

**SPEECH BY
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CHAIRMAN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURAL AND
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ON BEING AWARDED A DOCTORATE OF UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE GRADUATION CEREMONY
16 DECEMBER 2008**

This is a great honor. It is humbling, because I deeply honor learning.

Learning is a journey into the unknown, a stepping towards understanding, a meeting with the revelation of the new.

As an immigrant, the conception of *journey* is, for me, significant – embracing as it does notions of voyaging to discovery, of finding the challenges of impediments, of rites of passage, of pilgrimage.

My circumstances, the circumstances of my coming to this new land, all that has been given to me here, the profound gift of the education I have received ...

... the learning opportunities that have come to me, the knowledge that has been made available to me, the chances for understanding that have been offered to me - can do but one thing and that is to make me profoundly grateful.

That leaves nothing more than to decide what to do with that gratitude.

And the answer is obvious: to give back.

As William Arthur Ward put it:

“Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it”.

To learn is to be deeply grateful for the learning. And for that learning to have any point, it is to be used, to be given back, to be handed on.

It has been my wish to be useful. It has been my greatest pleasure to be able to find ways to express that gratitude ... to be useful.

It is therefore that I accept this honor as a profound responsibility.

And it is so, because I am full of gratitude – not out of vanity for the honor. But for what has put me in this place, for the opportunities I have been given.

At the age of 21 circumstances caused me to set sail in search of a safe place to live and the opportunity to rebuild my future.

I was lucky. I found it!

After a long arduous sea journey I found the silver horizon when we eventually reached Darwin harbor exactly 31 years ago. And I am grateful.

A wish to expand our horizons makes us humble pilgrims. I think of the wonderful words of John Bunyan:

*“Who would true valour see let him come hither
One here will constant be, come wind come weather,
There’s no discouragement shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent,
To be a pilgrim”*

We learn – learning comes to us - in many ways

We learn by the pressing of circumstance – like I learnt navigation on a flimsy boat searching to find that silver horizon.

We learn through the learning of others as I did at this University.

We learn from our experience.

I was born in the year the Vietnamese people defeated the French colonial rule in Vietnam but also the beginning of the bloodiest conflict in our history.

For me the war was part of my life and a painful memory of my childhood.

I lost many close relatives and friends in the war

I learnt that life is fragile, delicate and precious.

By the time I was 21 years old the war ended and there was a total change of the political situation that forced me to think about my future and what options were available.

I decided to escape from my motherland.

I am full of gratitude that when I was young the question of '*To be or not to be*' was thrust upon me.

Where difficulty of circumstance made it simple to decide to *be*, to throw what seemed like so much away, to cast off the mooring rope, grasp the tiller and sail - to chance my *being* on the seas of fate – literally and metaphorically.

When we had to abandon our boat and to swim to shore in Malaysia so that coastguards would no longer be able to push our boat out to sea.....I was to learn the value of thinking outside the frame, of abandoning structures that may have brought us a long way but which had become irrelevant, or more, entrapped us.

There can be apparent setbacks in our pilgrimage. But as J.K. Rowling put it in her recent address at Harvard University:

“The knowledge that you have emerged wiser and stronger from setbacks means that you are, ever after, secure in your ability to survive.

“You will never truly know yourself, or the strength of your relationships, until both have been tested by adversity. Such knowledge is a true gift.”

As a new migrant trying to re-establish and rebuild my future in a new land, life was quite hectic.

I studied, worked in several jobs, and involved myself in community activities at the same time.

I remember back then I was always looking forward to holiday breaks so I could catch up with all the lecture notes and tutorial discussion papers.

But for whatever difficulties there might have been, there was too much that was positive about all these experiences for me to do other than apply myself to my studies with great optimism and positive thinking and to

enjoy these experiences.

I learnt that what can appear to be a setback or an impediment to our progress can actually be an opportunity, that if we don't let ourselves be discouraged, if we perceive things as opportunities we can often achieve more than we imagined.

Mastering English to cope with studying was also a big challenge.

I remember in the early days at the University, I was waiting outside of the office of the Course counsellor to go through all the subjects for my enrolment for the 1st year.

When it was my turn, the Counsellor called me in and asked, "You are who?" to which I quickly replied "Yes I am". He was puzzled and repeated the question. I said to him "Yes that is me, definitely – Hieu."

I remember one day my tutor asking me, "How ya goin', mate ?" And she was very confused when I replied, "I am going by bus."

After a while I came to realize that I had come to a place – as South Australia's founding fathers had wished, a "*Paradise of Dissent*" - a place where a rich clash of opinions and ideas, unfettered and fearless, compete for the intellectual imagination.

I was greatly influenced by the wonderful teachers I had, that I met here at the University of Adelaide.

The kindness and intellectual generosity, of the likes of Scott Henderson, Fred McDougal, John Hatch, Brian Bentick, Sue Richardson, Geoff Harcourt, Fred Bloch, and many, many others.

Fred Bloch, for example, was a real character - who had another life as a North Adelaide League footballer, where his bald head would be famously seen flashing out of the centre and down the flank.

Once in his lecture, he took us by surprise, bringing Accounting lessons to life by turning them into theatre with students taking the roles of accountant and client to demonstrate some complex accounting transactions.

These Lecturers all inspired me a great deal –
....it was not just that they gave me a good mark sometimes!

The University of Adelaide gave me the skills, the confidence, and inspiration to pursue my dream.

It gave me not just a dream of success in life, but also a deep sense of humility, and gratitude
....and an urge to return something back to the society.

Learning is a pilgrimage, a journey to knowledge, but not just knowledge – to wisdom.

As was written in the Book of Proverbs:

*“Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom,
And with all thy getting, get understanding”*

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my journey I have learnt many lessons, and I hope I may have gained some wisdom: and in all this abides the deep longing - the long pilgrimage toward understanding.

My gratitude is deep; my wish is to learn the ways I can practically give back.

My time at this university had a major impact on my life.

It is for us who have so benefited to feel deep gratitude, to wrap that gratitude in our energy, intelligence and the knowledge that we have learnt, and return them back to the society, to make a positive life impact on others.