

3-1 University Hall
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2J9
Tel: 780.492.3212
Fax: 780.492.9265
www.president.ualberta.ca

**Convocation
Spring 2013**

June 2-14, 2013

MASTER VERSION

**I.V. Samarasekera, OC
President and Vice-Chancellor**

- Class of 2013: Congratulations!
- I look out over this auditorium and I am filled with pride at what you have accomplished at the University of Alberta.
- This is a day for celebrating your success . . . for reflecting upon all that you have learned . . . for acknowledging all those hours that you spent in the classroom, library, and laboratory . . . for reviewing the experiences you gained out in the field, on co-op placements, in community-service learning assignments, and studying abroad.
- Be proud of your achievements.
- Be thankful to your parents and families for all of the support they've given you.
- Your families are extremely proud of you. You have no idea the sense of relief they are experiencing. A piece of advice - now would be a good time to ask for money!
- You graduate at an exciting time.
- Virgin Galactic, the world's first commercial space line, announced that they have recruited two pilots for their commercial flight team.

- Space travel for ordinary people like you and me will become a reality in your life time.
- I wonder if you have been following over the last several weeks, the tweets of Canada's own celebrated astronaut, Chris Hadfield, Commander of Expedition 35 of the International Space Station.
- Chris Hadfield was only nine years old when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Inspired to become an astronaut, he was the first Canadian to leave a space craft and float freely in space. He was the first Canadian to operate the Canadarm.
- Did you know that two University of Alberta alumni played significant roles in the making of Canadarm, Canada's most renowned contribution to the human space program?
- Garry Lindbergh, a U of A engineering alumnus was Canadarm's project manager, while another alumnus, Lloyd Pinkey, built the space vision system that gave Canadarm 2 eyes as well as arms. It was in 1981 that Canadarm made its debut on the space shuttle Columbia.
- Now, in 2013, we are on the verge of commercial space travel.
- This is all the more amazing when you consider that it was only one hundred and ten years ago, in 1903, that Orville and Wilbur Wright made the first controlled, powered and sustained human flight.
- Their first plane cost less than a thousand dollars and the first flight lasted 12 seconds, travelled a distance of only 120 feet, at 6.8 miles per hour.
- And so their journey began. It was neither easy nor speedy. They had trouble establishing legitimacy. Most newspapers did not cover their efforts because no one believed it.
- They endured crashes, patent wars, and lawsuits.

- Finally in 1909, they incorporated the Wright Brothers company. In November of 1910, they transported the first known commercial cargo for a payload of \$5000. They also launched a flying school.
- By 1916, Wright Brothers had trained 115 pilots, and commercial aviation was launched, the wellspring of today's space travel.
- Theirs is an amazing story of grit and entrepreneurship. Unfortunately Wilbur died at the age of 45 of typhoid fever and Orville sold the company in 1915.
- On Wilbur's death, his father Milton wrote this about him in his diary: "A short life, full of consequences, an unfailing intellect, imperturbable temper, great self-reliance and as great modesty, seeing the right clearly, pursuing it steadfastly, he lived and died."
- As you graduate today, I want you to reflect on the lives of Wilbur and Orville Wright and the many who followed to develop aviation and space travel, including Neil Armstrong, Chris Hadfield and University of Alberta alumni Garry Lindbergh and Lloyd Pinkey.
- They saw the right clearly. They have lived lives of consequences. They have led good lives.
- Today, as you graduate from the University of Alberta, I challenge all of you to live a good life.
- And what will that entail? In our society, we tend to equate a "good life" with an "easy life"—a life of quickly achieved professional success, personal happiness, and financial security.
- While it is my hope that you experience all of these good things, I want to turn this notion on its head. Today, I want to suggest to you—that a good life is not an easy life—but an uneasy one.
- A good life makes you uncomfortable. It includes adversities. It presents you with difficulties that take all of your knowledge, ingenuity, and energy to solve. It tests your fortitude and teaches you the value of failure.

- Seeing adversity as a positive force is out of fashion in our society right now.
- As parents—my children are only a few years older than you—we have tried to raise you well. That has included shielding you from hardship, wanting to save you from pain.
- But sometimes I worry that with the best of intentions we have inadvertently taught you another lesson. A lesson that teaches you that you need our protection because you can't handle really difficult challenges.
- But do not under-estimate yourself.
- Today you receive a degree from the University of Alberta. If we have done our job well, we have challenged you to work very hard, to stretch yourself intellectually and creatively. We've asked you to get out of your comfort zone and forced you to ask tough questions of yourself.
- Now, I want you to go out and seize the opportunity to build the new organizations, industries, and institutions our society obviously needs.
- Your generation is much more equitable, open and tolerant than mine or your parents. You can be the generation that comes up with the solutions we need to solve cultural and political conflict and reimagine international relations.
- New technologies? You're already there using them in every endeavor from teaching to scientific research to design to business.
- Can you see the potential in new forms of media for building community, citizen action, information sharing, and so on? Absolutely.
- Will it be easy? No.
- Will it take enormous amounts of determination and energy to do the work that needs doing? Yes, it will.
- But this is what it means to lead a good life.

- Today, you join a family of U of A alumni who stand 240,000 strong. This family now also includes today's honorary degree recipient _____.
- Throughout the history of our university, graduates and honorary degree recipients have been inspired by the two fundamental values on which the U of A is built: the pursuit of truth—*quaecumque vera*—and the call to use knowledge for the uplifting of the whole people.
- We need you to live a good life. I know that you can and will.
- A good life is not shaped by what you are given but by what it demands from you and how you use your gifts to respond to those demands. Lived well it will bring you much joy and satisfaction.
- J.K Rowling, of Harry Potter fame, called on Harvard's graduating class of 2008 to live a good life in her convocation address.
- I conclude with her words:
- "Tomorrow, I hope that even if you remember not a single word of mine, you remember those of Seneca, an . . . old Roman I met when I fled down the Classics corridor . . . in search of ancient wisdom. [He said]: As is a tale, so is life. Not how long it is, but how good it is, is what matters. I wish you all very good lives."
- Congratulations!