

Vice-Chancellor, members of the University, fellow graduates and guests.

I am honored by the invitation to address you on this momentous occasion.

I would like to share with you a quote by Isabel Waxman, who was right when she said 'It is indeed ironic that we spend our school days yearning to graduate and our remaining days being nostalgic about our school days'. I am sure we can all identify with that statement. If we think about it, the nostalgia will be different for every one of us. For some of you it will be the social aspect of university life that most clearly springs to mind – such as the hours spent drinking coffee with friends or the days spent at the uni bar. For others it will be the memories of hard work and academic achievement such as the late nights or the large quantities of chocolate and coffee consumed whilst studying for an exam. There are those of you who will remember university as a rite of passage that had to be endured in order to pursue a successful career. And then there are those of you who will remember university as a time when you were working towards an uncertain future. Whatever the memory, whether its just one or a combination of many, it is clear that when we walk out of this courtyard today, we will all be taking with us a unique feeling, memory and experience. Our time here will have meant different things to all of us.

For me, university will mean much more than receiving a degree. It will mean realizing my potential; inheriting a set of skills and tools that will stay with me no matter what path I take in life and appreciating the support of those who believed in me. For me, university was a journey and this journey began when I was 19 years old and working as an admin assistant in Macquarie bank's private equity division.

Maybe it was the lack of interest or the boredom but I really made a terrible admin assistant. I made bad coffees and constantly took wrong messages. I still recall the day one of the executives called me a 'bird brain' because I had taken a wrong phone number. Ironically, that same executive ended up offering me a job a couple of years later.

I was fortunate that the group of individuals I worked with saw my potential and allowed me to morph into various roles. I discovered I had a talent for analysis and numbers, but without a degree I could not progress beyond a financial assistant role. It was the desire to pursue a professional career and the encouragement of my work colleagues that ultimately motivated me to enroll in my finance degree. By the time I commenced my studies in 2002, I was 21 and already married.

I was a part time student working full time for the majority of the four and a half years I spent studying. The road was tough and tiring at times, but I had the unwavering support of my family, husband and friends. Without their help I would not be here today. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our families, partners and friends for providing us with the support needed to complete our studies.

Four and half years later, the Macquarie University road has come to an end, although the journey has just begun. I have come a long way since my admin assistant days – I am still at the bank but am now a business analyst and am project managing an Initial Public Offering. I never imagined all those years ago when I was running around making teas and coffees that I would be standing here today. Whilst university has

helped me achieve my career aspirations, it has given me, and all of us really, so much more.

We have received knowledge and with that knowledge comes three powerful assets: awareness, understanding and confidence. We now have a platform from which we can confidently face the challenges this fast paced world throws at us. The foundation and framework we have been given will continue to serve us no matter what path we take in life.

We have opportunities and a chance to continue to realize our full potential. We have choices to make. It is we, as individuals, that must decide what we do with the tools and skills we have been equipped with. The possibilities are endless.

We have received a ticket to learn. And the learning has really only just begun. There is a whole world out there waiting to be explored. There is a lot to see and absorb.

And finally, we have forged friendships and added to our support network – a network that will continue to stand by us as we face the realities of the working world.

I'd like to leave you with a poem by Dr Seuss that really encompasses all I have said today. Hopefully it will help you understand that what you now do with this experience ultimately lies in your hands.

**You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.  
You're on your own.  
And you know what you know.  
You are the guy who'll decide where to go.**

**Caterina Polistina**