

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Dr Ken Douglas, distinguished academics and guests, fellow students and graduands, and all our friends and families.

Tonight is your night.

It is yours to savour and relish.

You are graduating from the school ideas and imagination, yet in another sense you are only now entering the world of ideas and imagination.

You are also graduating in an auspicious year: 1999, Victoria University of Wellington's Centennial year. This is a University of fine tradition, situated high on the hill above this beautiful city of ours, a University which values highly its relationship with the town below and the parliament nearby. After this impressive ceremony, we will have the opportunity to toast the next splendid 100 years.

But first, on administrative matters, the Chancellor has asked me to remind you that while he expected you all to switch off your cellular phones during his address, he knows I would not wish you to feel any such inhibitions during my remarks.

I am mindful that receiving an honorary doctorate is a great honour. But it is also potentially a mixed blessing, as the former Prime Minister, Sir Robert Muldoon, discovered after receiving his from the University of Seoul. On returning to New Zealand, Muldoon was initially disappointed with the lack of acclaim of his award, so when a member of the Opposition, Russell Marshall, asked Sir Robert about it in the House, Muldoon beamed and confirmed his delight that he had indeed been awarded an honorary degree.

So followed the supplementary question from Marshall: Will the Prime Minister be using the title Doctor full time as in Goebbels or part time as in Jekyll?

By the way, one reservation I do not have about the honorary doctorate is this splendid outfit. The Chancellor has promised to gift it to me so that I can wear it to Board meetings and corporate annual general meetings.

When the Vice Chancellor first rang me to ask me if I would accept an honorary doctorate of laws, I replied instantly that I would be hugely honoured. When he then asked me, with some apparent trepidation, whether I would be comfortable to receive it at the same ceremony that Ken Douglas would receive his, I said I would be doubly honoured.

First, I have always been one of Ken's secret admirers.

Secondly, unbeknown to either the Vice Chancellor or probably to Ken, I was at one stage, for four years in fact, Vice President of a trade union.

And, thirdly, given Ken's well known affinity with the left of politics, I knew he would welcome some company tonight from someone of moderate, middle of the road views.

Now that Ken and I have jointly entered the law, albeit by way of a short cut, we are thinking of setting up a consultancy practice Douglas & Deane, charging of course much lower hourly rates than those other former Victoria alumni, Chen and Palmer, to say nothing of the competition we will offer the Chancellor in his private capacity. Perhaps even the Solicitor-General, a former Chancellor himself, may engage us occasionally.

On the other hand, perhaps I should not pursue this storyline too

far. After all, it is well known that a lawyer is someone who can't stand the excitement of being a chartered accountant.

In preparing these remarks for tonight, I said to a friend who called from the United States a few days ago that I was anxious to avoid sounding like an ancient industrial dinosaur. She said, disconcertingly, that it is not easy to escape the truth.

Be that as it may, if there is any lesson from my somewhat diverse career, it must be what a wonderful array of opportunities Victoria University can effectively create for us. I have become acutely aware that life is not about the jobs we have but rather about the ideas we work with; not about the day to day projects we carry out, but rather about the people we do them with; not about the industries we work in, but rather about the amazing diversity of opportunities we face if we have the courage to grasp them.

A sense of place has also been important to me. When I heard of Alistair Campbell's honorary doctorate, to be awarded tomorrow, I re-read his eloquent Kapiti poems which, as it happened, were in a pile of books by my bedside. I was reminded of being a New Zealander, of attending the tiniest rural schools, yet having the opportunity to participate in the leadership of the country's public service one day and its largest company another day.

But what really mattered in this process was the people and the wonderfully supportive network of friends. I am reminded of the way my economics teacher, Professor Sir Frank Holmes, captured my imagination with the world of economics and overstimulated my love of ideas; of how Sir Ronald Trotter encouraged me – no, damn near forced me – to grasp opportunities apparently well beyond my established talent base; of how working with nine different Prime Minister's and, coincidentally, nine Ministers of Finance, has provided fascinating insights into the great array of talents leaders possess and the complex personality dynamics that

underpin leadership; of how all my friends in the IHC, have taught me about the real meaning of life and above all about the value of diversity in our society; and of how my wife Gillian, whom of course I met at Victoria, taught me about art and architecture, about music and opera, and about the wonders of flax bushes and cabbage trees.

I have worked in all these arenas. On Sunday, when Ken Douglas was playing golf, I was mowing the lawns. This is New Zealand, egalitarian but full of challenge and excitement. Do not underestimate the breadth of your opportunities in this land.

I must conclude.

I asked my friend, the cartoonist, Tom Scott, what advice I could give you tonight.

He suggested a simple rule of thumb to assess your success: If you make it to 35 and your job still requires you to wear a name tag, you've probably made a serious vocational error.

Ladies and gentlemen, graduands: graduation is a wonderfully exciting step on the way to the rest of your life.

Never underestimate the depth or diversity of your own talents.

Never underestimate your ability to keep learning and contributing to life.

Value highly your integrity.

Be true to yourselves.

Thank you