

**UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA**  
**GRADUATION SPEECH – Glen Brennan**

Firstly thank you to Vice Chancellor Stephen Parker and the leadership team of the University of Canberra for inviting me here tonight. I am deeply honoured.

A big congratulations to the students who are graduating today. You should feel very proud of your achievement. To those family and friends who have come along tonight, thank you. On behalf of the graduates today, thank you for riding every bump on their journey. And not that you need my permission, but today is that day where you can be absolutely over the top in your admiration for your love ones because they deserve it. Please get the photo of throwing the hat in the air – it is a timeless shot not to be missed.

I asked my wily old uncle about what to say tonight. He is the last of my old people – the Kamilaroi people from Narrabri in NSW. He is a grand old man who is well into his 80's - we think he might be 82. But the truth is we don't really know what year he was born in and neither does he (nor does he care). He says he lived his life to the fullest and has no regrets. The wise old owl gave me this advice.

Your talk needs to be like a mini skirt. Long enough to cover all the important bits, but short enough to keep people interested..... Clearly he still has a sense of humour.

When I started at the University of Canberra, there was no internet, no emails, no mobile phones and you were considered as rich as Gina Reinhardt if you had your own computer. On my first day, the University opened its brand new state of the art building - the revamped Boiler Room. The number 1 song was Meat Loaf's I'd do anything for love (but I won't do that). And the mighty Raiders were coming of a premiership win. The year of course was 1993, I had dread locks and I had become the first person in my entire family to ever attend a University.

For a kid from Narrabri, Canberra seemed like a never ending metropolis of good times and opportunities. My father dropped me off at the 'old ressie building', with some pots and pans, a doona and a pillow. I was handed the keys to room **B11** and told this is where I'd be living for the next 12 months. As I looked around at the Spartan room with its single bed, desk and small fridge I was delighted! It had taken 18 years, but I finally had my own room. At my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday my father would confess he thought I'd be home within a month. The truth is a never really ever returned home because UCan gave me a ticket to the game and the world unfolded in front of me.

Just thinking about those days makes me smile. I made life-long friends and learnt important life lessons. I learnt some awkward truths which we can only discuss on graduation day. It was better to cram the night before for exam, rather than study for a week. I learnt that I could do a 2500 word essay overnight, provided I had access to caffeine. I knew where every happy hour was within a 10km radius of the Bruce campus. And I learnt that I could make it in the big bad world provided I worked hard.

UCan was, and still is, a melting pot of cultures. There were international students who cooked the most amazing food and generously shared their culture. There were local Canberra kids who warmly shared their family homes to us orphans from out of town. There were country kids like me, who loved the fast pace of Canberra. Of course there were Sydney kids who had a different opinion.

No matter where you were from, the pursuit of excellence was the same. Students and academics seeking to forge forward in that of most honourable relationships – teacher, students and learning. Learning is the bedrock of UCan and the ability to continue to learn will be the greatest gift that this fantastic institution will ever give you. It's a precious gift and it is the lesson I'd like to talk a little more about.

*The richest man on the planet Bill Gates said - It's fine to celebrate success but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure.*

You see if you think that now that you have finished your study that you're learning is complete you are wrong. Learning is a life-long skill. I learn something new every day. And to really learn you have to be trying so hard the sometimes, despite your best efforts, you will make mistakes. Even former students who are distinguished alumni like myself, fail and make mistakes. I encourage you to reframe how you see an **F** because it will serve you well as you move on to the next phase of your life.

I don't make mistakes on purpose and I never make the same mistake twice. The truth is sometimes I don't even get that right.

*My favourite Hip Hop star Nicki Minaj said - When you don't make moves and when you don't climb up the ladder, everybody loves you because you're not competition.*

Competition in corporate Australia has always been fierce. Everyone wants the best people, systems, products and services. But behind the smiles and claims to the contrary, everyone from the Chairman down wants to get one up on their direct competitors on every metric that matters. At stake are bonuses, bragging rights and most important of all, continued survival in the corporate jungle.

No matter where you go from now on in the workforce you will need to compete. Sometimes with your colleagues, and sometimes against your colleagues. Be willing to embrace the competition, no matter the odds. The things I value most I had to fight the hardest for. They're the things really worth winning. Back yourself because there won't be time for self-doubt. Believe in yourself and your abilities. And believe in the foundation that UCan has provided you. By graduating today you have proved you are capable.

*Barrak Obama - Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.*

Change is constant, restructures are evitable and I can guarantee you're going to get dealt some cards that are unplayable in your career. The truth is I haven't decided what I want to be when I grow up and like my old uncle neither do I care. I joked earlier about the world I entered in 1993, but the truth is someone will be doing the same thing to you in 2035.

I implore you to be ready to adapt and to embrace change. Be ready to change course and if needed duck and weave. In the words of Kenny Rogers's, *you've got to know when to hold them, know when to fold them and know when to walk away and know when to run*. It is an art, not a science so trust your instincts and intuition.

My father's generation didn't change careers, but our generation can and do. I was supremely confident that I was going to be the next big thing for the Canberra Raiders. However, the world didn't work out that way. I never thought I'd be a banker, let alone love the job. I encourage you to find a job you love and don't be afraid to make a change if you fall out of love. Life is too short to do something you don't enjoy.

I said earlier I was the first person in my entire family to ever attend University. I'm please to say both my younger sister and brother are also graduates of this wonderful University. I now have 3 sons and I hope one day they will decide to follow the Brennan family tradition. It's a tradition that I started.

As you graduate today it's a tradition that I hope you embrace. How can we, the alumni of the University of Canberra, make the institution better? The stakes in the game are high. For me it is a world class education for my most value assets – my boys. However, we all need to be thinking how we can leave the University of Canberra better than when we found it.

For me every chance I get I will use the University to undertake research for me. If there is an UCan graduate applying for a job with me they've probably hit the jackpot. You'll need to find your own way, but please stay engaged and involved. We need you and please don't forget us.

I thought of all the usual ways to end my speech. There's the Yogi Berra quote; *If you come to a fork in the road take it*. There Beyonce's *Power means happiness; power means hard work and sacrifice* or Dead Poet's Societies *seize the day*.

However, I landed on a poem. The poem is special to me. It was shared with me by an old friend who is no longer with us.

### **Man in the Glass**

When you get what you want in your struggle for self  
And the world makes you king for a day  
Just go to the mirror and look at yourself  
And see what that man has to say.

For it isn't your father, or mother, or wife  
Whose judgment upon you must pass  
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life  
Is the one staring back from the glass.

He's the fellow to please – never mind all the rest  
For he's with you, clear to the end  
And you've passed your most difficult, dangerous test  
If the man in the glass is your friend.

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years  
And get pats on the back as you pass  
But your final reward will be heartache and tears  
If you've cheated the man in the glass.

Congratulations! May the force be with you as you pursue your dreams. Live long and prosper!