

**Embargoed until 3 pm 25 May 2013**

**Graduation Address  
25 May 2013  
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E nga mana, E nga reo, E nga hau e wha, tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotu katoa

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, members of Council, Colleagues, Graduands, families and friends.

W.H Auden said that

“A Professor is someone who talks in someone else’s sleep”

I hope that I am a Professorial exception to Auden’s definition and that I can keep you all awake for the next few minutes.

First of all congratulations to all you new graduands. Special thanks, also to all your friends, families and colleagues who have worked so hard to get you to this place. You are graduating in your own right but you could not have made it without the support and help of others. Now is the time for celebration and quiet reflection on all those who helped you --in good times and bad- teachers, peers and wise mentors.

This day is also a chance for you to reflect on times well spent and misspent; the growing up that you did; the crazy and serious things you got involved in and the learning that took place. You came here with lofty ambitions, hopes and interests. I hope that you are leaving with most of these hopes fulfilled and that whenever you hear Otago’s name you will have positive and warm memories.

In terms of your vocations I wish you well in whatever career you choose. The most useful careers advice I can give you, is (i) never accept a position that has no interest for you (unless it's a choice between unemployment and boredom) . (ii) Direct all your passion to it, learn all that you can from it and I can guarantee, that the next vocational door will open up before you.

The world you are about to launch into is full of both promise and challenge.

As the satirist Tom Lehrer put it in his song Bright College Days

“ Oh, soon we'll be out amid the cold world's strife.  
 Soon we'll be sliding down the razor blade of life.... Eeek!

My bit of the “razor blade” has to do with conflict, violence war and peace. As Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies I am interested in conflict and violence everywhere and how such violence might be prevented, managed or transformed.

The good news is that we are making progress and the world overall is becoming more peaceful. There is still, however, far too much instrumental violence and too many people who desire domination in their inter-personal, group, or trans-national relations. There are also far too many people consumed with grief and revenge for past harm and some who still derive sadistic pleasure from hurting others. Weapons of minor and mass destruction continue to kill unacceptable numbers of people and far too many people seek to bully others for their own purposes. So even though progress is being made peace cannot yet be declared.

The world is full of opportunity but it is a very brutal and harsh place for the great majority of the world's population. Your generation will be confronted with global warming and rising sea levels; a widening gap between rich and poor; the erosion of democracy and many new and diabolical ways of killing each other. One of the very specific social challenges you will face will be how to sustain and nurture direct face-to-face relationships in the face of remote networked alternatives.

Being Otago graduates, I have no doubt that you will negotiate most of life's challenges with relative equanimity. Others who are not so fortunate as you, however, will live in twilight zones, around the corners of your more privileged worlds. They will suffer materially, socially and politically from inequality, marginalisation, disrespect and humiliation.

Those of us who are relatively privileged, therefore, have to make sure that our wealth, status and intelligence is used to ensure that everyone can realise their full human potential. I can hear some of you asking, as Katherine Tate does every week, “Am I bovvered? “. “Am I bovvered?” I hope that I might be able to persuade you why you should be bothered, just a little, by those who are less fortunate.

One of the original proponents of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi said,

“Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest person whom you have seen, and ask yourself if the next step

you contemplate is going to be of any use to that person? Will that person gain anything by it? Will it restore that person to a control over his or her own life and destiny? ... Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away”

Or if you don't like Gandhi, you might like Maya Angelou's exhortation “Before you die do something wonderful for humanity”

In order to do something wonderful for humanity we need to unclench the fist (or fists) around our hearts so that passion and intellect might be combined in a deeper empathetic and humble consciousness of ourselves and others. This means deepening personal values in your work and social life.

Towards the end of his life, when my father, who used to be a Methodist Minister, was unwell, my beautiful 19-year-old daughter was sitting by his bed, holding his hand. He seemed to slump into unconsciousness. She thought he had died so she called us in, at which point, he opened his eyes and said that he couldn't possibly go into a coma holding the hands of such a beautiful young woman!!

She wasn't persuaded, however, and decided to ask him, there and then, what he thought were the keys to a long and happy life. Without hesitation he said “Love, Courage and Hope”.

It seemed to me then and still does now that these are important ingredients for a good life. They are essential if you want to lead a meaningful life or wish to be of any use to those who are weak, poor, or oppressed.

If we look at each one of these concepts we realise just how important each is for the lives that we wish to lead and for giving our complex identities shape and meaning.

**(i) Lets take love--** that universal four-letter word. Diane Ackerman says

“What a small word we use for an idea so immense and powerful, it has altered the flow of history, calmed monsters, kindled works of art, cheered the forlorn, turned tough guys to mush, consoled the enslaved, driven strong women mad, glorified the humble, fuelled national scandals, bankrupted robber barons, and made mincemeat of kings. How can love's spaciousness be conveyed in the narrow confines of one syllable? “

Love is one of those emotions that is critical to the good life. It is extremely difficult to develop well-integrated individuals where there has been no experience of being loved unconditionally. Certainly, those who have not been loved, or have experienced broken love or suffering are more inclined to be aggressive and hostile than those who have known love.

Love is an animating emotion. Whether its love of another person or a vocation; love of art or music, politics or even a pet; love will drive us in all sorts of different and wonderful ways. It figures in most world religions. It has both egoistic and altruistic qualities.

Love is passion, deep friendship, loyalty, trust and commitment. Love is compassion and care. It is the glue that binds family, friends and community.

It is love of self and others that gives us enlightened and caring communities. Remove love and all sorts of other important things like trust, friendship and relationships become quite problematic.

If we wish to be fully human, therefore, we need to be loved, to know how to love and from acts of love to build trusting relationships. We ensure our own well being and security by loving others more than we love ourselves. A life without love would render work meaningless and we would never be able to flourish as human beings. Love is not an optional extra, therefore; it lies at the heart of what it is to be fully human.

**(ii) Courage:**

Courage means being true to yourself and vulnerable to others. Being true to yourself is hard since we are hard wired to connect and bond with family and peer groups and it is sometimes difficult finding your true self in these other relationships. Second, courage means confronting fear, pain and danger with equanimity. The first results in moral courage, the second in physical.

My father knew about moral courage as a conscientious objector to the Second World War. He spent 4 years in detention during the Second World War for his beliefs. That required considerable courage because the majority of the population thought that Conchies were cowards. It requires moral courage to stand against the crowd and to advocate for those who are weak, marginal and voiceless.

At a more basic level though we all need courage just to live. Life is precarious and uncertain. We are confronted by risk and uncertainty every day of our lives. We need courage to Be in the face of everything that might cause despair. Courage is critical to living a good life and to most political

and social transformation. It takes love to be courageous and it takes courage to love and be in transformative relationships with others.

So love and courage seem to go together but what about the third leg of my father's triad?

**(iii) Hope.** Hope is another of life's imperatives. It transforms cynicism into action, pessimism into optimism.

Buddhist Philosopher, Daisaku Ikeda says that

“Hope changes everything. It changes winter into summer, darkness into dawn, descent into ascent, barrenness into creativity, agony into joy. Hope is the sun, it is light. It is passion. It is the fundamental force for life's blossoming”

Hope demands both a capacity to imagine positive futures and behaviours to realise them.

Hope involves choices and actions. Without some degree of hopefulness ordinary living would be problematic and the world would be a very nasty and solitary place.

I hope, therefore, for a world that is sustainable, just, non-violent and peaceful. I hope for a world in tune with nature and without weapons of minor or mass destruction. I hope for a world where there is no discrimination on grounds of culture, religion, gender or ethnicity. I hope and work for a world where my grandchildren and their grandchildren can be free of fear and can realise their full potential in collaboration with others.

So I think my father was right. If you make decisions that generate love, care and compassion you will create good relationships, good business, good politics, and thriving community.

If you make ethical decisions with fearlessness and courage you will generate integrity and authenticity.

If you act lovingly and courageously you will generate virtuous rather than vicious dynamics and live each day in a spirit of hopefulness.

The really good news is that all these qualities are available to everyone for free.

No matter how clever or brilliant you are. No matter whether you have just got a Graduate Certificate or a Ph.D these transformative qualities are available to all of you without any GST!

If you live loving, courageous and hopeful lives you will experience personal happiness and do your Alma Mater proud.

You will be able to embrace and handle complexity, risk and vulnerability.

You will do something wonderful for humanity and be the men and women you are meant to be.

So go from here loving yourself and others.

Be courageous and of good cheer and hope for a 21<sup>st</sup> century that is mature and free of the many scourges that afflicted the 20<sup>th</sup>.