

GRADUATION SPEECH, UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA
GRAND HALL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE
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Acting Vice Chancellor, thank you for those kind words and that introduction.

Deputy Chancellor, thank you for your invitation to me to speak today, it's very humbling indeed.

Members of the academic procession.

Chloe Yin, student speaker, the point you made to parents, partners, family and friends who support you, that "our achievements are as much yours as they are mine" is one I believe to be key.

In fact, in forms a central part of my address today.

But first, I join those who have spoken already, paying my respects to the Traditional Owners, the custodians of this land, who maintain cultural integrity. Something we probably don't talk about so much, but I think is crucial for the country we are living in, and particularly where we may be going, in to the future.

Now, you've probably heard stories of Tennant Creek. You might know someone who has driven through, or you have done so, with the windows wound tightly shut, with the doors locked - maybe that's your story. It's a story I've heard before. It is a rough town, there's no doubting that. It's a place where quite horrific things have happened in the past. But I want to talk to you today about the Tennant Creek I know, the Tennant Creek that I grew up in. A small town, that's located 500km north of Alice Springs, and 1000km south of Darwin, that has a tremendous sense of soul. It was where Australia's last Gold Rush happened in the 1930s, and it's a place of opportunity. A land where you can really have a go, if you want. I think the message from that, for you graduates today, is that if you want, there are opportunities for you. I describe it as having a rough and tough exterior - but a powerful sense of soul and community.

Today, I want to talk to you about Pathways and Passions. The two collided for me when I was 13, looking through the window of the Tennant and District Times newspaper, wondering what was happening in that newsroom, and how I could be a part of it. Well, ultimately, that happened when I started cleaning the windows, and was invited in, to see just how a newsroom operates, and how a newspaper is put together.

From there, I can remember vividly, the day that I was sent out to cover my first news story. It was the netball, and anyone who listens to the ABC Radio Canberra shows that I present, you'll know that I'm not that keen on sport, and to be brutally honest, I don't understand it. Sorry to those graduates in the sports sciences today.

But I agonised for hours and hours over what would go in the newspaper article, that would be less than a hundred words - and I'd taken many, many photos while out on the job. When I saw it in print, and saw my by-line - which arguably filled up half of the space - I knew that this was a career space for me. And not because of the by-line, but because of the

ability to take an idea, to transform that in to a story, to be able to then connect, through this form of communication.

Now, I mentioned this speech is about Pathways and Passions, well the passion was clearly there for me, it was something I sought out. The pathway is something that's a little more difficult to grasp. Just how do we find a pathway? What do we do? How do we reach our potential? How do we get to that point?

Well for me, it was finding someone who would support me. The first was an editor, Jasmin Afianos, who said you can do this, you need to give this a try. Since then I've been the beneficiary of so many people, who have taken such enormous leaps of faith in me. The challenge for me, and perhaps the opportunity, has always been, taking up those offers. And then doing the best job that I can.

I mentioned how Tennant Creek can be a rough and tough place, well I had my first death threat at the tender age of 16. Which by Tennant Creek standards was borderline old (said with tongue in cheek). I was sitting in court, the first time I covered a court case - that first day, that first death threat, I can remember being as white as a sheet, and feeling like I would be sick. I went back to the office and said I can't do this, this is absolutely outrageous, and Jasmin the Editor said "well, the thing you've got to realise about death threats, is it's only really the first one that counts." That may have been Tennant Creek logic, or it may have been the brutal honesty about what I could expect in the media - and there have been other threats since then, not since I've come here to Canberra, fortunately. The lesson here is about the professional challenges we all face - they will be many and varied - but all will require thinking and the support of mentors.

From there, I was essentially run out of Tennant Creek, when I was about 21, by the Editor of the newspaper, and my Mum, who decided I had become a big fish in a small pond. That I had surpassed my potential and my ability to learn and to grow. I had my first adult foray in to the academic world - studying a law degree at Charles Darwin University. For me, at that point, university was such a disconnect, another world - and not one that I was familiar with. And sadly, at that point, not one that I pursued.

I took a chance, and said to the NT News - renowned for their crocodile front pages, of which I've done a few in my time - that I wanted to do some time with them. They were not keen, until Jasmin, my previous editor gave them a call and explained if they gave me a chance it would be worth it. So, they offered me a cadetship, and in true News Ltd style, ended up lasting for some time, with minimal pay. And from there, learned some amazing skills about how to communicate, how to tell a story, and to understand your audience. That when you are told something - even when someone is yelling at you - there's a message beneath that; something we need to take from that, perhaps a learning. I've carried that with me.

From there, as you heard, have worked, in remarkable places around Australia, and have had the opportunity to report extensively in Indonesia, and cover some fascinating stories there: the changing shape of democracy in Australia's closest neighbour; covering the last Presidential election campaign there, that was almost as arduous (in length) as the recent

Federal Election that happened here in Australia just last year - of which I also spent all but a few days on the campaign trail. I also have covered stories that are quite crippling. I was in Cilicap, that's also known as 'Death Island' - outside of Jakarta, where Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran were executed in April 2015. The date and that night will forever be ingrained in my memory. And for those of you who have studied journalism or communications, or media, and are going in to this profession, there will be challenging stories that you'll have to cover. And you'll have to find somewhere deep within you, a strength, a resolve to push through. Because as you can hear, it still makes my voice waver to talk about it, even all these years later. About how politics and policy, and an absolute lack of humanity - clashed that night on a lonely stretch of island not too far to the north of Australia.

It was those sorts of experiences that landed we back in Canberra for the second time, at the very start of last year, at first working for SKY News as a federal political reporter, and now here at the ABC Canberra - reporting on the stories that are shaping our community, right across our region, and the biggest news stories. It has been an absolute tremendous honour to be able to take stories; to have people come to me and say these are the things that we want to talk about, but you're the one who has to use your voice and use this platform - and that's exactly what we've done. In speaking about gambling addiction, in talking about some of the challenges with development and town planning as well; we've also done that in highlighting some of the really magnificent things that are happening in the community. It's really important that we do that in the media, that we maintain a balance: talking about what's tough, but also what works. Because otherwise, it would be pretty sad every time you turned on the radio or TV, or opened up a newspaper. If we just focused on the really challenging things happening right around the world.

On Pathways and Passions, to the graduates, let me speak directly to you. Find what your passion is - I suspect you already know, because you've been studying for some years to get here. Make sure that you don't lose that; that fire in your belly; that drive that makes you get up and go. In terms of the pathway, find the people who are going to support you, to champion you - those who will help you to get to whoever it is that you want to go. And don't let yourself be defined by what anyone else says about you; about how you operate; about the sort of person you are. That's something only you can determine; what it is that defines you, and where you go from here.

One of the early lessons I had in my career, was from a journalist, who went on to be a Minister in the Northern Territory, and is now a Senator for the Northern Territory, in this very building. Malarndirri McCarthy reinforced in me a lesson taught by my first editor - and every mentor since - a key point, which is: when someone speaks to you, when they put themselves on the line, when they commit to you, their thoughts or their views, or their feelings - you absolutely have to respect that, protect that. Because it can be very difficult for some to stand up and say this happened to me, this is my experience, this is why I'm doing what I'm doing or it's why I'm thinking the way I am. So those of you who follow in that direction, please make sure to always stay true to that.

In closing, I could quote for you the great works of Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, about the virtues that you may be calling upon as you head in to the next stage of your lives. But I

thought I might quote someone who I think is even more profound. Someone who has, for me, written in such a simple and eloquent way, that it's so difficult to look past. And that of course is Dr Seuss.

“All the places you'll go.

There is fun to be done, there are points to be scored.

There are games to be won, and the magical things you can do with that ball will make you the winningest winner of all.”

Well I think there are some universal truths within that. And I hope there are some points I've made that will help you.

Finally, when we talk about Pathways and Passions, and opportunities - always chase your passions, doggedly determine what your pathways are going to be, and find the champions and mentors who will help you to get to that point.

Thank you very much, it's been a great honour to speak to you today.