

## UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

### GRADUATION SPEECH – Samia Goudie

Good afternoon,

I am a Bundjalung and Mununjali woman, who was born here on these lands. I would like to acknowledge this beautiful country that we are privileged to hold your graduation ceremony on today. I acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, the Elders past and present; indeed, I acknowledge all of our ancestors who have gone before us and all those who have helped to bring us to this moment. I also acknowledge any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are here with us today.

Thank you, to the University of Canberra for inviting me today to speak with you. I especially wish to acknowledge and give thanks to your Esteemed Chancellor, Professor Tom Calma, Vice Chancellor, Stephen Parker and members of the University Council. UC is extremely fortunate to have such a high calibre of leadership. Leaders, who demonstrate the virtues of working together, Leaders who encourage us to be socially active members of our society. This kind of Leadership encourages us all to focus on social justice and forward thinking innovations as part of a larger vision for the future Generations.

Your Chancellor, Professor Tom Calma, is our first Aboriginal Chancellor in Australia and as such reminds us all of how the world can change. Professor Calma has a long history of active social justice work. Professor Calma has had a huge role in supporting initiatives to address Justice Reinvestment and has also been a champion of the close the gap initiative , something that we have focused on as a nation as a priority, to address and overcome Indigenous disadvantage and disparity.

Vice Chancellor Stephen Parker also has had a long and dedicated involvement with law and social justice, as well as I hear a love for the Beatles. I am sure each of you also has many talents and I hope this part of your journey is another beginning to add to what you do in your lives.

Do not take for granted the gift of this leadership and the value of your time here learning together to become who you are today. YOU now are in line to be the Elders we seek.

Today you graduate from various disciplines, Maths and Technology, Nursing and Midwifery. All of you have strived hard and sat up late at night at various times to be here today. No doubt your friends and families are also glad for this day and I hope you celebrate with them wildly and with abandon.

I want to revisit the meaning of making an acknowledgment of country and to speak about beginnings and endings. As you may know, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have returned to a custom of opening events with a welcome to country (always done by someone who is from the land you are on) in this case an Elder from this community. Otherwise an Acknowledgement is made, just as I have.

Acknowledging country is more than stating ownership. Country is for us, all of what we are connected to. All the things we have relationships to. To the land, the sky, the wind, the rivers and trees. To the people around us, our families, our kin. To the animals and birds, in fact to all of life. This land we are on sustains us in so many ways and acknowledging it is about recognising that connection and relationship.

In any relationship we have a reciprocal responsibility, in this case, wherever we find ourselves on country, we have a responsibility to take care of country, to keep it strong and keep ourselves and each other strong. There are many ways to do this, in simple acts each day, from watering the garden, to kind actions to others.

As nurses and midwives are graduating today, I feel this image is relevant. As midwives, you are helping to bring into this world a new life, born on country. For Aboriginal people, your birth place is important and no matter whom you are, you have connection to place especially where you are birthed. So, your role is very important. Equally we also see life as a cycle, from cradle to grave, wherever and whenever this happens for us all. As health care professionals you are tasked with a great privilege to share the most intimate of moments with others. Your compassion and care of others and yourselves is a demonstration of what we mean by taking care of country. If we do this well, and with respect, country also takes care of us. I hope you can hold this image as a way to sustain you in your sacred task of healing.

Today, I want to feel that something I say will help you go forward and feel inspired. I look back on my life and reflect how fast it seems to be passing. Of course many people when they are older tell you this, but suddenly one day it dawns on you that it is true. There is so much more I want to do. So much still to be done. We can never do it alone and we can never do all of it. However what we do, no matter what comes our way, as much as possible, we should be able say we lived our lives well.

This is not as simple as it sounds. Profound challenges face us all in this millennium world. In our personal lives at times there may be events that send us off balance for a while or even shake our very being. This is the human challenge and each of us must find our own ways to make sense of the struggles and challenges we face and consequently the actions we choose. Try finding people to challenge and inspire you, be open to collaboration, often others have better ideas than our own and together I do believe is the only way we can make any real difference. Everything we do is built on the steps of others who have come before us and we should never forget who we are and where we have come from.

Things very rarely go according to plan in life, but we must have a vision to head towards. You can choose to follow others scripts for you or you can dare to venture forth today and write your own story; if you do this incredible things will unfold. The privilege of having an education, offers you this possibility, use it well.

Please be the voice for those without voice, the eyes for those who cannot see, listen well and pause. When everyone is running around you and things speed up as they do, stop and remember to breathe, remember why you chose this path. I dare you to be brave, to be

interested, and to continue to challenge yourself and others around you. To not settle for the status quo.

You have chosen paths that are very different yet have overlaps. The link and intersections of disciplines has always existed, for instance, technology is a vital partner in health, and every piece of equipment used has had an inventor and a team of people involved in its design. New technologies such as nanotechnology contribute to the improved designs of joint and organ replacements. The increased access and use of multiple new media practices and platforms such as apps, Facebook, Twitter etc. are all now contributing to the exploration of innovations for the delivery of health care. This is especially relevant to bridge the tyranny of physical distance, and serves as a way to bridge the technology gap, the intergenerational gap and the gap of disparity that impacts many populations in regards to their access to good health care.

Every new innovation we have seen has a breakthrough moment, I WILL be excited to see which ones your year will be responsible for. I have had the good fortune to grow up with innovation, my adopted Uncle Dr Tom Grace; Tom was an eminent scientist who passed away in December last year. He made priceless contributions to invitro biology with the development of his famous "Grace's Tissue Culture Medium." Many fields in cell biology have benefited from Grace's Medium.

Tom was a humble man; his passion for science came from spending time in the bush, catching butterflies. He was inspired by his great Uncle an eccentric man nicknamed "the Birdman" who spent years in the early 1900's living for at least 6 mths of a year for over 60 years, in what is now known as the Royal National Park. He is attributed as being able to imitate over 250 different bird songs. Stories of his interaction with local Dharwul people of the Wollongong region are also documented and passed on though oral storytelling. These are some of the stories that shape my life.

I am telling you this personal story to illustrate how things build on the past in our lives in ways we sometimes do not see. I have only realised this link in recent years. I never saw myself as a scientist, nor understood how my Aboriginal heritage overlapped with my mixed upbringing. As a child of the Stolen Generations, adopted at birth, these two worlds of white and black seemed unrelated and negative. Indeed, like many, my life has not been without Trauma. However as you can see the connections and relationships were varied and not one sided.

We live in complex times. No story is one way, stories have multiple parts, each part is a story in itself, some parts shift and change, and sometimes our stories are even contradictory. Life teaches us this. Life asks us to be flexible and open, even when it is hard to do so. Finding this balance is a test for us all. Use whatever skills and gifts come your way and pass this on to each other and those around you.

I am still learning these lessons,

I am an artist, a poet, a film maker, an academic, a woman and a mother. I am an Aboriginal woman. I know my history and I know the parts that make me who I am. This is for each of you to find and claim if you do not know it yet. This is as an important contribution to our national narrative as is any other. Living your lives fully while you can. Dreaming big, living simply. Loving well. Taking care of your precious selves and loved ones, taking care of country. So country will take care of you.

Congratulations on your achievements and thank you for listening. Of course, take from this what you wish and leave the rest.

Thank you.