Curtin Occasional Address

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, members of Council and staff of the University, distinguished guests, graduates, friends and family.

Last week, I turned 40. So I climbed a Volcano. More about that later.

Ten years ago, I was diagnosed with a chronic disease called Multiple Sclerosis. You'll be surprised to hear that in retrospect, I believe it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

I've always been strong willed. I've always thought of myself as an achiever. I've always been able to set a goal and reach it. But what I - just didn't realize- up until my diagnosis was just how lazy I was being. I didn't realize how much of my life, my time, I was just frittering away. Letting the pages peel off the calendar. With no appreciation of the value of each and every day.

It was only once I was diagnosed with a progressive, debilitating neurological disease - that will eventually put me in a wheelchair - that I really started living life. Maybe it took a little bit of brain damage for me to stop wasting time and start valuing what I have left.

Every day when you wake up, you go through the routine of life. For many of us, we go to work, eat lunch, work some more and then go home. Life becomes, to a large extent, monotonous.

But if you knew you were going to die tomorrow, how would you live your last day? If you knew, this was your last week on Earth, what would you plan to do? If you found out you only had one month remaining - what would you want your biographer to write about you? Could they write anything about your achievements? It's hopefully way too early to be thinking about this, but what will they be able to say about you in your Eulogy?
"He was a wonderful, hard-working man. But didn't do much with his artistic talents."
"She had impressive qualifications, but worked so much she never had a family."
"He watched TV every night and never once went on holiday overseas."

Or something awesome like:
"She died at 98 in a naked sky diving accident."
Or "He climbed Kilimanjaro and knitted jumpers for orphaned penguins."

It's all about making a difference. Not just to others - but to yourself.

Living life as though every day were the most important day of your life will result in you actually living your life.

I've reached a point in my life where I've been given a much shorter timeline. I don't know the exact date that I'll go deaf or blind or lose my ability to walk. I don't know when I'll stop being able to speak clearly or lose all sensation in my feet & legs, but unless there's a breakthrough in treating Multiple Sclerosis, it's pretty much inevitable.

And so my world has changed. It's no longer good enough to wait till tomorrow. Because tomorrow I could be hit with a major Multiple Sclerosis attack and then I'll never have the chance to ski the Swiss Alps, scuba dive the Barrier Reef or walk the Kokoda Trail.

When I was writing this speech, I had an epiphany.

Whilst my Multiple Sclerosis has put me on a timeline, you're on a timeline too. You're at the start of yours, but it's still a timeline. In
fact, on average you've got about 55 years or near enough 20,000 days left on your timeline. And that's one less after today.

Here's a way of thinking about your 20,000 days. If it were 20,000 minutes, it would work out to 14 days. If it were 20,000 seconds, it'd work out to 5 1/2 hours. Sometimes looking at things from a different angle puts everything in perspective.

You've studied hard. You've completed many difficult assignments. You've worked through the night. You've sat tough exams. You are now qualified to do, what it is you want to do with your life. But you'll only get to do it about 20,000 times.

And in those 20,000 days, you also need to share time with your family, your partner, your kids and your hobbies.

Time is already running out.

I really wanted to be something when I started my working life. I still do. I want to make a difference. I want to be remembered. But frustratingly, I didn't know that my 20,000 days would be so prematurely cut short.

So would I have played things differently if I'd have known? Oh my word yes. Had I realized I wouldn't get my 20,000 days, I would've pursued my dreams far more ferociously. I would've pushed harder. I wouldn't have ever taken no for an answer and when I got knocked down, I wouldn't have spent time licking my wounds, I'd have been back on my feet and back in their face.

Take it from me. No one is going to give you anything. Nothing will be handed to you on a platter. Life just doesn't work that way.
Decide on your goals. And then do whatever you must to get there.

Now it doesn't really matter if your goals change along the way. Just be sure to have some. Wandering aimlessly is a waste of the opportunity you now have ahead of you. I'm not saying you shouldn't have downtime or leisure time. Of course you should. You must! It's just as important as your career. You can't possibly be the best you can be unless you occasionally make time to disengage, re-gather and re-energize. John Lennon said, "Time you enjoy wasting was not wasted". But make sure you do enjoy it. Don't waste time frivolously. There just isn't enough of it to waste.

Remember, not everyone made it into University and not everyone made it all the way through University. You did. You're here. And whilst for most, it's the end of your academic journey, you're right at the start of your life journey.

You have 3000 weeks. 20,000 days. If you're lucky.

I'm now 40. I have been reliably informed I'm not going to get my full allotment of 20,000 days. And you may not get yours. I have started living my life as though someone is writing a book about me. Each day, I think about what I've done. What I've achieved. Each day, I think about what else I could've done - so that I know that I haven't wasted any opportunities.

Have you ever heard the saying, "The harder I work, the luckier I get"? It's true. Opportunity smiles on those who are best prepared. Opportunity is usually found by those actively looking for it.

It's a key word in life. Opportunity. Having graduated you have a great many opportunities ahead of you. You could choose to coast and take it easy. Or you could decide to make the most of life by grabbing every
opportunity by the horns. There's hundreds, if not thousands, in your discipline alone, graduating each year. Which of those graduates do you think are going to have the most "luck"? Probably the ones who are most eager, most enthusiastic, most passionate and most fearful of wasting the opportunities that happen by. Grab them. Make sure you're prepared for them. Opportunity doesn't often knock twice.

I've learned my lesson. I'm now actively pursuing what I want in my life. My dream is to have my own radio shift on talkback radio. I won't take no for an answer. I will achieve this goal and I'm already well on my way. 6PR now use me as a Fill-In Host. I sit in when the big names are sick or on leave and it's one small step away from my own show. I wanted it. I did what I had to do to realize my dream. And the shortened timeline made me push that much harder. I wanted it, I worked at it and I got it.

Do what you need to do to realize your dreams, don't take no for an answer, don't let laziness and apathy limit your potential and always remember that those calendar pages will never stop peeling off. You'll never have today again.

One of the great philosophers of our time, Ferris Bueller said, "The question isn't "what are we going to do," the question is, "what aren't we going to do?"."

I opened my speech by telling you I climbed a Volcano. It's true. Last week I was in Bali and stood atop Kintamani. Last week, I took an opportunity to do something. That day wasn't wasted.

Ladies & Gentlemen, The world is yours. Now you just need to go and get it.

Thank you.