

“Full circle”

Langara College Speech June 3 2010

Written by Rick Etkin

First, I want to say thank you to the college for this award, and offer my congratulations to the students and co-winners of this alumni recognition. I am very honoured to be in such esteemed company.

Good morning to all. In the spirit of equality this address is to everyone here, as you are all important. Of course, to the graduates here today, this is really for you.

As a child I always remember watching the Olympics on TV with my family. I was constantly impressed by the pursuit of human performance and excellence that the Games personified. At some point I knew I would get to the Olympics in person, not necessarily as a competitor but I was determined to go.

After finishing high school, I worked full time in a sports related job that enabled me to travel to Europe. The trip coincided with the 1976 Winter Olympic Games in Innsbruck, where I was able to get my first live taste of the games.

Later that year I also made it to the Montreal Summer Olympics. Of course there was a lot of photographs taken on these travels as that was my other passion. I had intended on returning to pursue a photographic education here at Langara but my application had been rejected.

So I changed my plans for the time being.

About a month after my return from Montreal, by fluke, I happened to see an ad for openings for the photography program in the photo section of the classifieds in the Sun. This was just before the Labour Day weekend.

Being persistent, stubborn and not wanting to take a second no for an answer I called for an interview and was accepted in record time to start on the following Tuesday. Here I was at Langara and I wasn't even old enough to get into the pub.

I kept my schedule flexible, followed my passion and leapt into my career path.

Two years later, I sat out there where you are today and was confident I knew where I was going.

I always wanted to be a photographer. In fact I knew it when I was 11 and had my dad's camera at summer camp. The first time I processed and printed my own images I was hooked. I still am after so many decades.

All these years later, I'm still passionate about the cause and have become a statistical anomaly (for all you math people) staying in only one career my entire life. Not the average of four and a half careers or seven different jobs.

What does it take to keep that?

Goals, desire, determination, focus, passion, intensity, flexibility, stubbornness, sense of community.

Did I say flexibility?

Someone once said "My father always told me, "Find a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life."

My career has taken me across our great country and from Shanghai to Berlin. I've hung out of helicopters and stood on top of Whistler as dawn broke over the mountains to the east and the moon set over the Callaghan Valley.

Microsoft, General Motors and Coca Cola are among many companies that have chosen to work with me.

I have also have involved myself in the community, offering my services to Variety Club, The Children's Hospital, Gratitude week and well over 20 years here at Langara on the Photography Program Advisory Committee and a board member of a professional organization, CAPIC.

All of these elements were combined when Vancouver won the bid for the Olympics. I had been asked to work on the original domestic bid and shoot a film that was used in the presentation. This was getting closer to my dream. Photography, film and Olympics together in our hometown. It couldn't get any better.

With the goal of becoming more involved, I kept watch for opportunities and a position with VANOC to become Photo Services Supervisor for the Mountains came up. It wasn't photography with a camera in hand, but it was a way to combine all of my collective skills at the Olympics. I was reaching for my goal and being flexible at the same time.

I did get the job and wouldn't trade the experience for anything.

I was often working in the best, most exciting places at the Games. During my work at the Olympics I helped determine where the Olympic rings should be in the Bobsleigh track. During the Medal Ceremonies I was so close to the Athletes that you could feel the emotion they were experiencing.

You can only imagine what it was like to be standing at the lip of the Large Hill Ski jump at Whistler Olympic Park as the competitors launched into space at 100kph or at the Whistler Sliding Centre with a Luge blasting by at over 150kph. Blink and they were gone, but the sound and memories will never fade.

I'm guessing that you can sense that I don't feel like my "job" is like "work".

The desire to achieve excellence, the passion to follow a dream, and the determination to make a difference were driving forces. It isn't ironic that the Olympic athletes and my photographic career use the same words to describe where we want to go.

I have found the job – my job - that doesn't feel like work and I hope you have entered into something you love and will embark on this next chapter of your life feeling like it is not work.

Be passionate about what you do, set the goals so high that you feel the achievements, and as you get closer, set them even higher.

Walt Disney said

"Somehow I can't believe that there are any heights that can't be scaled by a man who knows the secrets of making dreams come true. This special secret, it seems to me, can be summarized in four Cs. They are curiosity, confidence, courage, and constancy, and the greatest of all is confidence. When you believe in a thing, believe in it all the way, implicitly and unquestionably. "

Have a sense of community and compassion; use your skills to help make the world, yours and ours, a little better place. Make a difference in the lives of others by what you do.

Unlike my experience you are not so likely to have one only career in your lifetime.

The reality is that you have reached today's graduation by a plan you had for your future or perhaps by circumstances. For most people career planning is an ongoing process.

You will probably revisit your career plans more than a few times during your life. At this time in history, the typical person entering the work force will have as many as five or six different occupations by the time he or she retires.

Important as it is to find an occupation that will be rewarding, it is rarely a final decision. Many occupations that will be available within your lifetime may not even exist yet!

You have worked hard to get here, had your plan for your future and will soon reap the rewards of your Langara education.

Now full circle... 34 years later. After eighteen months at the Olympics, I am here again. This time standing in front of the 2010 Langara graduating class. Giving the speech to you that I don't remember from 1978, not the person, nor the topic. Hopefully I will not have the same effect on all of you....

Thank you for listening and congratulations to you on your achievements and graduation.

To close I would like to you to remember the following:

To paraphrase a wise person:

"If nothing else, remember that your families are all very relieved and proud of you at this moment, which means it's a great opportunity to ask for money!"

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

- Lao-tzu

This is your next step...

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