

Introduction: Congratulations!

Thank you Chancellor. Thank you Michael (Professor Rowan). Given the long association between Issues Deliberation Australia and the Hawke Institute of the University of South Australia I am especially honoured to accept this Honorary Doctorate.

But I am most honoured to share *your* special day. And I just want to say: *How lucky am I to be here with all of you today??* I rejoice for you and the journey you are on. It has been such a gift to reflect on my own journey – one that has taken me from where you now stand – to where I am standing, exactly thirty years after my own graduation with a Bachelor of Arts degree.

I was shocked when I calculated just how long ago I stood where you now stand. Time has flown! And **FLYING**, or more specifically, **MAGIC CARPET FLYING**, is my theme for the reflections I want to share with you today.

A friend recently retired after 30 years as a television journalist. He described his 30 years with the television network as **a magic carpet ride**. His whimsical description really resonated with me. My thirty-year journey since my graduation in 1978 has also been a magic carpet ride. And I am hoping that on April 3rd 2038, when you look back on your life since graduation, that you look back in wonder at YOUR magic carpet ride.

What do we know about carpet rides?

Carpet rides of all kinds share some basic characteristics:

- Carpet rides **go up and they go down**. The journey ALWAYS includes **both ascent and descent**.
- There will be periods of **straight and level flight** when you are in **equilibrium** – just cruising, on automatic pilot.
- Every carpet ride involves **turbulence** – sometimes severe, **battering storms**, so bad you may wonder if you'll get through. You may have to negotiate at least one **crash landing**.
- Sometimes you'll fly **solo**, other times, in **groups**. Sometimes you will be **the learner**, sometimes the **instructor**.
- Some times you will be **flying in the dark**. You'll feel **lost, disoriented**.
- And sometimes you will **soar through the light: dancing with the wind, laughing with the sun**, basking in wonder and joy at all that you see, know and feel.

I have been both witness and bearer of the extremes of carpet flying. In my work:

In Ethiopia I have **looked into the sad and shamed faces of the women** whose bodies were emaciated by malnutrition, pregnancy and childbirth before their bodies were ready – their internal organs sometimes ripped apart;

In Sri Lanka I have **walked on the decimated beaches** with students and teachers who outran a ten metre high wave and bravely returned to the beach hours later to bury the dead;

In East Timor I have **witnessed the determination** of the women trying to forge a better future for their kids, themselves and their country, often after years of sexual abuse;

In the USA, on the fifth anniversary of September 11, I have **descended into the pit of Ground Zero** and felt the palpable, searing pain of collective loss. On the kerbs of **New Orleans** streets, I **sat and cried with single mums and their kids** – amid 10 metre high piles of rubble, as they wondered how they could possibly start over;

In South Africa I have **sung and danced with the children** whose families were wiped out by HIV/AIDS, some of the kids savagely raped because of the virgin cure myth;

In outback Australia, I have felt the pain of the Aboriginal men who shared their stories of being removed from the only homes they knew, to be forever torn between two cultures;

Next week, **I fly to Uganda to meet with war-affected kids, many of whom were child soldiers** who have witnessed and/or perpetrated some of the most horrific acts of violence that human beings can do to each other.

In my personal life:

I have seen the devastating toll that **mental illness, other disease and early death** extracts from those who suffer – and all who love them.

My dad was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia when I was about 7. He died when I was 15. Like others diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, my dad heard persuasive voices in his head. He truly believed those voices represented forces trying to destroy him (and his family). Like Nobel Laureate **John Nash**, my dad suffered through electroshock treatment and mind-numbing drugs - because in those days that's all they knew to do. *Unlike* John Nash, by the last year of his life, the voices my dad heard were so powerful he could no longer bear them. Like others diagnosed with mental illness, he was severely depressed. To kill the voices, he had to kill himself. He could see no other alternative. He shot himself 5 months after his 48th birthday.

Not long after our dad died, my **sister** was diagnosed with the recurrence of a life-threatening blood disease, and had her spleen removed. A couple of years after she recovered, my **brother** was diagnosed with kidney malfunction, a condition that continues to challenge, but not define him. About 6 years after my brother's initial diagnosis, my **mum** died of a rare form of cancer.

By the time I stood where you now stand, **death, dying and chronic life-threatening illness were familiar passengers on our family carpet ride.**

Light

But while my carpet ride **catapulted me through darkness**, both at work and at home, **I have always been surrounded by light.** While I have been confronted by the depths of sadness and the worst horrors inflicted by human beings on each other (or on themselves), **what stands out most for me is survival, healing, hope, happiness ... life.**

In both my life and my work, I see evidence that most of us not only ultimately cope after heart-wrenching tragedy, we can grow.

Our **Psychology Beyond Borders** work shows that we may never **get over** horror, but we can **get through** it. And getting through tragedy is often made possible by **giving human beings.**

The enduring images I have from Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, East Timor, South Africa, the USA, my own childhood in Broken Hill...are

- **images of profound strength,**
 - **of intimate human connection,**
 - **of people doing good for each other,**
 - **people being there for each other,**
 - **people being there for me.**
- **I picture joyous, expectant smiling eyes** – faces lighting up with glee at their own images on camera, and **little black hands** reaching out for mine as we walked in the dust;
 - **I picture Muslim women** in their *hijabs* singing “Waltzing Matilda” - side by side with ocker Aussie men – celebrating our common humanity;
 - **I picture the looks on mothers’ faces** as they make candles or jewellery, earning a living to build a future where they had thought they had none;
 - **People all over the world** rising out of the most desperate of circumstances -

choosing life, even when they had witnessed so much pain, or death ...

- I picture some of the most **passionate, dedicated altruistic professionals on the planet** – people who are committed to helping those in their journey through horror;
- In my personal life, I remember the **strength, the resilience, the immeasurable courage of my mother, my sister, my brother and my father;**
- **I see a childhood filled with love and laughter because our mother chose to embrace the light, not the dark;**
- **I picture the incredible support of friends and extended family** – amazing beautiful gifts – each and every one of them.

By experiencing both the ups and downs of carpet flying – I know that when we face some of the worst things that can happen to us, we can also **learn the best:**

- **that we can be strong**
- **that others love and value us**
- **that we love and value others, and**
- **that we can have a lasting positive impact on the lives and beings of others, as they can on us.**

So my carpet ride has left indelibly imprinted images, not of darkness, but of light, and not of horror, but of hope. And it is seeing the light, the hope and the life in the darkness that has been one of the biggest sources of magic for me.

So HOW CAN YOU CREATE YOUR OWN MAGICAL CARPET RIDE?

1) Know what is magical for you: magic for one person can be a nightmare for others

You may not know what is magical until you do something and reflect back on what you did. The professor who most influenced me during my Ph.D. at the University of Texas, Karl Weick, had a mantra: **“I don’t know what I think until I see what I say”**. I have extended this mantra to: **“I don’t know who I am until I see what I do”**. The very acts of saying and doing give us the raw materials for defining what we think and who we are, for defining our own magic.

So to find your own magic, look back on what you have been doing. If what you have been doing ignites your passion, is replenishing and life-giving – then it is magic. If what you have been doing is life depleting, if it does not feel right ... it is not magic, so know when to walk away. Go try some more activities till your passion is ignited.

For me: magic is living my truth

I have learned that **magic for me is about “living my truth”** – both to myself and to others. For me, living my truth means to not just speak out against injustice, but to do something, however small, and to speak out honestly, openly and caringly about the tough issues, including suicide and mental illness.

And I have found that magic multiplies when you live truth, when you live your passion. You tend to be excited, enthusiastic, happy. And it's contagious. You exude light and attract light. You meet others in the same headspace (as well as airspace) – and this creates a type of self-fulfilling prophecy – because the energy you have, joins with the energy of others on the same flight-path, in the same light. The resulting **synergy** is potent. It's called **SYNCHRONICITY**. You will be incredulous at who and what you encounter! And you will be incredulous at what you can achieve.

2) Select a magical destination and go for it

Point your carpet in the direction of the magic and enjoy the journey. I learned the hard way that it is easy to get so fixated on the destination, that we don't notice the flying.

(When I first left Adelaide in the 1980's, I had a clearly defined career plan. I knew what I was going to achieve by when. But then I fell in love with an American – and my carefully delineated career path imploded. I found myself in the USA. My envisaged brilliant career was not so brilliant in an alien environment. But then I started my Ph.D. at the University of Texas, and I studied organizations who succeeded by being **opportunistic, adept at going with the flow of their environments, by being adaptable**. I learned flexibility could not only be good, but in “going with the flow”, in **making myself up as I went along**, (while not losing sight of the star or planet to which I ultimately wanted to fly), **I could create new flight paths, discover new galaxies and land in airports I might never have envisaged when setting out.**)

So instead of a rigid step-by-step plan, I discovered I could actually achieve more by having a flight path with a very broad bandwidth in the general direction of my destination. **The key is to both plan, and not plan, to have a map, and no map.** A wonderful case study illustrates this:

(During World War Two, an army regiment was engaged in military training exercises in Switzerland. The commanding officer sent a troop into the mountains on an “outward bound-type” mission. A severe snowstorm hit and the troop became lost. When the troop was two days late returning, the commanding officer became concerned. When they finally arrived into base camp on the third day, the relieved CO asked how the men found their way back without a map. They revealed that indeed, one troop member did have a map. When the CO scrutinised the map, he discovered it was a map of the Pyrenees Mountains. These men were in the Swiss Alps!!)

Maps animate and orient us. With a map, that WWII regiment was active, had purpose, an image of where they were, an image of where they were headed, so they kept on moving, kept noticing cues, kept updating their sense of where they were ... **and found their way.**

When you allow yourself, a flight path with a broad bandwidth **can be playful.**

(It may not surprise you to know that I have been learning to fly a plane. As part of my cross-country flight training last year, I asked my instructor if I could fly to Broken Hill. When he and I were planning our route, he said: "Do you want to fly straight there or do you want to muck around a bit and zig-zag on the way?" Of course I chose to "muck around and zig zag", and as a result, was exhilarated by **both** the journey and landing at the Broken Hill airport!)

So I encourage you, as part of making yourself up as you go along (within the bandwidth of the flight path toward your ultimate destination), to **experiment with zig-zagging** using any map that broadly reflects the territory in which you want to fly. **Any map will ensure that you fly in the general direction of your defined magic**, because it will set you in motion and keep you cognizant of where you are, versus where you want to go. You may be surprised at what and who you experience along the way.

3) Be the Pilot in Command

i.e. **Be the one who designs and enacts your own carpet ride.** Sounds basic, but so many of us live other people's lives – the flight paths set in motion by the lives our parents wanted for us, the lives our partners live, the life and experiences that have defined us until now. Being the Pilot in Command means forging your own flight path, not flying in the wake of others - **living your truth, your core values.**

Sometimes a single flight (or story) may start to dominate our identity, who we present to others, how others see us. But every human being is more complicated than just one dimension. Our challenge is to think about all the other aspects of who we are that also reflect who we want to be. At any given point in our lives, we have the power to re-define our flight path, how we fly, what we fly. So I **encourage you to continually define your own flight path** by looking back at where you have flown, and ahead to where you want to be – and maintain or change your heading accordingly.

4) Magical flying requires preparation and training

Being Pilot in Command and making yourself up as you go along is nowhere near as easy or chaotic as it sounds. **To be ready, willing and able to soar beyond average destinations, to fly loop de loops, to negotiate inevitable storms, or even finesse a**

crash landing, we need to be skilled to fly well. No good pilot will attempt a manoeuvre (climbing, stalling, spins) for which they, or their plane are not equipped.

a) Connecting with others makes extraordinary flying possible and fun

For me, **I have been able to enact some of the hardest manoeuvres of my life because of the people who fly with me.** So much of what I have done is with other people - the Issues Deliberation Australia team, the Psychology Beyond Borders team, the Silverton team, the University of South Australia, friends and family. I could never have achieved what I have achieved without these amazing people flying by my side. And in flying together, we have discovered how much we can do, both as individuals or as a group.

b) Learning is forever

Continuing to learn and discover new things are also magical for me.

Education is a beautiful thing. By completing a formal tertiary education, you have already taken a huge step to prepare yourself for magic carpet flying. Over 10 percent of the world's peoples do not even get a primary school education. 800 million adults cannot read or write. As we stand here today, eighty million kids don't even go to school – and women and girls lose out the most. So you and I are the lucky ones.

Education can be a life-long process. And neuro-psychologists tell us this is a good thing. By continuing to fire neurons down new pathways in our brains, we not only ward off Alzheimers, but we continually open ourselves to new experiences and new opportunities for magic.

And I have learned that for the most daunting of activities **perseverance and tenacity are key.**

(That has been particularly poignant in learning to fly a plane at 50. One of the most challenging aspects of learning to fly was learning to talk to the Air Traffic Control Tower. I am not un-used to publicly speaking to hundreds of people, doing media interviews on live television or radio, but sit me behind the microphone in a little Cessna talking live to Air Traffic Control with who knows who listening....My first few flights, when ATC needed me to respond back to their fast paced instructions, I would look at my instructor in complete panic and say "You do it!" But I was determined ... I listened for hours and hours and hours to live ATC live on my computer, responding out loud as if I was in the plane with my headset on. It took me months to get comfortable. When I finally made my first smooth, seemingly unflustered call, ATC came back with: "*Excellent Radio call Cessna 52208, but you are on the wrong frequency. But call us any time to practice!*")

Education is not just about being equipped to enter uncharted airspace, skilling yourself to tackle new flight paths or new manoeuvres, it's also **about being prepared to DETECT opportunities when they occur.**

Those successful flexible companies I studied as an organisational psychologist were not only prepared to act effectively when opportunity knocked, but could SEE opportunity in the first place. **And the Law of Requisite Variety** tells us that only complex organisms can detect complexity in their environment. When we complicate ourselves, we expand the number of neural networks firing in our brains. (Its like creating new neighbourhoods in the "street map" of your brain!) The more complex we are, the more opportunities we will see and be able to act on.

So **one of the strategies for creating more opportunity for magic, is to increase your own complexity** – think, do, "be", outside your own box as often as you can stand it. You might be surprised at how this simple strategy increases your creativity and helps you think outside your box.

c) **Mind, body connection**

Successful flying requires integration between the Mind, Body and Spirit. This has probably been my single biggest lesson of the last few years. My area of speciality as a psychologist has been cognition – how people think, how they process information, how they represent what they experience in their brains. And as you might expect from this specialty, while athletic, I have always been someone who lives in her head.

However, as **research on psychological trauma** so clearly reveals, (and as Eastern cultures have known for millennia), the body bears the record of the psychological pain and joy our brains register, and **it takes both brain AND body to soar with the spirit.** For truly magical flying, the Mind, Body and Spirit are inseparable. So I encourage you to constantly explore ways to grow and nurture your mind, body *and* spirit.

I have learned, as someone who is determined to think her way through everything, heeding the lessons of my body will be a lifelong lesson! I now know that if I am not listening, my body tends to do something dramatic to make me listen!

5) **Don't forget your own insignificance – have fun**

Despite the pain I have witnessed, or perhaps because of it, I find intense joy in what I do and the people with whom I do it. I feel truly blessed to be able to choose life, to choose magic every day that I am alive. **Life is too short not to have fun.**

And in case I start to get carried away with my own importance, my body and mind seem to conspire to ensure I **laugh at myself**:

(A few months ago, I was meeting with the UN's Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, a meeting the PBB team had been trying to facilitate for a long time. On the morning of my meeting, as always, I was trying to multi-task, finish just one more email, swim one more lap ... whatever I could squeeze in. I frantically threw on my dress – a very long fitting dress with fabulous vibrant African design on fabric made of mesh - with the accompanying long slip – and ran to the lift to head down the 35 floors or so to the hotel lobby. I noticed in the lift that the dress and the slip were a bit out of synch with each other, and I needed to straighten it out by pulling the slip down. So I bend over to do so, only to discover that the more I pulled, the more slip filled my hands. ... I had not pulled my arms through the straps of the slip when I hurriedly stepped into the dress! So picture a 6 ft tall blond, bent over double, frenetically pulling her slip from beneath a long mesh dress, glancing up every few seconds to monitor the free fall of the lift, only to find that the doors opened as the full slip reached her ankles. All I could do was confidently walk out into the lobby of this very swanky hotel, past all the businessmen and diplomats in my see-through dress as if I had my most professional business suit on, and into the hotel spa calmly explaining: "Fashion emergency, where can I change?" So for the rest of the day, when in meetings with various dignitaries at the UN, when I caught a glimpse of that dress in any reflecting surface, I could only laugh, and certainly not get carried away with being the girl from Broken Hill in the big city!)

So no matter what we are doing or no matter where we are, it is so, so important to **laugh often, to find light, fun and hope**.

In his final hours, my dad could not see the light, the hope or the life. He could not see beyond a single solution. He did not know how to think outside of his box of limited alternatives. **But the rest of my family could, and do.**

And I see the light, the hope and the life in my own two precious daughters. My heart sings when I see how they embrace life with playfulness, honesty, integrity, compassion. They **daily** teach me more about living truth than they will ever know.

As a child growing up with the unique Australian outback desert sky, I would look up at night in total awe of the Milky Way stretching out into black infinity. I would imagine myself flying among the stars, gleefully sliding down the slope of a crescent moon. These days I look up with a knowing smile: *I have been blessed to fly among the stars of the Milky Way, **beyond** the Milky Way. My magic carpet ride has taken me to far-flung solar systems and undiscovered universes – galaxy-hopping journeys of my mind, body and spirit with the most life-enriching travelling companions; a carpet ride I didn't dream about as I stood in my graduation gown in 1978 - not even in my wildest imaginings.*

My favourite poet, TS Eliot said in *East Coker*: "...the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing". So as you set out on **your own carpet ride** after your celebrations tonight, I encourage you to point your carpet toward the stars. As you fly, my wishes for you are these. That you:

- **Embrace both the light and the dark, both the stillness and the dancing** that will be your journey – and grow from the knowledge inherent in each;
- **Experience the peace and contentment** of living your truth;
- **Discover the thrill of zigzagging** within the bandwidth of your map, as well as the exhilaration of venturing beyond your own airspace;
- Experience the **rewards of finding solutions outside your box**, even outside all known boxes;
- **Revel in the sustaining force** of those who love and care for you, and you for them;
- **Rejoice in the presence of the fellow travellers** who surprise you, challenge you and enrich you;
- **Know the joy of giving of yourself** to others in less fortunate circumstances;
- **Look back in thirty years (from April 2038!) in awe and wonder** at the magic that was encoded in your body, your mind and your spirit through thirty years of flight.

I believe you can and will use the blessed gift of education – in all its forms - to make a difference to our world. Happy Flying....