



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

LA TROBE HONORARY DOCTORATE
Wednesday 14 December 2022

The Honourable John Brumby AO, Chancellor, La Trobe University
Professor Jessica Vanderlelie (*VANDER-LAYLEE*), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students), and
Members of the University Executive
Professor Lorne Neudorf, Acting Dean, La Trobe Law School
Family members, friends, distinguished guests and, above all, today's graduands

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are gathering, and I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and to Elders of other communities who may be with us.

Today is a proud day for every graduand and for every family member and supporter who has helped them on their way to having completed a highly sought-after degree from a prestigious university.

May I, without immodesty – I hope – admit that today is also a proud day for me as the recipient of a La Trobe University Honorary Doctorate.

First and foremost, I am proud for family reasons.

I am, like so many of us in Victoria, the daughter of a migrant father.

He, like so many others, found safe haven here.

And he, like all who've come, wanted the best for his children, and worked hard to provide it through our education.

He loved this country dearly and, with my Australian born mother, wanted us to contribute to it.

With that background, and married to someone reared similarly with a strong community conscience and conscientiousness, I am someone who, although committed to public life, has never seen myself as a public figure and someone who, after almost 8 years, still drives up the Government House drive, or still walks to my office down our beautiful staircase each morning, (modelled on the one in Buckingham Palace), not quite believing that it's me. Or that it is me, in THAT House. Or me, in THIS role.

It's no longer an imposter syndrome...I don't think one can 'impose' for THAT long, but more the wonder of where I find myself – with Tony – calling home.

Ordinary people, living in extraordinary circumstances.

With extraordinary opportunities and insights into the people and the talent – and the goodness – that resides in our State.

It makes me proud that this honour is bestowed upon me today by La Trobe University. You too should feel similarly proud.

This is a university that leads in many disciplines, and is genuinely connected to community here in Melbourne's north, where it is a significant contributor to employment and the economy, and connected regionally as well.

It is a university overseen by an outstanding Chancellor.

John Brumby AO is recognised for his commitment to public life – both within and outside politics – to education, and through leadership roles in medical and scientific research and a range of not for profit organisations.

And it's led by an outstanding Vice-Chancellor.

I have known John Dewar AO for many years, having met through our work in family law (decades ago). He has demonstrated great vision and leadership as this University has grown, and has contributed to the whole sector across some of the most difficult challenges of the pandemic.

Finally, I am proud that I have been able to participate in this ceremony that sees almost 160 students graduating today.

Some of you have graduated with a Degree in Criminology.

Two things about that. I enrolled in criminology as a part of my first year Law Degree (back in the olden days). I didn't get too far. It was hard. Really hard. I'm afraid I changed to a politics course instead. But if it helps my credibility with the criminologists amongst you today, I can make the claim to fame that my husband studied – and completed – criminology after his law degree. And he loved it.

Most of you graduate today with a degree in Law. It is a degree that has been for me, and for my husband – and indeed for our two children – a passport to different but fulfilling and gratifying careers.

Seeing you, I am prompted to look back and – with the benefit of the wisdom that comes from experience – wonder if I would tell my younger self to do anything differently today.

I'm not sure that I would! Well, perhaps around the edges – but that's all.

I was 20 years old when I graduated with just an LLB (Honours) degree from The University of Melbourne. I say 'just', because it has since become more fashionable to undertake combined degrees. (I didn't. So, don't panic if you haven't!)

What would I not change?

I wouldn't change my drive to succeed.

I say that, well aware that it can be misconstrued. But I am deliberate in saying it, in the hope that it might help remove the stigma so often associated with ambition.

I am comfortable to admit to ambition. Ambition to do my best. And, sometimes, still better! Ambition to achieve. To achieve the goals that feel important to me, whether in study, in work or in my private life.

Don't be ashamed of holding and carrying through on the ambitions that are dear to you. It is in fact a courageous thing to do.

At the Sorbonne in Paris, more than 110 years ago now, former US President Teddy Roosevelt gave a stirring speech about that sort of courage.

He spoke of the '*man in the arena*', who '*strives valiantly*' and:
'...who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that [as President Roosevelt put it] his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.'

So, never be ashamed of daring greatly. And don't be timid about some defeat along the way.

What else, looking back, would I not change?

I wouldn't change my desire to keep learning. You graduate today, but your learning by no means ends.

Retain your hunger to learn. Curiosity is a gift. It enables you to widen your horizons, to stay fresh, to feel and in fact to be, relevant in any chosen field.

I think I've learned more in the last seven years that I've been in my role as the Governor than ever before. Then again, I've probably thought that in every phase of my life and career so far.

I know too that I would never change the adventure of living and working abroad. That prospect or opportunity probably doesn't warrant much discussion with a group graduating in 2023.

But when my husband and I were young barristers – some decades ago now – it was not so much the norm to temporarily step out of a career in Melbourne to seek experience elsewhere. We both left the Victorian Bar to live in Hong Kong for three years, where we prosecuted criminal trials, before resuming our careers back here.

It was professionally and personally enriching and created cross cultural links and friendships that remain unbroken.

Finally, and certainly, I wouldn't change my priority of family. It is everything. I can't put it better than that.

So, what would I change?

I would possibly change the linear approach to my career. But that is very much with the benefit of hindsight. And, in the light of the changes across a half century, (gulp!), in how law degrees are used and working lives are lived.

Although my husband and I both studied law and became solicitors, then barristers, and then judges – a very traditional legal career trajectory – it has been no shock to us that both our sons studied law and neither is now practising as a lawyer.

You are of a generation where your options are broad.

But your law degrees will not be wasted. Everything that you have learned about the principles that underpin the rule of law, fairness and natural justice, and your acquired capacity to analyse and reason through any conundrum, will stand you in good stead for whatever you do.

That leaves me only to say how much I want to thank La Trobe University for bestowing me with an Honorary Doctorate. I particularly appreciate the symmetry in accepting this honour from the university named for my predecessor.

Although Charles La Trobe was not in fact the first Governor of Victoria, rather Superintendent of the Port Phillip District, which was at the time a separately administered part of NSW, (that hurts, doesn't it!), he later became the Lieutenant-Governor of the fledgling colony.

In that role, he oversaw the birth of iconic Victorian institutions, not least The University of Melbourne, the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the State Library, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra and the Royal Botanic Gardens.

La Trobe laid the groundwork for Melbourne to become a centre of lifestyle, culture, learning, sport, the arts, and major events.

La Trobe was a community builder.

Each one of you has the community builder within.

Approach everything that you will now embark upon with ambition, courage, curiosity and a sense of adventure.

It will be a pleasure for me to know that your future careers will in that way be fulfilling to you. It will be a pleasure to watch your inevitable contributions to Victoria. And a pleasure to watch La Trobe University continue to go from strength to strength.