

**University of South Australia Graduation Ceremony
Law and Business Schools
19 March 2013 The Honourable Robyn Layton AO QC**

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor Members of the University Council, academic staff, graduands, family and friends.

I firstly wish to acknowledge that this special occasion is occurring on the traditional lands of the Kaurna people.

It is an honour to address you today and I am most grateful that my address is taking place after I have been bestowed with an Honorary Doctorate and not before. The decision to bestow could easily be reversed, given the persons present on stage today. It is indeed a great honour and privilege to receive it.

Today is a special day to celebrate the achievements of those of you who will receive undergraduate or post-graduate awards today. Reaching this stage of academic achievement has demanded hard work and dedication. Your family and friends have every reason to be proud of you and undoubtedly their support has enabled you to reach this stage of your life.

This ceremony brings back some memories for me. In the mid 1960's I had a number of competing emotions on the day.

- Relief and excitement that I would finally get the important piece of paper in my hand.
- Embarrassment as my proud parents were telling friends, acquaintances, or perfect strangers behind counters or on the streets, about their clever daughter who would be graduating in law.
- Terror because I had the qualifications to be a lawyer but no idea as to whether I could be one or even whether it was the right career for me.

There were limited career choices for me at the time of graduation. When I had earlier door-knocked legal firms to seek placement as an articled clerk, a number of them told me outright that they did not take women. Then a highly respected broad based legal firm bravely accepted me. I was later informed by the wonderful principal who selected me, it was because I had performed in Footlights Club Reviews and University Reviews and he thought that I must have something going for me! My academic achievements were not illustrious.

I have three themes to share with you today which have helped me.

First theme... use your degree creatively

A Law Degree or a Business and Commerce Degree are two of the most flexible degrees one can have. There are many different career pathways to excite your passion and interest.

I have never had a particular career strategy. I do not proffer this as an argument to distract you from the value of having a strategic career plan, but instead to say, don't panic if you don't have one because you are not sure what you want to do. In life beyond university there is no core curriculum, but instead it comprised of multiple electives.

My career has been shaped by taking up opportunities when they arose, most of which have stemmed in one form or another by doing voluntary and pro bono work as well as sheer luck.

As a law student I began voluntary work for a civil liberties group. That led to:

- Undertaking pro bono work for protesting demonstrators who were arrested in street marches and charged with criminal offences during the Vietnam War days.

- Then followed pro bono work to act for Aboriginal people charged with criminal offences.
- Pro bono work gave me experience in the Courts which I would not have otherwise had. I could practice my fledgling legal skills on those unfortunate enough to have even less skills than I.
- This early voluntary work led to me attracting actual paying clients.
- It also led to appointments as a member or chair of a number of arts organisations and educational institutions and later to board membership on various health bodies as well as health a Director of the National Rail Corporation. I learnt a lot about freight trains.

On the whole, the most interesting aspects of my work have been voluntary and unpaid.

My second theme is... be prepared to take risks

I start with a story about the Great Blondin -- the man who invented the high wire act. There are many versions of his tightrope feats. In 1859 the Great Blondin announced to the world that he intended to cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope. Thousands of people gathered to watch. His crossing was heart-stoppingly successful. After that initial crossing, the Great Blondin crossed the Falls again and again -- once blindfolded, then carrying a stove, once in chains, and again on a bicycle. He was about to begin yet another crossing, this time pushing a wheelbarrow. He turned to the crowd and shouted "who believes that I can cross pushing this wheelbarrow." The crowd shouted "yes". Blondin pointed at one man.

"Do you believe that I can do it?" he asked.

"Yes, I believe you can," said the man.

"Are you certain?" said Blondin

"Yes," said the man.

"Absolutely certain?"

"Yes, Absolutely certain."

"Thank you" said Blondin, "then sir, please get into the wheelbarrow."

There will be times in your life when you will be challenged and in order to succeed you will have to trust yourself, your judgement, swallow your fear and leap into the wheelbarrow. I have had a number of wheelbarrow moments in my career. Two recent ones are linked. Two years ago I resigned early from the Supreme Court. The wheelbarrow moment was to jump from a safe position on the Bench to instead market myself as providing judicial training and workshops here and overseas, and also to increase local volunteer work. On the occasion of my resignation from the bench, I told the formally assembled court and practitioners of my intentions and also said that I was looking forward to cleaning out the cupboards at home. You can see I was trying to keep all options open!

As it turns out I have not cleaned out a single cupboard! Life instead took a different turn. At chance meeting at a dinner party I was asked whether I would be interested in applying to do a consultancy with the Asian Development Bank on poverty reduction for women in Kazakhstan, Cambodia and the Philippines. I had never ever done such work before. The further wheelbarrow moment was that I applied and then the ADB, even more courageously, appointed me. I will be finishing that project this year. I will be looking around for another wheelbarrow.

The third theme is ...do what you feel passionate about.

I am fortunate in being able to say that I have been passionate and interested in everything that I have done and am still doing. I have been personally enriched well beyond my very

minor contributions. I recently saw a clip of Steven Jobs delivering a speech to students at Stamford University, What he said had a great resonance for me and it was this:

“Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition”

I wish for each of you is that you forge your own unique and enriched career and life.