

“Avoid Straight Lines”

**Graduation Address to Innis and Trinity Colleges
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Chancellor Wilson, President Gertler, Principal Janet Paterson and Provost Michael Ratcliffe, members of the 2014 graduation class of Innis and Trinity College, proud parents and relatives, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am deeply pleased and honoured to be addressing this year's graduating classes of both Innis and Trinity Colleges, especially as I never went to my own ceremony when I graduated from Innis College. In the '60's, it wasn't cool to go to your grad ceremony. I know how hard each of you have worked for your degree. And so my first congratulations are to you, this year's graduating class.

But my biggest congratulations are to your parents. To them, today symbolizes many things: today means one more big step

in the fulfillment of their dreams for you and a giant step towards independence, (and perhaps one day paying back all those tuition fees).

You are graduating at a pivotal moment in time – the baby boomer generation (that’s me!) is gradually and reluctantly exiting the stage and the world is facing exceptionally daunting challenges. It will soon be your turn to write the plot, act as if your life depends on it (because it does) and decide what your role in the community will be.

I started at Innis in 1964. Hence, I was in the first class at Innis – 50 years ago! Innis was very small then, housed in a portable near Hart House and it had all the advantages of a small college. We all knew each other, including the Principal and

Provost, Robin Harris and Geoffrey Pazzant. And even though all my courses were university courses – I was in Maths and Physics – I ate lunch and generally hung out at Innis. Now, in my 4th year, my friend Mike asked me if I was going to the Innis dance. I replied that I knew nothing about it. He chastised me for not reading the Innis College newsletter. I told him I had never received it. Just then, Principal Harris walked by and Mike, jumped up and said “Alan has never received the Innis College newsletter!”. Well, immediately Principal Harris went to the files and looked under ‘B’. No Bernstein! I had never been registered. I went through 4 years of university and paid four years of tuition without being registered in a college! I’ve always meant to ask the U of T chancellor or president how I could get my tuition fees back.

For many of you, your formal education may have ended with this graduation. But I have no doubt you will be reinventing yourself many times during the course of your career. And you shouldn't think of that as a burden – quite the opposite. The average Canadian today will live almost twice as long as they did when our country was born, almost 150 years ago. And so today, you will likely have three or four different careers over the course of your life. You will get to learn from your own mistakes, evolve your path through life, decide what has meaning for you and what doesn't.

I ran a lab for over 30 years, I've been director of research at the Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum research institute at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Toronto, I was the founding president of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, of the Global HIV

Vaccine Enterprise in New York and now of CIFAR – five different positions all revolving around science, research and young people.

And what's striking about all five organizations is this: none of them existed when I graduated from U of T! There is no way I could have planned or anticipated my career in advance.

And so, my first advice to you is this: don't plan your life too far in advance. Live it as it comes. Life is not a straight line. It's not a race, it's a journey. Enjoy the journey.

When I was asked by Bill Gates to become the executive director of the Global HIV Vaccine Enterprise, how could I say no? This year alone, almost 2.0 million people will become newly infected with HIV and half of them will die of AIDS. I was

asked to head the Enterprise not because of my deep knowledge of HIV, immunology and vaccines, but the opposite. My job was to bring fresh thinking to the AIDS crisis. The world urgently needs new people, new ideas, fresh ways of looking at this problem. And not just the AIDS problem. At all global problems.

When my wife JoAnn and I returned from New York, I was asked to become CIFAR's 4th President. CIFAR is a unique Canadian institution, a product of U of T actually.

It has a disarmingly simple vision: bring together extraordinary researchers, from diverse disciplines, countries and cultures, and encourage them to tackle questions of importance to the world. This vision has proven to be a highly effective path for

creating new insights and transformative new ways of looking at important questions. The world's thinking about population health, early childhood development, the origins and evolution of our planet, machine learning and the genetic networks that underlie health and disease, have largely come from CIFAR programs over the past 30 years. Today, CIFAR supports close to 400 Fellows and advisors from 16 countries, working in over 100 institutions.

And so, another piece of advice: don't surround yourself with people who think like you do. Do the opposite: challenge yourself constantly by surrounding yourself with people who are smarter and think differently.

I've had the great privilege of doing things I love doing and being surrounded by people who are both different and smarter than I am. And equally importantly, I've had the great privilege of being given the opportunity to work on problems that matter to the world: cancer, HIV/AIDS, research funding, supporting young people.

And along this journey, I've worked with exceptional young people. You are not wedded to old ideas. You bring energy, passion, idealism and naiveté – all the qualities that are essential for transformative progress.

Addressing the world's challenges demands a fresh approach not constrained by discipline, nationality, ethnicity or politics.

Al Gore in his book "The Future", talks about the profound

changes about to hit our world. But he ignores the most important driver of change. Young people. Your generation has a global perspective that the world has never seen before. You combine a global view, with energy, initiative, enthusiasm and the desire to apply what you have learned, to make the world a better place. That energy and perspective is the most important hope for the future and will be the most important driver of change in this century.

In your search for deciding what you want to do for the rest of your life, remember 3 things: first, and most importantly, you're not deciding what you want to do for the rest of your life. You're deciding what you want to do for the next few years. Second, don't aim for perfection – aim for impact.

Change the world. As Canada's Leonard Cohen put it: "Ring

the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in". (Anthem, Leonard Cohen). Third, follow your gut not your brain. What feels like the right thing to do at this point in your life?

It's customary in these speeches to encourage graduates to follow their passion. But my advice today will be different.

Pursue a path that will make a difference in the world. The world urgently needs you. And I know that, in so doing, you will develop a passion for what you are doing. CIFAR has a program called "Social Interaction, Identity and Well-Being".

Part of the research in that program has led to an important conclusion: Happy people, people with a deep sense of well-being, share two things in common: first, they have a sense of

belonging, of identity with a group; and second, they feel they are living a life with purpose.

And so, my last piece of advice is this: live a life with purpose.

And that purpose can be making movies that move us with their stories and explore the mysteries of the human condition; it can be teaching children or it can be solving the riddle of mental illness. It doesn't matter. Just change the world. But to change the world, to paraphrase Tolstoy, you first have to understand and change yourself.

And so on that theme, I will end with some wise words from the American pianist, Jeremy Denk:

“Sometimes you wish you could go back and ask your teachers again to guide you; but up there on stage, exactly where they

always wanted you to be, you must simply find your way. They have given all the help they can; the only person who can solve the labyrinth of yourself is you.”

The stage is now yours.

Break a leg!