

Occasional Address – University of SA Graduation Ceremony
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Graduands, it is a privilege to be asked to speak to you today on this special occasion.

As you finish one part of your life, a new part begins.

There will be challenges and difficulties - good days and bad days - and today I wish to share a story which helps me to manage when I feel that I am having a bad day.

Some years ago a police officer went to serve a summons on a man at a farm house in the Barossa Valley. As he was moving past a side door he began falling without knowing why. He then realised that he had been shot and was continuing to be shot at through a screen door. He was struck by bullets and shrapnel a total of 14 times. As he lay on the ground he managed to return fire through the door, which caused the gunman to stop shooting at him.

He got to his feet and staggered around the corner of the house before collapsing to the ground. The gunman retreated to a prepared position in the roof where he had a view of 360 degrees around the house and from where he was able to keep other police officers at bay for some time.

I was sent as part of a medical retrieval team to the Barossa valley and we waited at the end of the road some 1.5 km away while the Police tried to work out what to do. We could hear continuous firing and watch spent bullets kicking up dirt in an adjacent field.

At this stage no-one knew if Derrick was dead or alive, except Derrick. He lay on the ground as still as possible hoping that the bleeding would slow down or stop. Despite his bullet proof vest, he had been hit twice in the abdomen and multiple times in the thighs, lower legs and both arms. He kept thinking about his wife and children. He lost consciousness a number of times and at one stage lost his vision as his blood pressure became too low to keep blood flow to his retinas in his eyes.

Eventually a brave team of police officers in a van approached the house under covering fire and were able to locate Derrick. The officer who found Derrick initially thought he was dead but then got some response. He called for assistance.

The radio call that went out said "we've got him" and this may have been misinterpreted to mean "we have the gunman". Anyway the ambulance that I was waiting in was sent racing up the road towards the farm house. When the police at the scene heard this they tried to get us stopped but it was too late.

When we arrived in front of the house there were a number of police lying on the road shooting at the house and the sounds of gunfire were also coming from the house. We got out of the Ambulance and got down on the ground behind it.

I crawled over to a police officer I knew to ask if we should be there. As I got to him his radio received the words "we can see the ambulance, we'll bring Derrick to it".

They carried Derrick to their vehicle and then bounced him across the field to where we were. When I looked in the back of their van I saw a man with skin as white as a sheet, covered in blood, not moving, unconscious and apparently dead. I could not feel a pulse. I remember thinking "he's dead". But then he took a breath. He was not quite dead.

We pulled him out of the van and put him on the ambulance stretcher at the back of the ambulance. The two paramedics put pressure on the bleeding points, applied oxygen and connected a heart monitor. I tried to find a place to put in a drip, preferably in a limb that had not been shot. There wasn't one, but the right arm seems to be the least damaged and I was able to put a drip into that. Tim, my retrieval nurse had run through some fluid which we connected and squeezed in. At this stage we still could not feel a pulse. The heart monitor showed his heart rate was only 70 and slowing down. This is a very bad sign and is the final stage of decompensation when bleeding to death. I realised that bouncing him across the field to us had shaken loose the clots that had formed while he was lying still and his bleeding had increased but with no reserve. I knew there was no hope. He would die at any moment. The text books were very clear. He had no chance.

But even though I knew Derrick would die I knew we had to do our best for him and for his colleagues who had risked their lives to rescue him and bring him to us. Sometimes it is not the result but the effort that counts.

Meanwhile the police around us who were all wearing bullet proof vests were very concerned that we were working in full view of the house from which firing was still coming. A huge amount of gunfire was also being directed towards the house in an attempt to make the gunman keep his head down. I remember thinking if I get shot, I'd better die because if I don't my mother will kill me....

We got the first bag of intravenous fluid in very quickly and then put up a blood transfusion. A STAR group police officer next to me asked how he could help and so I said could he please squeeze the bag really hard? So he went like this.... and said what now doc? I said that was good, please do it again.

Amazingly Derrick's heart rate started to increase and I felt a transient pulse in his groin which meant I could find a large vein there to put a big drip into. With the two drips we squeezed in 5 bags of blood (equal to about half the volume of blood an adult has in his body) and also gave some other fluids before he seemed to have a steady carotid pulse and I felt he might survive the trip down the road to the helicopter.

We loaded him into the ambulance, did one of the longest 3 point turns I can remember, and drove to the helicopter. During the short flight to Adelaide we gave him 4 more units of blood and arranged for specialist surgical teams to be available when we arrived. We rushed him straight into the operating theatre where the surgeons opened his abdomen and controlled the internal bleeding.

Derrick was admitted to intensive care and while it was touch and go for a while, he survived. In fact he not only survived, but he eventually went back to work as a Star Group officer.

Derrick beat the odds. I still don't know why he didn't die out there.

So what does Derrick's story tell you as you sit here at the end of one stage in life ready to move on?

Well to me there are two messages.

Firstly, even when I think I am having a very bad day at the office I know it could definitely be worse....

and secondly, no matter how bad things look, or how hard it gets, **"Don't ever give up"**. Derrick didn't and neither did his colleagues or our team. If you don't ever give up, you may not always win, but at least you will know you have done your best, and sometimes, just sometimes, maybe a miracle will happen.

Congratulations and good luck for the future.