

UHS 2009 Talk by Hyder Gulam

Acknowledging the traditional indigenous owners of land, The Hon. Bronwyn Pike, Mr Robert Newton (UHS Principal), Mr Kevin Campbell, Ms Matina Lontos, Ladies and Gentlemen, and most importantly the UHS Class of 2009 Valedictorians.

I start not with a joke, nor with an anecdote, instead do I start with a quote from Pink Floyd's 'Time' from the album 'Dark Side of the Moon':

*'You are young and life is long and there is time to kill today.
And then one day you find ten years have got behind you.
No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun'.*

History and Memories of UHS

I was born in Singapore, and my family migrated to Australia in 1976. I attended King Street Primary School, which sadly is no longer, although the building is still there.

I started and finished UHS in the 1980's. Along with my two sisters and brother, we attended UHS. I was a Sharman boy, and enjoyed the friendly rivalry with Chapman and Brookes – these two I would describe as the Hogwarts equivalent of Slytherin and Huffle Puff, respectively.

Just as today, UHS then was a melting pot of the different races, religions and cultures from around the globe. My friends ranged from Task Force kids (those who completed High School in 4/5 years), to kids from the Housing Commission flats, to those who lived in strange and far-sounding suburbs such as Warrandyte and Wheelers Hill, to those who had escaped persecution from Sri Lanka, Chile, East Timor and Vietnam.

I quickly learned the rude words in most if not all the different languages and dialects of the student diasporas at UHS. Perhaps it was the fact that we were mostly new Australians, perhaps it was the poverty, perhaps it was the changing landscape of Australia because of multiculturalism or perhaps it was something else, but everyone seem to get on with each other. I learned about the different religions and customs from around the world from my fellow students.

I also remember fondly the sage words and advice of my teachers at UHS – Mrs Foxall's favourite saying 'you must do your homework' with a Spanish twang. I also remember the faith that some of the teachers had in me, like Mrs Pap. My father died while I was in Year 9. While I thought I had coped, the reality was perhaps I had not. I made the momentous decision to repeat Year 11 – and all my family, friends and teachers were very supportive. Needless to say, I never looked back.

What I did since leaving UHS

As soon as I finished at UHS, I applied for a job as a kitchen hand in Flowerdale (in country Victoria). I spent close to 4 months living the country life and enjoying the break from school. However, once I got my results, it was time to think about the next chapter of my education. I was accepted into Accounting at RMIT. I was unprepared for University, and missed the close community feel of UHS. In addition, I had no passion for Accounting (most my adult relatives said it was a good and stable profession (which it is) – it just wasn't for me). I then enrolled in an Arts degree at Swinburne, and studied Japanese, Sociology and Media Studies. I then travelled around the world, and had my last \$50 when I returned home back to Australia from this backpacking odyssey.

A close friend I was travelling with fell ill in India, and I felt very helpless to do anything. This inspired me to study Nursing, which I completed at Deakin University. Along the way, I was elected President of the Student Union. After working in Outback Australia with the indigenous community, as a paediatric nurse at the Royal Children's Hospital and at Royal Melbourne Hospital, I completed a

Law degree. I then joined the ADF as a reservist, and ran an Operating Theatre as a Nurse Unit Manager. After 2001, I was invited to join the RAAF as a Legal Officer, which I did for the next 6 years. I served all around Australia and overseas, and worked as a Military Prosecutor. I then left the military and worked in Saudi Arabia for the world's biggest law firm. My father is buried in Mecca, so it was extra special for me to work in the Kingdom. After sometime, I got homesick, and returned back to Melbourne.

I now work for a commercial law firm in the city and am very happy to be home in Melbourne. I serve my community by volunteering my time with the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Royal College of Nursing Australia, the Australian Red Cross, the Muslim Legal Network and City Circle.

So at last count: I think I have close to ten degrees: 3 undergraduate, 3 Masters, 3 Post-Graduates, and perhaps one day I'll do a doctorate.

What students should be thinking about after leaving UHS

Your friendship groups from UHS will change, and may change drastically. From knowing just about everybody, your circle will become a tight knit group. Yes, Facebook will help you keep in contact with others, but it will become quite difficult to keep up to date with what is happening beyond your close circle of friends. It is just the natural progression of things.

You may end up going to a University that none of your friends are going to which may mean that you're forced to make new friends to be sociable, to sell yourself, and in order to do that you need to be confident in who you are. Sometimes it's the only way to find confidence in yourself.

You can make many new and amazing friends at Uni – it's not easy, and outside the comfort zone: but it is very rewarding.

You can be whoever you want to be outside of school. You don't have any of the baggage of the last 6 years – so you can form a new identity, get a new look, become anyone you want to be. Your High School days are behind you, and new horizons beckon.

Advice on approaching the next few years and Values

Values are something you have developed throughout High School and will continue to develop. My values can be summarised as follows: to respect and honour your parents; to give charity to the poor, destitute, orphans and for public welfare; to be honest and fair; to hold firmly to principles, but be flexible in methods; and to treat everyone with civility, giving greetings to all.

You will make mistakes – it's only natural. We all do. The trick is to learn from your mistakes and not make them again. You may fail in some of the things you set out to do, that's OK. Remember what it feels like, and use it as inspiration for next time.

Have a sense of humour, be self depreciating. This helps break the ice, and makes people warm to you.

Don't forget to balance – you can party, relax, go crazy all you want...as long as you balance it with every other aspect of your life...family/friends/work/school/studies.

You are now or will soon be an adult – which gives you certain rights. But with these rights comes responsibility. You will be accountable for your action as an adult, so take the time to reflect and think about things.

Life moves very fast, so whenever you can slow things down, do so. Take the time to enjoy the moment. Life in the 21st Century travels at light speed, and society has become very intrusive. There are all these tools out there like Twitter, the iPhone, Facebook, blogsites, all trying to capture what you are thinking right now. Enjoy your private and quite moments, and take the time to reflect.

Don't forget the key to success is patience, tenacity and perseverance. Good things take time, and sometimes immediate gratification is only fleeting. What does this mean? Behind every 'overnight' success you read about, are hours and hours of hard work.

Travel when you can – now is your opportunity to learn a new language, pick up a hobby, do those fun things you've always wanted to.

Help out in the community – volunteer your time the best way you see fit. This is your society, your world. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "Be the change you want to see in the world".

Finally, life is full of challenges. I take solace in these very simple words, which I hope also help you:

'Persevere in any good effort and do not fear to face difficulties and hardship, as success comes only after hardship'

Now it is your turn to 'Run'.

(My sincere thanks to Peter B, Brendan O-T, and Alex B.)