

## Occasional Address

Wilson Hall, University of Melbourne, Saturday 2 December 2017, 11.00am

Dr Ross Bastiaan AM RFD

*Periodontist*

It is an honour for me to stand here today before you, the newest and brightest graduates of our university, and to welcome you into the family of graduates of this University now that you have completed, at varying levels, your tertiary educational programmes.

Today also means much to me as I once sat here in this Wilson Hall in 1973 just as you do today and watched my generation of graduates go forward to receive our qualifications and to wonder what lay ahead.

Back in 1973 it was a different graduate world. Work was assured, we were in demand. My horizons were to be a dental practitioner in private practice and to teach part-time at our university. I had an eye to specialisation and achieved that two years later. But so have hundreds before me.

So why do I address you today? Well it's because not only have I fulfilled my professional dreams but more importantly I chose to give a considerable portion of my non-professional life pursuing a very special service to Australia, well outside dentistry and one that has provided to thousands of people a practical permanent record of Australia's history.

If the right side of the brain is tuned into dentistry and the humanities are of the left brain, then years ago I felt an urgent need to massage the left. For you in the Health Sciences the scientific rigour that you have observed over many years has been both vigorous and demanding. There is however a rich element of the humanities which life at this university should have tempted you to indulge in but probably passed you by as your program allowed so little free time. Don't despair as most students in my day missed it also. I found the humanities 20 years after graduation.

Born in Australia and with a Dutch/Australian family background of service in war, I grew up with a major interest in Australia's involvement in all conflicts of the last century. My mentor was Laurance McCarthy VC, a national hero of the First World War, who helped fund my education and inspired me to strive for the best. He said that '**nothing in life worth having is easy**' and I have carried that motto throughout my life. I consequently tried harder and took opportunities that others avoided or ignored. Some opportunities do not come again. May be this is one of the main message that you take home from me as it will serve you well when you seek direction.

In my post-graduate studies in London in 1977 I obtained a collection of previously unseen, invaluable old photographs of the 1915 Gallipoli Campaign and which were to change my life. An opportunity! I sort to investigate these pictures in Turkey and eventually to publish a hard back book titled "*Images of Gallipoli*".

In the writing of the book I visited Gallipoli in 1988 and here was dismayed to find almost no information in English to help advise the many thousands of people who were coming to one of Australia's most sacred and revered sites. I felt this wrong and so I obtained permission from the Turkish Government to put a series of ten large bronze information plaques telling the story of the battle in English, Turkish, German and French. A dentist doing such things was unheard of then and hence some objections from historians were raised but I was able to secure ten sites around the battlefield so you could walk around Anzac using the plaques as a guide. I unveiled them with PM Bob Hawke in 1990 and 53 of the last surviving Gallipoli veterans.

One might think that could be the end of a journey but it was not. It was the beginning. Soon I was contacted by Sir Edward Dunlop and together we did the Prisoner of War story of Australians captured by the Japanese in Thailand, Borneo and Singapore in World War Two. And so it rolled on year after year with the Federal Government, many corporations and average Australians supporting my not-for-profit projects around the world from Asia to Europe. In France & Belgium I placed 14 plaques on every battlefield McCarthy VC had fought and although many years after his death I felt I had repaid my debt to my mentor.

The bronze plaques, each one metre square and 85 kilograms where by now very distinct because I had learnt to sculpt in *bas-relief* using my dental materials and dental skills, and I wrote multi-lingual explanatory text with maps on each plaque telling you the significance of where you stood and orientating you to that site. The text painted a vivid picture for both our people and the people in the lands that we fought. It reflected this nation's commitment to freedom and democracy.

That journey continues to this day and now 27 years later and with over 280 large bronze commemorative plaques erected around the world, my original aims are almost fulfilled. I have covered all major battlefields in which Australia has fought and expanded into some of our social history including the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition, the history of the Great Ocean Road and other major past historic events. Additionally I wrote 3 guide books highlighting these aspects and often speak publicly.

What I have done should say to you that your journey from graduating today is only the start of a much bigger, exciting picture. Among you there will be some, who like me, will expand their horizons and use your current education to improve your broader mind and skills. Certainly your education was always about you earning a good living and thereby enjoying a rewarding life style. Ask your parents on why they wanted you well educated and I am sure they will support that concept but it should also be to expand your commitments to the community in which you live in the years ahead.

Your life is privileged; you have been given the knowledge to better yourself and the people that you will serve. When you think about it, what you have learnt during your years of study is not wide ranging, but it is in depth. Hence your mind is disciplined but more importantly this university has taught you how to logically think and how to process information and facts. You know how to search out information; process thought and using these, set new goals. A great skill.

Most of you will have untapped leadership potential and organisational talents that will give you an edge. Use them, grasp the opportunities. Exploit these qualities in the years ahead

but give back to the community that gave you this start. Get involved in community groups, help children learn, sit of school boards and make a difference.

Remember today is also about your family who share in today's joy and success. They have given so much to get you here. Their reward is to see you prosper but as any good parent will tell you, they also want to see you expand as a person into some of the softer, non-materialistic aspects of life which a good education allows. No parent wants a single dimensional child and what I challenge you now is to find that second and even third dimension to your life. Start small, move slowly for it will take some time to find your feet, identify the opportunities, but allocate a portion of every week to give to others.

Not every culture embraces these ideals but ours does so if you see what I have done with my life to make people think and remember, then you too can do things outside your chosen career. I extoll all of you to keep this concept of the beauty that comes from a broadness of education and to use it as you go forward proud of your achievements, enriched by your endeavours and superbly educated to help others.

In conclusion it is this extra effort in lifer that you will hold dear and not yet another root filling.

### **Vice-Chancellor's Introduction**

*Dr Ross Bastiaan is a periodontist who has been in private practice in Melbourne since 1978. He has dental Masters degrees from Melbourne and London Universities, has contributed to three dental textbooks and published over 25 scientific articles. He has served as President of the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons and taught for several years at the Dental School, University of Melbourne. Dr Bastiaan was the Forensic Dentist to the Melbourne Coroner and Homicide Squad, Victorian Police Force, for 10 years from 1981.*

*He is currently a serving Colonel in the Army Reserve, Royal Australian Army Dental Corps, and was the honorary dentist to the Governor General of Australia. Australian Military History has been his long-term interest and since 1990 he has personally placed around the world over 270 multi-lingual, large bronze commemorative interpretative plaques, mainly telling of Australia's past military & social history.*

*He has written three books on the First and Second World Wars. In 2006 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for "Services to Australian Military History and Dentistry". It is a pleasure to introduce him as guest speaker today. Please welcome Dr Ross Bastiaan.*