the most productive period of my life, joy at the accomplishments of my students and staff, pleasure at the beauty of the campus and its wonderfully inclusive ambience, a little apprehension at what might be coming, but also some excitement at the possibilities, and so on.

What can I, at what is conventionally the end of my working life offer you at what for many of you is conventionally the beginning of your working life as a professional? Incidentally, I should point out that I have no intention that this will be the end of work for me — I like work! My working life started at about this time of the year in 1958, at the end of my university examinations 43 years ago. Australia then had less than half its present population, it had only eight universities, and much of what we teach at university today was not known. We were, however, rather better at tennis and about the same standard at cricket — although in the 1960s to come the West Indies were about to show us something about fast bowling and good batting. It was a wonderful time: Australia was growing in wealth and in confidence, the spectres of the second world war and, even worse, the possible nuclear third world war were beginning to recede. I was about to marry, and babies were a little way off, though rather closer than either my wife or I thought.

I am not going to give you my history, but I want to give to you some sense of the unpredictability of life, and impress on you the need to keep your options open. I was intended for the teaching profession, mostly because my Dad and my Mum were both high school teachers, as were some of my uncles. So let's spin forward five years from that graduation, to the end of 1964. I am now a postdoctoral fellow at Oxford University, working in a discipline I never even studied as an undergraduate, and planning to go to the USA. Spin forward another five years: I am undertaking the first national survey of political

attitudes and behaviour ever carried out in my own country, using techniques and computers I first used in Britain and the USA, and leading a staff of around 200 people. Spin forward another five years: I am a professor at a new university in Sydney, writing a column in a national weekly newspaper, appearing on radio and television, with two books published and a third big one in preparation. But it is only fifteen years after my last exams.

Of course, that was a good time to be alive and to be entering the workforce. The expanding university system picked me up and carried me with it. Indeed, I have never been able to leave university! But the paradoxes are endless. I was being prepared for one thing, and finished up doing something else. I studied two subjects very seriously, but finished up in a third. I saw myself teaching in New South Wales country high schools, but found myself using very large computers in a leading American university. I was a country boy who disliked cities, but I have spent most of my life living in them and indeed I now study them.

If there is a message in all of this autobiography, it is that one should not hold rigidly to any plan about what life will be about. Life has its own energy, its own agenda. The important thing is to see the opportunities, and to seize them. I have been reading little biographical stories from the graduates of one of the University's professional programs, and a persistent theme is the steady knocking on the door of opportunity, not always the opportunity that one hoped for, or planned for, but opportunity nonetheless. Hear that knock, and seize that opportunity! The world is very short of skill, and you all have skill. Not only do you have the specific skills around which your degree courses have been built, but you also have a set of associated skills that have much more general application. Build on those, as well as on your specific knowledge. Most people today who were trained in one area are working in another. Skills travel!

What else can I pass on? Well, I had no idea that I would spend any considerable time of my life overseas when first graduated. Actually, I have lived and worked in both the USA and the UK, not once, but on a number of occasions. I have lectured in universities all over the world. I have had to learn some elementary phrases in a dozen or so languages. I have had to learn that politeness takes many forms, and that it is always better to be polite. As someone who remembered the Second World War as a boy, I had an internal antagonism about Japan and about going there. But I have dealt with that antagonism, visited Japan on many occasions, and come to appreciate the Japanese people and their culture. So the message here is two-fold: see the world as a place to explore and to participate in, and don't take with you too many prejudices about other peoples, their cultures, their food and their values. We have a lot to learn about the world, and the sooner we learn about it, the better.

A third thing I really want to pass on is the importance of continuing to learn. My generation thought you really only needed to go to school. If you were one of those who went to university you only did the one degree. But I found quickly that what you knew only fitted you to learn the next thing you had to acquire. A wise man whom I had the luck to meet also told me that though I

should go on learning and never stop, it was important to learn only as much as one needed. He thought that there was no great point in becoming a master of knowledge for its own sake. Knowledge is there to be used, and used properly. The point of all our learning is the use of our knowledge, not its acquisition. Though there is a great debate about all this, especially in the university world, I think he was right. I have gone on learning throughout my working life, but I try to learn what I have to learn, not everything that goes with it. I will go on learning until the end.

In speeches like this, brevity is everything. You won't remember my speech next week, and in a few years' time you won't even remember who the speaker was. But if I'm a bit lucky you might remember three little bits of advice: keep your options open, explore the world, and go on learning. I have had a marvellous working life, and I can only wish the same for you all.