

Chancellor Dowd, Vice Chancellor Lee, distinguished guests of Southern Cross University, families and friends of the graduates, and most importantly, graduates. Please accept my warmest congratulations to you, your families, and to those who have helped you along the way towards achieving this success today. With the recognition that I am only three speeches stand between you and no doubt a much anticipated celebration, I will keep my comments brief.

I have to admit that when I was invited to say a few words on this very special occasion I felt honored, but I also felt the weight of the responsibility to deliver an inspiring message. As the graduates will appreciate, my first step in researching my topic was to undertake a Google search, and I was surprised to find heaps of articles offering sage advice about giving an Occasional address: focus on the graduates, be sincere, be inspirational, be poignant, and, most importantly, be short.

Fortunately, based on my academic training, I was able to go back to an even more reliable source, Aristotle, and was thrilled to realize that my six year journey of completing my PhD in Classical Rhetoric was finally going to pay off! I have no doubt that I will be the only Rhetorician that you will ever encounter, as we are, indeed, very rare beasts. I can assure you that it has been mighty embarrassing on the few occasions when I have been woken up on an overnight flight to be asked “Are you a medical doctor?” You can imagine how

bad it made it me feel to have to reply: “No, but if you need help deriving appropriate lines of reasoning, please do let me know”.

Given that I have been immersed in tourism management education for the past 25 years, I thought it only fitting to focus my message today around a travel metaphor such as “Life is a journey, or life is a trip, or life is a holiday, or life is a voyage, when I hit upon the realization that: “life is an endless cycle of roundabouts” .

As you may know, if you have travelled to the US, we don't have many roundabouts. Instead, we have the petrol guzzling, time wasting, stop and start, frustrating, and dangerous system of traffic lights. I will never forget the first time that I drove on “the other side of the road” between Christchurch and Dunedin NZ and came to my first roundabout. Fortunately, there were no other cars in the roundabout as it took me at least two attempts to figure out where I was supposed to exit in order to go straight ahead. And it's this cycle of life's entrances and exits that I want to focus on today.

When we think about it, life really is nothing more than an endless cycle of entrances and exits. We enter the world, we enter our families, we enter School, we exit School, we enter jobs, we exit jobs, we enter relationships; we hopefully maintain these relationships, but sometimes we elect to exit from relationships; we enter professions; we exit professions, people we love exit this world, and

eventually, of course, we exit to the Great Unknown. We enter periods of great joy, happiness, well being, and contentment; and we enter periods of great loss, disappointment, and uncertainty. If we are resilient, we exit from these difficult periods with enhanced coping strategies. I think we can all agree that all of these entrances and exits are the essence of human experience regardless of who we are, where we live, what we do, or what we are able or not able to achieve in life.

For many of you today, your exit from University finds you entering the giant roundabout of the world of work. I mean a really Big roundabout. Picture the Arc de Triomphe roundabout. If any of you have had the exhilarating but terrifying experience of driving through the Arc de Triomphe roundabout as I have had on many occasions, you will appreciate that all you hope to do is to survive the process and eventually exit as intended. In reality, even if you do exit unto the wrong road off the Arc de Triomphe, it's actually not too bad because a) it's still incredibly beautiful and b) there are no dead end roads.

Unfortunately, this is not the case in life. Sometimes, in life, there are unplanned diversions, road blocks and dead ends. In fact, sometimes, if we are brutally honest with ourselves, we create our own diversions, potholes, roadblocks, and dead ends that divert our journeys. Sometimes we let something take over the gas pedal, the brake pedal, and most importantly, the

steering wheel; in other words, we let something else drive our bus. What is this powerful force? Our own fears.

Like all of you, there have been several highly influential books that have truly changed my life. One of the seminal books in my life was written by Susan Jeffers, and it has been instrumental in forming my life philosophy and my life plan. The name of the book is *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyways*. This book was first published in 1987. I re-read it at least once a year and have given it to many friends, family members, and former students.

Jeffers' thesis is that we are taught from birth by our families and society, especially females, that we have to "be careful", that the world is a "scary", and that we need to take every precaution to "avoid risks" at all cost. In this book Jeffers tells readers how to move from being a victim to being a creator, how to make "no lose" decisions, and how to create more meaning in your life by silencing the negative chatterbox in your brain.

It is how we control our fears, especially those fears surrounding failure or our desire to "always look good and not look bad" that I want to focus on for the next few minutes.

I am not going to pretend that I'm the only one here today who has managed my own fears. Reflect on what you have just accomplished. Undertaking and completing a university qualification is fraught with all kinds of fears.

Remember waiting for your first (or last?) exam result? Remember the first time you were assigned to a group project with people you didn't know?

Remember what it was like to write your first essay after having been out of school for 10 years? Remember when you told your friends that you had to study rather than go to the pub? Remember the first day of your internship?

Today, right at this moment, many of you are dealing with all kinds of fears about the future. "Will my partner accept that I want to move to Victoria to pursue my career?" "Will my qualification get me a good job?" "Should I stay in Australia to work?" or the ever present "Will I be smart enough to do this job?"

We all struggle with our own fears, for ourselves and for others, but those who manage and overcome their fears develop effective coping strategies. Susan Jeffers says the first necessary step is that we need to consciously raise our awareness to identify if and how fear is holding us back. Her advice for conquering our big and little fears sounds highly simplistic. She tells us to learn the mantra: "I can handle IT, " whatever that IT may be ranging from the death of a relative, to the loss of a job, to the loss of a retirement fund. Her second piece of advice is that we need to move out of our comfort zone if we want to avoid stagnation.

As you well know, University life is all about asking questions, about being curious. As you prepare to exit the womb of this wonderful University to enter into the very scary place universally referred to as “The REAL WORLD” you may want to ask yourself just a few quick questions: Are you driving your bus or are you letting your parents, your partners, your siblings, your employers, or your friends take control of the steering wheel?

The irony about fear of course, and you know this already, regardless if you are 18 or 68, is that 80% of what we fear never eventuates. It doesn't eventuate because it was never a real threat; it was a figment of our imagination.

Let me give you a few examples when I have “Felt the Fear and Did It Anyways”. This “road trip” that has been my life to date has turned out to be dramatically different than what I expected as a result unplanned exits that I decided to take from that safe and familiar road. For example, I left University after my first year of study and made the scariest exit of my life up to that time: I left my family and friends to take a job at the Grand Canyon National Park. Upon reflection, my decision to take this exit proved to be one of the best decisions of my life as I learned to live on my own, I found my spiritual home, and I made lifelong relationships that I still maintain today. After several years of working in the hospitality industry in Southern California, Hawaii, and Montana, I exited my Hippie Dippy life and entered the amazing world of academe, where I have remained for the past 35 years.

Other significant exits for me was when I left a “good” University job to pursue my PhD, when I moved to central NY to take on a full time job at Cornell University while still completing my PhD, when I left my first husband and family to move to Australia in 1995 to open Cornell’s program in Canberra, when I decided to leave Cornell, a world class ivy league University, to take a job in Auckland, New Zealand because I had fallen in love with a Kiwi, and when I had the opportunity to move back to Australia in 2008.

And let’s not forget; it’s not only the exits that you take that affect your life’s journey; it’s also the ones you don’t take. While I don’t have any serious regrets, I always wonder what would have happened if I had overcome my fears to pursue a career as a professional actress, or become a diplomat, or have children. What I am trying to illustrate is that sometimes we miss some pretty enticing exits if we only have one destination in mind.

For the graduates, your presence here today at this ceremony represents an exit from University, from a well-travelled road. Some of you travelled very far to study at SCU; some of you drove down the street. All of you had one destination in mind: to be sitting where you are today -- and here you are.

I know that I speak for the entire University staff when I thank you for making Southern Cross University an important part of your life journey to date. You have no idea how much we have learned from you. We know that you will take

your qualification and explore many roads, but we hope that the roundabouts bring you back to us. We hope that we have instilled in you a commitment to lifelong learning because we know from experience that as you grow both personally and professionally, you will need to build upon the skill set that you developed here at University.

We also hope that your journey returns you to SCU as active alumni of this fine university. All of you can recall how much you personally benefitted from industry guest lectures, industry mentors, and industry placements. By staying connected with the University, you will have the opportunity to not only engage in your own professional development through further study, but to give back to the University by sharing your expertise with future SCU students.

In conclusion, I commend you and congratulate you for undertaking this journey and arriving at your destination here today. You Felt the Fear and Did it Anyway! For some of you it has been a holiday, for others it's been more of a business trip, and for a few of you it has been an extended stay. Regardless, I hope that as you travel down this amazing highway of life that you will carefully consider your exits and make those decisions based on confidence, conviction, and joy -- not out of fear.

As the philosopher Robert Clancy noted: “The only thing that is real is your dreams. If you hold onto them, you will grow old, but you will never be old.”

And that ladies and gentlemen, is the only definition of success.

Best wishes for the future, and please do keep in touch. The Southern Cross University logo states “It’s All About U”; as alumni of this fine University, you play an important role in its future. May that future be bright for all of us.

Thank you and “Take Care!”