

*Elaine Bensted, Chief Executive Zoos South Australia*

*University of South Australia Graduation Speech*

*20 March 2014*

Thank you. It is a great pleasure to be here today and I welcome distinguished guests, University officials and academic staff, and, most importantly, graduands and their family and friends.

Today's celebration could be considered as a finish point or it could be seen as a beginning. Graduations are very symbolic events and in my previous role as Chief Executive of TAFE I was privileged to attend many graduations and I thank Pro Chancellor Terry Evans for the invitation to join this celebratory occasion.

This can be seen as the ending of an era:

- The end of the need to attend lectures
- The end of that last minute panic when assignments are due or exams about to start
- The end of a particular relationship with your fellow students and academic staff, and dare I say it,
- The end of those pub crawls with very bad t shirts!

Career and study choices have been an important part of my working and personal life. I grew up absolutely convinced that my career path was to be a vet – and I never considered any alternative path. It wasn't until late in year 11 that I had to face the fact that I am exceedingly squeamish and unable to cope with blood – hence my career path was not possible. I went to university starting a Science degree, but could not link that to a desired career, and so dropped out and joined the workforce. This took me down a business, finance and marketing path and all of my future studies were completed part time. I have worked in private sector, local and state govt and now have the enormous privilege of being the Chief Executive of the not for profit charity that runs both Adelaide and Monarto Zoos. So at 50 years of age I am now working in an area that is pretty close to where my passion as a child was – and I have also had a wonderful learning journey along the way.

So you could see your graduation as an ending, but it can also be seen as a beginning.

- The start of your life with this formal qualification – you will no longer describe yourself as "a Uni student"
- The start of your learning journey that hopefully will continue for the rest of your life and
- The start of the life you choose to live post study.

The Royal Zoological Society is 135 years old. In reading its history it has been assisted by a number of people. People with names such as:

- Thomas Elder
- Henry Ayers
- Samuel Way
- The Minchin family (the first three Directors of the Adelaide Zoo all came from the Minchin family).

Many of you will recognise these names from a range of other Adelaide institutions. They were people who gave a significant amount to the community.

As an organisation we also have twice as many volunteers as we do staff. This allows us to remain open and also to do some amazing conservation work to preserve species from extinction. The financial donations we receive help us in breeding programs here and also in critical overseas efforts for example to reduce rhino poaching in Africa.

Your life journey has reached a really important milestone today and for that I congratulate you and encourage you to take the time to celebrate with family and friends your achievement.

When we talk of a “beginning” – I challenge you to think about what contribution you want to make to the community, to others or to the environment.

Maybe in future graduation ceremonies, your name can be an example of someone who was a great contributor to society as a whole.

Thank you.