

Middle School Speech Day

Address from Old Collegian Steph Evison-Williams ('06)

Thankyou very much for inviting me here today, I feel very honoured, nervous and privileged to be here.

I attended Scotch from 1994 to 2006 - Reception to year 12- a total of 13 years.

Scotch is a very special place. It has been nearly 5 years since I have been here and walking onto the grounds today, I felt the same almost electric feeling come over me, and I see that Scotchies are still the same.

I was smiled at by complete strangers, the atmosphere is still very positive and although the boarding house has changed, I am pleased to say the spirit and my feelings have not.

I loved being a Scotchie; and I struggle to find anyone that doesn't feel the same way. Scotch gave me the kind of all rounded education that, having taught and toured shows to many schools around Australia, is hard to beat. Aside from the sheer beauty of the school and the Hogwarts-like tower; the most significant aspect of Scotch is community

I know that when I run into a Scotchie, no matter what year they graduated, that we will have an instant connection, an almost sibling-like bond. That is what is so special about Scotch.

When I was asked to speak today I looked back at my year 12 book and I re-read my end of year quote - I had totally forgotten what I had written, and it surprised me that I still feel the same way.

So my year 12 graduating quote was this, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path, and leave a trail", anonymous.

I always find it is very difficult to describe to people what exactly I do - I don't have an average working week. I live a fulfilling life where everyday is different and I get paid to do what I love and to have a positive effect on a lot of children's lives.

Doing what I loved saw me leaving Adelaide and my home at the age of 17. I left school and moved to Melbourne to study at the Victoria College of Arts in Musical Theatre. I was working 4 jobs and studying full time hours and financially supporting myself. I couldn't have achieved this without the support of my school and my family.

It is by far the best decision I have made in my life. It would have been very easy to stay in Adelaide but it took a leap of faith to follow my dreams and leave everything I knew, including family behind.

There were many highlights of UNI – I played the role of Charlotte in *A Little Night Music* and performed at Her Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne with stars such as Rachael Beck, Rhonda Birchmore and some C grade celebrities like Robert Mills.

I was lucky enough that my first major job after graduating was working for Disney Productions. I was flown to Jakarta, to play Cinderella in the Disney Princess Show; and was able to travel after my contract around Indonesia.

I loved this job, but really struggled with the juxtaposition of the extreme wealth of where I was working and the surrounding poverty. I then almost subconsciously sought out more meaningful work

Since working in Indonesia, most of my work has been in children's theatre and more importantly, Theatre in Education. I have toured Australia with many companies; recently I worked with the Victorian Government and Beyond Blue touring an anti-anxiety show for children in lower primary called 'Go Away Mr Worrythoughts.'

This year has been particularly varied and eventful. At the start of the year I had no idea what would happen. However, I have just returned from 8 months - working and travelling in Spain, Morocco, Portugal, America and Canada.

In the middle of this trip I went to Up-State New York to teach and direct shows at a summer performing arts institution called French Woods Festival of Performing Arts. There I had the privilege of being on the other side of theatre, directing shows, working back stage, stage managing and teaching working hand in hand with directors from Broadway.

I worked in upstate NY for three months and met some amazing people and one of my favourite and most fulfilling parts of this job was running workshops for kids who were suffering with homesickness and anxiety.

The best thing I have done in the last five years is stay open; open to new ideas and

opportunities; learning to say yes but also knowing when your gut is saying no. You never know where something is going to lead and nothing looks worse on a resume than nothing. So I have always grabbed opportunities whenever they have presented themselves. This attitude has given me a very happy somewhat rocky but always fulfilling life post school.

I know that I would not be the person I am today if I had not come to Scotch. I can still find connections to my time here at Scotch and what I choose to do as now as an adult. For instance:

- When I was here I loved going to Goose Island - which the year 9s will have the privilege of doing next year. This was one of the highlights of my time at Scotch and confirmed my love for the outdoors, which is a constant passion of mine.
- In 2005 I was awarded a Performing Arts Scholarship - this gave me the confidence to believe in myself enough to subsequently audition for VCA and to now call Melbourne home.
- Home Ec proved useful when I was 17 living in a different state renting a small flat and could no longer stomach frozen dinners or free sample foods from the markets.
- I have worked in kids theatre for 10 years now - and I can pin point when it all started - my drama teacher at Scotch recommended I become a fairy for kids birthday parties just for some pocket money. This then was my first job in Melbourne and led to me touring kids shows and subsequently my passion for theatre and education.

I used to really hate it when people said 'your school days are the best days of your life.'

Year 9 for me was the hardest year at school - I remember feeling like the rules had changed overnight and everyone started doing different things and I felt like I had missed the memo. I felt very out of control. There is nothing worse than not feeling comfortable in your own skin; but I think its important to remember that your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life.

There is only one 'you' in this world and to quote 'it is better to live your own life imperfectly than to live the imitation of someone else's with perfection'. Sometimes school is hard, but it isn't always supposed to be easy and most things with merit

take work. Think about this, have you ever seen a rugby player tackle someone with a smile on their face...no?... because sometimes sweat holds more value than tears.

Find what you are passionate about and good at and remember everyone is different with a unique personality and set of skills; trust your own journey. To quote Albert Einstein, who was dyslexic like I am, 'everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. '

All of you are in some way or another at a crossroads, year 9s you are all about to move on into Senior School and I remember how scary that is, year 8s you are about to be the top-dog of the middle school -wherever you are, change is inevitable and it is a good thing. Don't get complacent with your life. Stay vigilant and keep striving for better. It is too easy to settle into mediocrity and none of you are mediocre.

You are all at such a wonderful stage in your life and a stage that will never happen again. You can do and go anywhere you want; but don't feel bad if you don't know what you want to do - some of the most interesting people don't. Scotch really was the best preparation I could have had for my life. Some of you may really appreciate the opportunities you have here and some maybe not. So trust in me someone that has been where you are.

The best advice I can give you is to find what you love and get paid for it. There is a market for everything. Congratulations year 9's for finishing in the Middle School. Stay true to yourselves. And stay open; stay open to new things, to other people and to new ideas. Thank you Mr. Macpherson for inviting me here. It has been an honour. I wish every single person here the very best for their future.

Steph Evison-Williams (2006)