

Anita Pahor
Graduation address, May 2017

Madam Deputy Chancellor, Dr Christine Nixon.

Vice-Provost Graduate Education, Professor Zlatko Skrbis.

Deputy Dean International of the Faculty of Business and Economics, Professor Michaela Rankin.

Distinguished guests and members of the faculty.

Ladies and gentlemen...and especially our new graduates.

Twenty five years ago, I stood on this stage being admitted to the degree of Bachelor of Economics. Six weeks prior to that, I had sat by my Father's bed as he drew his last breath on this earth.

His name was Albino (Alby for short), a Slovenian migrant who cited on his immigration papers "an inability to accept the political regime of his country" as the reason for seeking refuge on our shores.

And here I stood, being ushered into a new and exciting season of my life, expectant faces all around me....lecturers congratulating me, fellow students high-fiving me. An atmosphere of joy and celebration. A high moment in my life where the natural disposition I should have held was one of happiness (and perhaps a little relief).

But Alby, who was the reason why I studied Economics, which took me down a path of countless essays about supply and demand, the J curve and null hypothesis, wasn't here to celebrate with me, so I wasn't happy.

I was questioning everything. "What's it all about? Why do I get to live while others, in this moment, are destined to die? What's this Economics degree for and what am I supposed to do with it? What do I do to make sure I am happy?"

So here it was, one of those 'pivotal' moments in my life, marked by the death of a parent and the celebration of academic achievement. A personal low and a high co-existing in the same moment.

It was this moment that kick-started my quest. A quest every educated and privileged young person in Australia, no doubt, sets off on....that of existential inquiry.

And in the quarter of a century that has transpired since I walked out of this building, I have done a lot of thinking, doing and being in my quest to find happiness.

I've also spent 47,000 hours working in various careers around the world , 27,375 hours consuming food (mostly shared in the company of fun humans), and surviving 2 near-death experiences, BUT I have finally figured it out! Today, I humbly stand before you with the secret of how to be happy.

Time permits the sharing of these 7 gems at a topline only, so if you want to find out more or if you don't believe me, do some research....this is all legit.

Laugh more

Even if you're already prone to a daily giggle, laugh more. Don't take yourself too seriously, see the funny side of life, throw your head back, suck in some air and LAUGH.

Choose your inner circle of friends carefully

You become like the people you spend most of your time with, so choose these people wisely and carefully. Ensure that this posse encourages you, is honest with you, makes you a better version of you and that they help you with the abundant execution of point one above.

To get an amazing inner circle squad, you need to be an amazing friend...I've found that it's worth investing your time and treasure in your inner circle – get on a plane and go to the wedding, attend their kids' birthday parties, make the visit to the hospital to see them, even when it's inconvenient or it's really busy at work.

Please note, this point about becoming like the people you spend most time with also applies to pets, so choose your dog wisely as well.

Discover what irks you

While this world we live in is an amazing place, it's also got a lot of problems that need smart people like your good selves to fix. With your hungry minds, go find out the state the world is in...how many people do not have access to clean drinking water? What's the level of ethics like in certain business environments these days? Who's getting access to education? Who isn't? What inefficiencies exist in the Not for profit sector? Which diseases still exist that should have been eradicated by now? Go find the thing that makes you mad and channel your intellect, your compassion, your discipline and your drive towards fixing the problem.

Travel. A lot

Do this with the cohort from point two whilst partaking in point one and take a side trip to research point 3. In other words (for those of you whom I have lost), discover the world with people you adore, laugh your heads off and take a stop over investigating the thing that irks you.

Seek the approval of no one other than yourself

It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks about you. It matters what you think about who you are and what you stand for. What do you stand for...?

Eat more broccolini

These guys! Happy mini trees on a plate beckoning you to "eat me"...seriously folks, what's not to love about broccolini? Whatever fuel you put into your body has a direct impact on what you will get out of your body thereby having an affect on your capacity to do points 3 and 4 well.

Be thankful

Here's how I kick start my own brain on this one...You got to attend a great tertiary institution? Be thankful.

You're sitting next to family and friends in this room who have supported you? Be thankful.

You turn on the tap every day and enjoy a clean shower? (OK, for some of you that may not be every day) Be thankful.

Your boyfriend had a shower, put on nice clothes and rocked up at the family lunch? Be thankful.

To the spirit of my father, if he is with us in this room tonight and to all the people who make up the great community and institution called Monash University, thank you for pushing me to go beyond academic pursuits I thought I was capable of, for teaching me to have an enquiring mind and for demanding high standards from me.

To you, the graduate, a heart felt congratulations on what you have achieved. I respect you for what you have had to do to arrive at this moment.

To all of you, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak this evening, but I now must go as I have some inner circle friends to hang out with while we munch on lean protein and broccolini planning our next trip to bring clean water and sanitation to a slum in a foreign land....