

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS AT BROCK UNIVERSITY
BY EDWARD L. GREENSPAN, Q.C. - JUNE 7, 2012

Chancellor Goodman, President Lightstone, graduates and proud family and friends. A special welcome to you graduates.

Today is a very happy event. We come together on this morning to witness and honour your achievement. You now have a degree from Brock University.

I want to share with you the significance to me of my joining you today. I was born on February 28, 1944 in Niagara Falls, Ontario. I lived approximately 10 miles from Brock University. I graduated from Niagara Falls Collegiate Vocational Institute in 1962. I know what you are thinking - "How can anybody be that old and still be standing?" Brock University opened in September of 1964 with 127 students in a refurbished factory at the foot of the Niagara Escarpment in St. Catharines. Had I finished high school 2 years later, or if Brock had opened 1 year earlier, I would have had my degree from Brock in 1967. Unlike all of you who got your degree in the normal period of time, I've had to wait for 45 years, until today, to say, like you, that I have a degree from Brock. And you know what? It was worth the wait.

To be able to say that not only am I a graduate of the Niagara Falls Collegiate but also Brock gives me great pleasure and for that Chancellor and President Lightstone I sincerely thank you.

This region is in my DNA. I not only grew up in this area; when I got my Bachelor's Degree at the University of Toronto, I came back to Niagara Falls every

summer and worked at various jobs. How can I ever forget walking around Niagara Falls collecting coins from all the parking meters. I don't want to date myself, but back then an hour of parking cost five cents. Today my parking spot costs me \$1,268. A year after Brock started, I began law school in Toronto. But I have a strong sense of belonging here. At Effingham Park, which is less than 10 kilometers from Brock, I had my first cigarette. At Balls Falls, which is about 15 kilometers from here, I had my first something or other. The Garden City Skyway was just being built when Brock opened. Depending upon the lift bridge at Burlington, a drive from Niagara Falls to Toronto could take up to two and a half hours, especially in a Chrysler Desoto. Yes, a Desoto - which is not a Mexican potato chip.

I've told you this because I know you are asking yourselves, "What can this old man tell us that we don't know already?"

When President Jack Lightstone called me and said that I was going to be honoured by this great University, he said there were two conditions. He told me that there are no free honorary degrees at this University. You must do two things. You must, one: attend and you must, two: address the graduates for 10 minutes. Three weeks later, I got a letter from him telling me that I had 7 minutes to give my convocation address. For the last few weeks I have been expecting a letter from the President telling me that there is no need for me to speak at all, and don't even bother showing up. And if you must come, you have to pay for your own parking.

Today, you are hovering between the shelter of school and the reality of the outside world. I know you are coming to grips with the vanishing of your university

years and I know that some of you are starting to wonder what it means to live purposefully and I'm sure some of you are worried about the practicalities of life. If you are terrified that you will never get a job, that you will still be living at home when you are 35, remember this: your parents are even more terrified by that possibility.

No matter what you read in the newspapers or see on television about the world out there, I assure you that you are all going to make it.

We live in a time when our doubts are greater than our problems. I'm basically an optimist. Otherwise, I would never keep renewing my Toronto Maple Leafs tickets every year. I don't know if this is the best of times or the worst of times but I can assure you of this: This is the only time you've got and you can either sit on your derrieres or go out and pick a daisy.

On October 13, 1812, Sir Isaac Brock, who was 43 years of age, charged up Queenston Heights upon his horse, Alfred, to drive off the Americans' invasion. He was shot to death by an American sniper who took aim and ended Brock's life. His famous dying words to his troops were "Push on." For the 4 or 5 people who were with Brock at the moment he died, there is some dispute as to whether he said "Push on" before he was shot in the chest or after he was shot in the chest. I don't think it matters much. He said it. But one of the people said that he didn't say "Push on;" he used Latin and said "Surgite" which in translation is "Push On." Now, what are the odds that the guy's last word was in Latin? I don't buy it.

Anyway, let me talk about “Push on”. I don’t know if you know that that is the motto of this school, but it is. And it’s a really great motto. And I think it’s a fitting motto for this university. It’s an incredibly meaningful expression for graduates of any institution of higher learning. And that it comes from your school’s namesake, the savior of Canada, the hero of Upper Canada, who stands on the top of one of the most impressive monuments in the country, one of the most imposing historical limestone landmarks in Canada, who beat the Americans in a battle, it’s pretty significant. He was revered by the nation and rightfully so. You may look at me and say, “Easy for you to say, standing up at that podium. Times were different when you left school. You owned a DESOTO.” But let me tell you my story very quickly.

I wanted to be a criminal lawyer more than anything and I became a criminal lawyer in 1970. And I looked around and the criminal lawyers in Toronto were a large number of brilliant dedicated lawyers at the top of their game. In fact, the criminal bar was top heavy with a number of the greatest criminal lawyers in the history of the country. And I realized that I had entered the legal profession hoping to live out my dream to be a good criminal lawyer at a time when I didn’t have a chance in hell. My timing was impeccably bad.

1970 - It wasn’t easy then. At the end of the first 12 months, I had a serious discussion with my wife, Suzy, about the possibility of moving back to Niagara Falls, my hometown not hers. I knew it was impossible then to practice criminal law exclusively in Niagara Falls, that I would have to do all kinds of different areas of law to make a living and that, unfortunately, Toronto was the only place where somebody had the chance to successfully practice only criminal law. But I had only generated

\$3,100 in fees that first year. I was not quite an epic failure but I was definitely the biggest failure I knew. I was convinced that my only realistic option was to return to Niagara Falls, give up my dream of becoming a criminal lawyer and do real estate and run a general law practice. As I said my bad luck was that it was the wrong time for me. Suzy was a tremendous encouragement. She said, “Don’t give up. Let’s give it one more year. If it doesn’t work, you go back to Niagara Falls.” We are still together 44 years later and in Toronto. So, don’t ever get frustrated, never be upset and don’t despair. Hopefully you will never fail on the scale that I did. But I pushed on.

General Brock was dying, he was on his last breath, but he knew there was no other choice but to push on.

A year before George Bernard Shaw died, he was asked by a journalist to name a famous deceased person - a statesman, an artist, a philosopher or a writer - whom he missed the most. Shaw replied, “The man I miss most is the man I could have been.”

Some failure in life is inevitable - hopefully not the kind faced by General Brock or me. But, as J.K. Rowling said, “It’s impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all, in which case you fail by default.”

There is a mystical word that will make you a success and that word which makes all things possible is “work.” Benjamin Franklin once said, “Never was one glorious who was not also laborious.”

There is nothing special about working hard. A lot of people work hard. I don't object to work. In fact, I like work. It fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours. I love to keep it by me. I hate the idea of getting rid of it. It has given me continual interest, a great deal of excitement and above all, infinite variety. It has offered me the melancholy of temporary failure and the joy of temporary success. I have always loved it and I always shall. Work gives me an incessant undying tenacity of purpose. In fact, for me, as Noel Coward once said, "Work is much more fun than fun." Robert Frost said, "The object in living is to unite your avocation with your vocation." For those of you who want to be a lawyer or a nurse, a teacher, an economist, or a communications expert, you will find if you are blessed with work, you will happily do it. Now I'm sure you're tired of me quoting dead people and quite frankly I am too. So here is a piece of advice from some one very much alive - Chris Rock. He said, "Always borrow money from a pessimist. He won't expect it back."

Now, I had originally decided not to give you any advice at all, but I was much taken by Mark Twain who, in a 1905 commencement address, offered the graduate students an inventory of life lessons of what not to do. "Don't smoke," he said. "That is, don't smoke to excess." He said "I'm 73 and a half years old. I have been smoking for 73 of them. But I never smoke to excess. That is, I smoke in moderation. Only one cigar at a time." After that first cigarette in Effingham Park I too have smoked in moderation - only one cigar at a time. He then said to the students, "Don't drink. That is, don't drink to excess" and I agree with him. And he said, "Don't exercise. It is loathsome." To look at me, is to know that I agree fully with Mark Twain.

I could have said something very profound today but you would have forgotten it in 10 minutes. So I chose to give this kind of speech instead so that in 20 or 25 years from now when your children ask you what you did on graduation day, you can say, “I laughed.” And, if for some reason you didn’t laugh today, for my sake say that you did anyway.

I congratulate you all in your achievements. You have so much to hope for and so very much to give. Thank you and good luck.
