

PAMELA WALLIN - NOTES FOR CHANCELLOR INSTALLATION

1. Chancellor Emeritus Alexander,
2. President and Vice-Chancellor Summerlee,
3. Members of the Board and Honorary Fellows and Special Guests,
4. Members of the senior administration, Faculty, staff and students of the University of Guelph,
5. and you, the Graduands –your families and friends

I am truly honoured to stand before you today and I join you in your excitement about new beginnings – about what comes next - I too am taking up a new challenge today –becoming *your* Chancellor here at the University of Guelph - following in the footsteps of the incomparable and Honourable Lincoln Alexander. He is an extraordinary human being –much loved – and a man who has made this country think differently about people who are different.

It is a tribute to him and to all of you –faculty, staff and students that this university ranks at the very top when it comes to quality, reputation and the educational experience it offers.

I am proud to be part of this extraordinary place –that with Linc’s guidance and President Summerlee’s leadership and vision- has become a world leader in providing answers to real world problems.

Perhaps my rural roots drew me here to Guelph – and what I have found is a place that wisely uses its strengths and its traditions–the agricultural school and the Veterinary college, to fast forward into the 21st century...to solve the mysteries of modern disease or create a safe food or by turning tobacco into life saving drugs.

This takes both vision and courage-and new ways of thinking.

Universities are living and breathing places–which must be able to turn on a dime and respond to modern demands. Thinking...teaching...learning must all reflect the new world - we need to reward emotional intelligence not just IQ...research must be part of learning and not just some activity hived off in sterile labs.

In fact, much of the work you will do in the years ahead has not yet been imagined

And coping with change and the speed of it - will prove a constant in your life.

I spent many years in broadcasting and journalism – a world that is in the midst of a revolution that few could have imagined -

Chip and nano technology let’s us know anything, anywhere, instantly... but our obsession with immediacy and being first with the so-called facts, means that we-- far too often-- lose sight of the truth – lose sight of the big picture! We can so easily miss the significance of things if we look at them out of context....

And when technology allows us to so finely target our search for facts –we may miss the serendipitous discovery – that unpredictable moment where we have a brand new thought or idea – or where we connect the dots and experience one of those ah-ha moments.

Never underestimate the power of *serendipity* – those small events; moments in time; subtle, silent forces - that change your life – if you let them!

At university, I set out to become French teacher - in part because a babysitter had shown me pictures of the Eiffel tower at an impressionable age! I switched to political science and psychology and graduated a social worker. A chance phone call led to a career in journalism that I had never contemplated and an assignment in New York City after 9/11 drew me to diplomacy!!!

I may not have been open to such change and possibility -without parents who understood just how potent and life-changing “risk and adventure” can be - they fostered curiosity - and mine taught me perhaps life’s single most important lesson -through deed, not just word – and it’s my shorthand, not theirs –but their message was clear : character trumps genius

Simply put –you can be smart but if you are not kind and decent, fair and generous then the brains are for naught....

I remember a conversation with the poet Al Purdy who declared his personal mantra was to “stay stupid”, which, he explained, really meant “ just keeping your mind open”

It was one of those Ah-Ha moments.... You’ve got to stay stupid to become smart!

We need the balance between what we are capable of and what feeds our soul - because creativity –the ability to find answers - is sparked by using both sides of our brains- we need art and beauty and music in our lives to unleash the creative power to solve problems.

The late Sydney Harris –an old journalist - once wrote that:

“Most people are mirrors, reflecting the moods and emotions of the times; few are windows, bringing light to bear on the dark corners where troubles fester. The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.”

As I look out across the room today I know that both you –and this fine institution - have risen to the challenge – because learning is not about knowing for knowing sake. It’s about knowing so we can make a difference.

For the last few years, as a student you have been an observer, learning economic theories or agricultural policy, or the meaning of a literary work or the importance of a scientific truth...

As graduates, you become participants and citizens. Decision makers. With that, of course, comes responsibility.... For every action - there will be a consequence - good or bad, helpful or hurtful.

You are about to discover the wonderful burden of choice and that the decisions you make will matter - and not just to you.

As a wise journalist once wrote: An idealist believes the short run doesn’t count. A cynic believes the long run doesn’t matter. A realist believes that what is done or left undone in the short run determines the long run...

Your education will help you understand these choices – and their consequences .

But so too will your compassion and concern, your instinct and intuition.

Charles Dickens once wrote that to be truly knowledgeable we must recognize human frailty – that we all have flaws and needs.

We know from our own daily lives that in any relationship – be it between teacher and student ; sibling or friend ; child and parent – that the most important tool is an ability to listen –or as the actor Alan Alda put it: “listening is the ability to be changed by the other.”

That is precisely what education is about –the ability to be changed by what you have learned.....

It is said that each person’s life is lived as a series of conversations. For me that is quite literally true – I’ve had thousands of those exchanges in the glare of the TV lights, but I have listened and learned from them.

Many of these people would be considered successful – but by this I don't mean they have achieved just fame or fortune...

But I mean those who have become successful human beings –and what they have in common is this – they are passionate about their mission in life. And all have a strong sense of purpose.

They want their acts and actions to matter and count. They make conscious choices.

The successful also know their limits – and that was another of those ah-has moments for me. British writer G.K. Chesterton once said that the essence of art is limitation.

Roughly paraphrased, what that means is that the most important part of any painting is its frame – it tells which way is up and what we are looking at –we too need to frame our worlds – and the successful do just that!

They decide where they can make a difference and focus their energies there.

Success in life – is the result of the expectation of it – by you of yourself , AND by others of you... families and communities are so key.

Growing up rural – in a small town – teaches you that you are your brother's keeper -and accommodation is a skill you learn early.

Of course, you can be mad at your neighbour but you are going to have to live alongside that person – perhaps for a lifetime - so you learn to embrace each other's needs –and differences.

In the urban setting, there are few consequences if you shove or curse or ignore the outstretched hand of stranger.

So perhaps, it is a truer test of your character - and as they saying goes: *Our character is what we do when we think no one is looking!!!*

For you - the graduands - today will forever remain etched on your mind.

You will be reminded of these past – amazing - few years often.

It will spark a feeling or a memory - perhaps about a true love or a broken heart - or that moment when you change your mind, about a belief you once so passionately.

One day, you'll look back and remember the dream you had and how much you will have accomplished.

You can choose to live and create in a world inhabited by doers and thinkers - those who pursue ideas and work, not paychecks and security.

This can be risky but embarking on risky ventures takes courage and confidence – it's not about ego.

Your education helps bridge the gap between aspirations and achievements.

Yes, you'll look back and wonder how you got there - wherever you'll be then - from here today.

It takes hard work from you and understanding and guidance from those around you.

Look around you today –your family, your classmates and colleagues, your teachers and faculty who have guided you and helped you shape your path – AND SAY THANK YOU TO THEM.

We are all touched by so many people who change our course –although I have met him, I never had a chance to interview him. But being in his presence, was nothing short of inspiring –and very few meet that test – but his words are wise.....

Nelson Mandela: his inaugural speech in 1994 after decades in prison....as he was to become President of his country --this is what he said, quoting an American writer:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us....and you playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

So let your light shine –on the dark corners, on the people in need –become those windows into the future.

Congratulations!

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June 13, 2007