

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
FALL CONVOCATION
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Convocation Address

By

I became an actor originally to avoid what I call the great red hope syndrome. Our families telling us, "You must get an education, you must help out. There are so many things that need doing, and you're a star; you're smart. We need you to help us out." And so, I did the silliest thing I could. I dropped out of my biochemistry degree and became an actor. It was really fun. I loved it. I remember though on my first film I kept bumping into the camera. I had to turn around at the end of my scene and I would hit the camera. And I realized that I needed some skills, I needed some training, and so I went to school. And I really loved being an actor; I did my very best at it, but eventually I realized that I had to do what I had hoped to do as a kid, to become a doctor or give that dream up forever because I was starting to age out. And I had what I think many of you had. In fact, I dare say, I had someone that I think all of you had. Someone who believed in me, someone who said, "Of course you can do it! Of course you can! You're smart enough, you're strong enough, you're courageous enough. You can get through it. You can do it." And so I did.

And I remember being in medical school. I remember as a young doctor and as a first year medical student I knew next to nothing. We had to learn how to do a physical exam. I had to learn to examine the human body and we were given an artificial breast to learn to examine and feel for lumps. And I took this little fake breast and I gave it a little voice and I was trying to make my fellow students laugh, and then the instructor came in; a very famous cancer surgeon and she said, "Yeah, yeah, laugh all you want, but if you miss a lump and your patient dies, you have to sleep at night." And suddenly I went from being a bimbo actor to being in charge of cancer and I thought how did this happen.

I remember being in emerg and coming home and telling one of my elders – actually some of her family are here – I was telling her, "Gosh, it was so busy in emerg today! I had a chest pain; I had a stroke; I had a motor vehicle accident with three different people who needed checking out. I was so busy!" And what I was telling her really was how important I was. And I said, "Can you imagine there was an old woman in emerg and she asked me to get her a glass of water. She asked *me* to get her a glass of water, and I was so busy". And my elder said, "Oh, maybe she thought you were there to help."

I think of those elders often. I grew up poor monetarily but I grew up rich with knowledge and I think of them often now – now that I'm finished with school like you, and I struggle for balance. I struggle for balance. I can stop studying, close the books, go out into the world and go back to many of the things that sustain you. If you ask anyone what makes them well, they won't tell you a physician. They'll tell you things like love and relationship and family and opportunity and that's where you come in. Now's your chance. You've spent your time indoors reading a book, and now the rest of your life stands in front of you. And I think of my elder today who said to me, "The point of all this is not for you to have a fancy degree and letters behind your name. The point of all this is for you to be the best human being possible. To be good, to be kind, and to be fair and to have beauty in your life and love and to help the people." And I wish you all the very