



Curtin University Graduation Ceremony

Address

by

**The Honourable Wayne Martin AC
Chief Justice of Western Australia**

Curtin University Campus
9 February 2016

Chancellor Colin Beckett, Vice-Chancellor Professor Deborah Terry AO, distinguished guests too numerous to mention, and perhaps most importantly of all, fellow degree recipients, and your family, friends and academic staff who are gathered here this evening to celebrate your achievements. I am sure that all graduates appreciate, as I do, that you or I would not be here this evening without the support and encouragement provided by family and loved ones, who are thereby entitled to bask in your reflected glory, and I would encourage you to expressly acknowledge that support and encouragement in the celebrations which I hope will follow tonight's ceremony.

Before going any further I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet, the Whadjuk people who form part of the great Noongar clan of south-western Australia, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. Of course this university does much more than merely acknowledge the first inhabitants of this continent - it gives effect to the obligations which arise from the dispossession of the first peoples by providing a world class education for their descendants, and addressing the particular needs and interests of Aboriginal students through the Centre for Aboriginal Studies.

I am greatly honoured this evening in two respects. First, I am greatly honoured by the award of an honorary degree from this outstanding university, and for which I am most grateful. I am all the more grateful because unlike all the other recipients of degrees this evening, I have not had to undertake any programme of study or pass exams or

write dissertations so as to demonstrate that I have acquired a level of knowledge and understanding in any particular field of study - all that I have done is to try to maximise the opportunities which a great education provided to me, working in a profession which I have really enjoyed and which has, at times, given me an opportunity to assist others and thereby, hopefully, provide some measure of return to the community which provided my education. That is precisely the opportunity which you graduates now have.

In a sense, for you, this evening marks the end of the beginning, whereas for me, as I approach my professional use-by date, it is more like the beginning of the end. The second way in which I am honoured this evening, is by the opportunity I have been given to draw upon the lessons I have learned during a thoroughly enjoyable career to make some suggestions that might help you to derive the same levels of enjoyment from the very different but equally demanding careers which await you.

It is common for lawyers to communicate using the words of others. Who better to draw upon this evening than the great Australian after whom this university is named, John Curtin. Professor David Black recently published an anthology of letters written by Curtin to various people, including Jessie Gunn, a girl who was 14 years old when the series of letters started - Curtin then being in his 20s. Curtin was believed to have been 'sweethearts' with Jessie's older sister Nancy (known as Annie) Gunn. After Annie's untimely death, Curtin

corresponded with Jessie for some years and he maintained connections with the Gunn family throughout his life..

In one of his letters to young Jessie, Curtin wrote in terms which aptly convey my advice to you this evening. He wrote:

"I urge you to employ time well for it never comes again. Money can be lost and we can get more. Jewels may be destroyed but there are others. A day that is wasted is gone forever. So I appeal to you to utilise every opportunity that offers in study, in preparation, in qualification for the serious work of life. All of us have our respective duties to perform. We owe it to the world and to ourselves to perform those duties well."

Curtin also took the view that formal education was simply an introduction to a life of continuous learning. In another letter to Jessie, he wrote:

"The knowledge you have gained at school will be valueless unless you retain it, and strengthen it, and increase it. This you can do without any great exertions, just keep going steady and sure, slow and steady wins the race - the tortoise beat the hare in the fable you know."

Expressed in more contemporary terms, Curtin was encouraging his young correspondent to use the skills of learning and the appetite for knowledge developed by her studies throughout the rest of her life, in

a context in which life is a marathon, not a sprint, and that is very sound advice.

Curtin also encouraged his young correspondent to "never hide your light under a bushel", that is, not to hide your talents and accomplishments from others; which is good advice to young graduates in a very competitive world. You might be waiting a long time for other people to extoll your virtues as well as you can do it yourself.

I will now step out from behind John Curtin, and give you a few clichés using my own words and drawn from my own experience. First, expect the unexpected. Nothing is more certain than the unpredictability of life - not even death or taxes. When I was sitting in the equivalent of the chairs you are in now, I had no inkling of the course my life would take and continue to be surprised by its unexpected twists and turns. The world class education which you have received at this university gives you the capacity to respond quickly and adeptly to the many unexpected opportunities and challenges which you will encounter during life's journey.

Based on my experience, anything more than a relatively short-term plan is not only a waste of time, but worse still, might blind you to opportunities which do not fit that preconceived plan. The least likely way of becoming the Chief Justice of Western Australia, or, I would suggest, the Chancellor or Vice Chancellor of a university, is to design and follow a path which has such an ultimate goal or destination. Instead I would encourage you to follow your hearts, to find

something you really enjoy doing, because then you will do it well and be successful. In order to do that you may have to take risks, so be brave, within reason. I am not suggesting you should bet the family home on a business venture.

As it happens, and perhaps not unsurprisingly, my own life is an example of what I am encouraging in you. I never set out to be the Chief Justice or even a judge. What I have done is keep my eyes open for new opportunities and challenges, working in an area which I have really enjoyed. It is easy to work hard if you enjoy it. Unfortunately, the only real predictor of success is hard work. If you work hard because you enjoy it, success will follow, as night follows day, and it need not be planned or calculated - it will just happen.

My studies in law taught me that a measure of the civilisation and worth of any community or society can be found in the extent to which it protects the rights of all of its citizens, and provides justice to all, whether rich or poor, whether powerful or vulnerable, and especially in the extent to which it protects those who, by reason of disability or disadvantage, are unable to protect themselves. That important lesson imbued me with a sense of responsibility which I have endeavoured to discharge in the course of my duties as a lawyer, and more recently as a judge.

I am sure that the very same lesson will have been imbued into those of you who are graduating in law this evening by the very fine law school at this university. My own involvement with that law school, and its journey from conception to fulfilment, and my regular

interactions with inaugural Dean Professor Paul Fairall, are another reason why I am so pleased to have had the opportunity to address you this evening.

Finally, there is I think one very big difference between the world into which I ventured following my graduation in 1973, and the world into which you go forth. That difference lies in the greatly diminished significance of national boundaries. The global village is becoming, or arguably has become, a reality. The internet, international trade treaties and modern forms of travel have created an economy which is more international than ever before. Graduates from Australian universities, like you, are now to be found throughout the world, including most particularly in the Asian region which, despite recent fluctuations, is most likely to provide the real impetus for world growth during your life-times. I am sure you will not think parochially - I am sure that this university, with its many international links, will encourage you to think of the whole world as your oyster (to borrow a phrase from Shakespeare); you are amongst the fortunate who are in a position to take the opportunities that life has to offer - so go out there and enjoy it.