

JANE RAPLEY - GRADUATION CEREMONY SPEECH TRANSCRIPT

HONORARY FELLOWSHIP AWARD ACCEPTANCE SPEECH GIVEN AT THE 2013 FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY GRADUATION CEREMONY

Transcript

“Chair of Governors, Vice-Chancellor, students, staff, ladies and gentlemen, first can I say thank you. I'm really, really honoured and touched that you have considered me to join your band of fellows. I've watched Falmouth from near and far for about 40 years. My very first teaching job was down in the road in Plymouth many, many years ago, and I've watched it grow, not just in size but in reputation and until it's reached this real watershed of actually achieving university status. And its contribution to its students, to the creative industries, and as important to the intellectual, cultural and economic life of Cornwall and Falmouth and Penryn in particular. So congratulations to the University, well done everybody.

When I was briefed about this they said well, we'd like you to talk about yourself. Well, I'll do that in a minute. First of all I'd like to talk about the students. You've all got your batons in your hand; you've done the first bit of the relay. Now, for some of you that would've been a fantastic experience, for some of you perhaps more difficult. But without a doubt it will have changed your lives. I was lucky enough, and I say lucky, to go to the Royal College. I hated it. I hated every minute of it, but it framed my subsequent life and career. The people I met, the things I learnt, the things I learnt about why I hated it; I learnt about myself. So whether it's been wonderful, whether you feel that you've reached your potential or you haven't quite, it doesn't matter, it's changed you. And your next phase of life will equally drive you on and change you. So you're about to start the next part of the relay.

Now, it's tradition in these circumstances that people give you some advice. Now, Oscar Wilde said that it's very silly to give advice and to give good advice is absolutely fatal. Whether for you or for me, he didn't go onto say, so I think that's up to you to decide. But I have three areas of advice that I am going to brave and give you. The first thing is that you have to do it your way. Students and graduates often have a view of what their life is going to be like, what their role models have done or been or the way they've operated. You have to do it your way, there's no answer in the back of the book, there's no set way of doing it. You have to be you, you have no choice. You have to work with your temperament. You may be very focused, you may be very practical, you may be very opportunist, you may be all bits of those things, but you have to find your own way through. My way was being very practical, rather opportunistic, laced with a bit of networking, and rather a lot of I happened to be in the right place at the right time, and as my husband always says; you're the lucky one. And luck does come into it.

When I was a teenager my father wanted me to go into the army. I was the boy in the family that he never had and I was going to be in the army. I wanted to be a farmer. He said that was rubbish, I couldn't be a farmer. So his second choice for me is he wanted me to be a secretary. I wasn't going to be a secretary. 1960s; I didn't want to be a secretary. I wanted to go to art

school, so I won that one. I wanted to study fine art at Exeter. I ended up doing fashion at Nottingham. I was educated as a womenswear designer; I ended or started and ended working in the menswear business. I was educated as a designer; I actually became a design manager. And along the way there were moments when I might have become a museum curator, a wardrobe mistress, a design historian, but things took me in different ways. And they were often practicalities rather than clear ambitions. So you do it your way, you find your way through. Often quite difficult at the beginning.

My second piece of advice was actually given to me by my daughter. She graduated from art school five years ago and I said to her during the week, well, your graduation, what advice would you have wanted to hear? As she graduated from my college she got advice she was given. But nonetheless, she said tell them not to panic. Tell them it takes time and mums and dads and partners and friends, remember that. It's not going to happen overnight. And the other thing she said, which I think was very wise, is she said it very seldom happens you go from A to B and B to C. You might start at M and have to double back to G and go to X and turn up at A, because that's how our industries work and that's how you discover where you fit and where you are most suited and where you are happiest. And sometimes there's some bad bits in there as well, but again, you have to keep faith and you have to move around and find out where best you can contribute. And to do that my third piece of advice is to find where your talents lie. Now, you will have discovered quite a lot while you've been here, what you're good at, what you're not so good at and what you need to do something about up to a point. But there are all sorts of talents. It's not just creative talents, there's a whole mixture of things and you will discover new talents as you go out into the working world. And some that you might be quite surprised about. I thought I was pretty good at colour and I was quite good technically and I was reasonably organised, et cetera. But actually what I found was my talent was people. I'm very good with people. I'm very good at nurturing them and cajoling them and sometimes bullying them and supporting them and challenging them and debunking some overblown egos and supporting some more fragile ones, pretty standard stuff for a teacher actually. That's what they do all the time and sometimes you notice it and sometimes you don't. It's not easy. Sometimes they make it look terribly easy. But that dealing with people has been my strength. However, you don't always recognise where your talents lie and sometimes perhaps you don't always want to admit what they might be.

A couple of weeks ago I had dinner with one of our successful alumni, and he was being very earnest and asking me about leadership and what were the skills, how did I manage to move 5,000 people, half of whom didn't want to go to King's Cross and how did I manage to persuade them not only that they needed to change but they actually wanted to change. It was a mixed bag, some I never persuaded. In the middle of this rather earnest conversation, we're getting a little bit posy, my husband suddenly interjected and said I'll tell you what Jane's talent really is! So I looked to my beloved trying to put on my best I shall look modest face, and he said she's bloody cunning! So now you know how I've done it.

So know yourself, be self-critical, be very committed about your work, be very serious but don't take yourselves seriously. A lot of my time at Central Saint Martins was telling them not to believe your own hype; you're not as good as you think you're being told. And there's a balance there about encouragement and being realistic. What I would say to you now is go out there and change the world. We thought we were doing it and we changed some things for the

better but there's an awful lot of mess out there that we've left and someone's got to go out there and actually sort it out, and I'm backing people like you to go out and change it. And whatever you do, don't worry about success. Love what you're doing, enjoy it, be happy, take it seriously, and that will be your success and your success is in your terms, nobody else's. So good luck, I'm sure you will be very, very, successful in many different ways. I was lucky enough to be invited to the ten year celebration of textiles earlier in the summer and there were some lovely people there and they've done such interesting things, and it was a smashing day spending time with them. And you're going to follow them; you're going to be the same as them, but maybe even better.

And my final quote is also from Oscar Wilde and I can say it to you now because you have now graduated. And he said that education is an admirable thing, but from time to time it's as well to remember that nothing worth knowing can be taught. What I would add to that as the Jane Rapley quote, but you can learn it. So go out there and go on learning and enjoy. Good luck.”