

## FLINDERS UNIVERSITY GRADUATION CEREMONY 9 MAY 2022 | OCCASIONAL ADDRESS

*Maggie Beer AO in response to the presentation of an Honorary Award of Doctor of the University*

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Chancellor - Mr. Stephen Gerlach AM, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) - Professor Robert Saint, Deputy Vice-Chancellor(Students) - Professor Romy Lawson, Vice President and Executive Dean - Professor Alison Kitson, University Council members, University staff, the family and friends of graduates and most especially, you the graduates.

In my lifetime I've not known of a more vital time to be graduating. You are all so needed and have so many opportunities. There are so many different paths you can take with your degrees and yet one of the most important things is to marry your knowledge with empathy, whichever strand you follow

I left school in 1959 at 14 years of age due to my parent's financial circumstances. At that time, it wasn't the norm for young people, can I say especially women, to expect to be able to go to university. Yet in a way it was a time too when there could be so much on offer as it was the 60's and if you had drive, aptitude, attitude - both equally important - and a bit of chutzpah you could often get your foot in the door without prior learning. It's different now.

After a few years working in offices learning skills but unfulfilled, at 18 I enrolled in nursing at Concord Repatriation Hospital in Sydney.

I have to admit it's rather a blur in my memory of exhaustion - between on duty and classes and exams, the bad habit of eating meals so quickly to get back on the ward in time, those perfectly starched sister's head-dresses and a good dose of fear of matron - but I loved it. Yet in that first year I injured my back so badly I was months in hospital and nursing was a thing of the past.

It did instil in me though a lifelong respect for all the nursing and health professions as a career path. You who can make such a difference to the lives of those suffering.

I spent many more years searching for what would give me those equal measures of challenge, commitment and contentment that would have been mine from nursing. I spent years thinking I was a failure because I wasn't 'educated'.

I had more jobs than you could imagine searching and I tested my mettle and pushed myself outside my comfort zone at first - but I was always learning.

I was 34 before I found my life's path and for you today, how pleased I am for you all you've found yours now. Though it is just the beginning of your journey, and this degree might well lead you onto others related to your chosen field because learning never stops and the satisfaction and the energy that comes from always wanting to know more is seductive.

You might know that my life path turned out to be food – I love to cook, and it came about by necessity in that our, that is, Colin's vision of farming pheasants was limited by people not understanding cooking game birds. As I'd grown up in a household where food was of vital importance and just 'knew' how to cook so never thought twice about throwing myself into cooking whatever we grew, always on a steep learning curve and that with Colin's Churchill Fellowship for game bird breeding, was the beginning of this journey of ours.

I found my passion and had it in me: always to learn more; to always do something better and, I loved every part of the journey. Now to give back by wanting to share that knowledge in making beautiful food accessible for those in aged care and whilst food is the 'centre of the plate' for me it's nowhere without the collaborative efforts of all of the nursing and health science professionals.

It's been an exciting, yet often challenging path, full of hard work but full of joy too as I know your worlds will be if you throw yourself into your chosen career with zest.

You have such an opportunity to make that difference in people's lives and to grow yourself because of that and, as you develop, you will have your chance to be part of growing a culture of caring.

As a society we must do better for those in need and you are part of a band of people who have the tools to do so. I admire you already for that - go into the world and make a difference!

**9 May 2022**