

2015 May Commencement

Kay Isaacson-Leibowitz '68

Thank you, Kristin, for that introduction.

Thank you Dr. Vaughn, members of the Board of Trustees, members of the administration and faculty, family and friends of the graduates, and, most importantly, you, the members of the Class of 2015. I am deeply honored and humbled to be with you today.

I graduated from The University of Tampa in January of 1968, and I never imagined I would be back here today giving the commencement address, nor did my professors, parents or friends. While I was an undergraduate, I was a solid C student, hated 8 a.m. classes, majored in French, which certainly narrowed my career options, and had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up. Sound familiar to any of you?

What I did not fully comprehend at that time was how my experiences and my education at The University of Tampa had prepared me for the future. I was given the tools and empowered by my professors and my peers to become a leader on campus. Each one of you will leave today with tools and experiences from your four years at UT, which will have prepared you for your journey.

So, as I thought about what I would say to my 21-year-old self, knowing what I know today, I say to you, "You are in for a great ride! Be open to all possibilities!"

I want to talk about three things: curiosity, love and to live your dream.

CURIOSITY

Decades ago Einstein urged us to "never lose a holy curiosity." And Walt Disney said, "We keep moving forward, opening new doors and doing new things, because we are curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths."

Brian Grazer, one of the most successful producers in Hollywood with film credits that include *A Beautiful Mind* and *Apollo 13*, along with TV hits such as *24* and the currently red hot *Empire*, just co-authored a very powerful book on curiosity with Charles Fishman called, *A Curious Mind: The Secret To A Bigger Life*. I highly recommend this inspirational book.

In it he writes, "Curiosity has been the most valuable quality, the most important resource, the central motivation of my life. I think curiosity should be as much a part of our culture, our education system, our workplaces, as concepts like creativity and innovation."

Curiosity is my most prized trait. It has pushed me to make bold decisions, to be a courageous leader, to be passionate about my life and my career. Curious people are good listeners and say what needs to be said. Curiosity encourages risk taking. Curious people are not afraid to fail; through disappointments they gain clarity and create opportunity. Curiosity drives out of the box

thinking, courageous actions and bold results.

So, be curious, develop your own compass and trust your instincts.

Actor Ed Helm said in his address at Knox College, "So long as your desire to explore is greater than your desire to not screw up, you're on the right track. A life oriented toward discovery is infinitely more rewarding than a life oriented toward not blowing it."

LOVE

Success is finding what you love to do, what you are passionate about! I recently read this quote. "You can Google for an answer, you can Google for a mate, you can Google for a career. But you can't Google to find out what's in your heart, the passion that lifts you skyward."

Keep your family and loved ones close, they will keep you "real." My Dad, an Air Force general and a fighter pilot during World War II was skeptical about my career choice. As time went on and he witnessed my successes, he came to the conclusion that I had chosen a good path after all. In 1995, I went to Victoria's Secret as executive vice president, chief merchant. Victoria's Secret, one of the most recognized brands in the world, a multi-billion dollar business, big financial package and a Gulf Stream 4 was my new ride. I could hardly wait to tell my parents. I had arrived! I called home. Mom was gushing and Daddy said nothing. Finally I said, "Dad?" He said, "They pay you all that money to sell women's underwear?" That response kept me real. I was still the daughter that sold underwear.

Speaking of family, Happy Mother's Day to all of you here and to my amazing 91-year-old mother in California! We love you! You are our inspiration!

Last but not least, share the love, love others less fortunate, give back, volunteer, donate. Muhammed Ali, who was the World of Children Award's first honorary chair, said, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."

My husband and I are co-founders of the World of Children Award, an 18-year-old international philanthropy serving the world's most vulnerable children and called by the press, "the Nobel Prize for Child Advocates." Giving back is our life through our foundation. I am the luckiest girl in the world, because not only do I have a second career about which I am passionate, but I am making a difference one little heart by one little heart, one little hand by one little hand.

So, start today! Start with this wonderful University! Find a cause you are passionate about. You can make difference!

Congratulations to all of you who have and will participate in the Class of 2015 scholarship campaign. As you heard, you have set the bar high for future class campaigns - now your philanthropy is building a foundation for your UT legacy. I want to share an old proverb I heard in India. "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito!"

LIVE YOUR DREAM

Steve Jobs gave an outstanding and meaningful commencement speech at Stanford in 2005. What resonated with me was the following:

"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma, which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's drown out your own inner voice. And, most importantly, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you want to become."

Living your dream is about being present in your life, making good choices, believing in yourself, trusting your instincts and being kind. Work hard, play hard, create balance in your life.

In March of 1999 I went to Tuscany with my sister to visit friends. While driving through the Tuscan countryside, we saw a 500-year-old farmhouse for sale, a ruin, high on a hill with spectacular 360-degree views of the Tuscan hills. It sat on 26 acres and had over 100 olive-bearing trees. It was my lifelong dream. I fell in love with it, and I bought it. While I did not go to Italy to buy a 500-year-old farmhouse, the opportunity presented itself, and I bought it because I could.

In September of 1999 I met my soulmate, the love of my life, my husband Harry. I had always dreamed of finding "the one," but at 53 years old it seemed an impossible dream. So, you see, dreams do come true. Harry and I restored our Tuscan farmhouse together and shared our life there for 13 wonderful years. For the past 16 years, we have dedicated our lives to making the world a better place for children. It just does not get any better than that.

I would like to close with this quote from Author George Sander's 2013 commencement address at Syracuse University. "Do all the other things, the ambitious things, travel, get rich, get famous, innovate, lead, fall in love, make and lose fortunes. But as you do, to the extent you can, err in the direction of kindness."

Thank you! Good luck, have fun, you earned it!