



KEYNOTE SPEECH TO MALVERN GRADUATES OF 2024

THE THREE A's

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Good afternoon, Malvern graduates, and their Parents and Supporters, Mr. Gotfryd, Platform Guests, and Malvern Staff,

We meet here today on an historic occasion. This group of graduates are the students who began high school at Malvern in September of 2020, only months after the outbreak of the Pandemic of Covid-19. While working in the Malvern Archives for the last 20 years, I have often said that each graduating class is Malvern's living Archives. You are an historic cohort of students, and your experiences were unlike those of any other group, except those of 1918 to 1920 in the days of the Influenza Pandemic, where over 50,000 Canadians died, mostly in the 20-40 age category.

During the Pandemic, the alumni were particularly impressed by the work of the Principal, Sandy Kaskens, in creating an atmosphere of normalcy via the regular editions of the school newsletter, and the rituals surrounding graduations of the years 2021, 2022, and 2023. We are here today to applaud the efforts of the staff and students and parents to recreate a regular school life in the academic courses, and in recovering the normal extracurricular activities of school life in music, sports, drama, and other school clubs. We are also here to celebrate your accomplishments in all aspects of school life at Malvern, and to speed you onto the next stage of your life.

It is my duty to say something that might help you make the transition to this next stage. At several previous Malvern graduations, I have attended, the graduates had three destinations – work or a gap year, community college, and university, here or abroad. So I want to say something that might help you to adjust to these new experiences. I have entitled my speech *The Three A's*. I will speak briefly about the role of these in your adjustment to your future, no matter where it might take you in education or work.

When we took Latin at Malvern in the 1950s, we first learned mottoes in Latin as these were the only examples of Latin we might see in public on crests or signs. One of these was **Mens sana in corpore sano**. It means **A healthy mind in a healthy body**. This is what you need to continue your education

and your life generally. You need to be able to think clearly and make good choices, you need to keep physically healthy, and you need to develop a sense of your own autonomy as an individual making their way in the world.

The Pandemic took its toll on many elderly people and many younger ones too. But the ones who were never ill suffered some losses that they do not talk about. I spent over 35 years in universities teaching anthropology and counselling students with their research and writing. But there were many students who knocked on my door and did not ask about their academic goals. They wanted to know what was the meaning of life, or how could they recover their confidence, or how could they set some long term goals for themselves.

This leads me to the first A, Anxiety. In the last five years, there have been rising and unprecedented levels of anxiety and mental illness among children and adolescents in Canada. This is the healthy mind side of things. Research shows that there have also been inadequate services provided for them in the medical profession, hospitals, social services, and institutions of higher education. Speakers at graduation ceremonies rarely mention the anxiety created by a major life transition, or even leaving home. Or the anxiety created by living through a Pandemic of epic proportions. It is wise to try to get help if you need it. Talk to parents or trusted confidants and see if you can get a grip on your feelings. There are many counselling services within colleges and universities that can help in this transition. Even if you feel very happy right now, do not deny that feeling of dread or depression in the future. You may have lived a very privileged life up until now, but it is important to know how you are feeling when you are dealing with challenges in school work or employment.

The second A is Addiction. Unfortunately, there are unprecedented levels of addiction to drugs in Canada. Other aspects of addiction may be measured in the use of stimulants, tobacco, vaping, and alcohol. New research is also showing the effects of addiction to electronic devices. This is where the healthy body comes into it. You are so lucky at the age under 20 to have a body that can take all the effects of these stimulants you want to give it. But I can assure you, the body will not carry you through a long life. Your mind will also not be fully functional when you are under the influence.

But there is a cheerful note to end on. **The third A is Autonomy.** Assuming that you are leading a healthy life, there is still the mental task of becoming an autonomous self-actualizing individual (Maslow 1954). Many students I have talked to express a lack of confidence in their ability to reach the goals or even defining what those goals are. Self-actualization is the process whereby a person becomes an individual who is able to operate independently with a realistic sense of their own abilities. Some people achieve this stage of development in high school. They are goal-oriented, know how to organize their projects or work, and can set reasonable schedules for finishing their work on time. We have many biographies in our Malvern Archives of students who showed early promise while at Malvern. The late film maker, Norman Jewison, is a good example as he participated in the Drama program while at Malvern. Other people will develop their potential later on in special areas of study or work. For everyone, it is the key to success in creating your future self and reaching your future goals.

In conclusion, these are my wishes for you today, that you bring a fresh and confident attitude toward your future, that you become the person you really want to be, and that you thank those who helped you along the way, both at home and at Malvern. I wish you all the very best! Thank you.