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Emmanuel College Papers

Valedictory Service and Dinner Speech
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Gretel Wilson

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Acknowledgement

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Our community lives, learns and grows together on these rich lands and waters that are, and have been, a place of gathering for thousands of years.

Emmanuel College is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the lands, waters and seas, and their significant contribution to society as the oldest living civilisation in the world.

Emmanuel College endeavours to promote reconciliation through education, respect and engagement.

The Author

Gretel Wilson (Emmanuel alumna 2009-11) is the CEO & Co-Founder of the Brisbane-based startup Casu. Her various professional experiences, though diverse, prepared her for this exciting entrepreneurial chapter.

She graduated from The University of Queensland with a Bachelor of Journalism & a Bachelor of Communications in 2013.

After working in advertising in Sydney for over three years, Gretel moved to New York and worked for the startup Morning Brew where she was one of the company's first employees. Here she got a taste of building something from the ground up, and she refined her sales and marketing skills.

Returning to Australia, she wanted to up-skill and completed her Juris Doctor (post-graduate law) at the University of Sydney. During this time is when Casu was born, a marketplace app connecting casual job seekers, with businesses in need of workers.

Today the Casu app has over 500 workers and 50 businesses on the platform, and growth is a key focus. Gretel is an advocate of trying different professional experiences and being open-minded to where you might end up!

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This speech was delivered at the Valedictory Service and Dinner on 27 October 2023.

Good evening everyone,

My name is Gretel Wilson and I am a proud Emmanuel alumna.

When Stephen Peake recently asked me if I would speak tonight, my initial reaction was - *surely I'm not qualified* - because stepping back onto Emmanuel grounds transports me back to a time when I was sleeping through alarms in Henderson wing, playing pranks on the boys in Drewe or being convinced I couldn't possibly miss another ground-breaking trip to the Red Room.

But when I stop and reflect, I know I have picked up some pearls of wisdom I would love to share with fellow Emmanuel leavers.

After many scattered thoughts, cringey memories, a few moments of pride, mixed with some serious nostalgia I landed on three key messages I wanted to share.

Firstly,

Try something of everything

Now you might instantly think - *who* has the time to try *everything*. And that's fair - so maybe a better way to phrase it is to be *constantly curious* and willing to try something new.

This doesn't matter if you've already secured a dream job and plan to be within one organisation or industry for years and years - keep trying new things and you'll surprise yourself.

It might be just putting your hand up to work with a different team; *or* leaning into a new hobby which you might eventually monetize, maybe; *or* just saying yes to spending time with a new group of people - these are all things which will keep sparking something in you. But you won't get that spark, or eventual purpose-fuelled fire, without pushing yourself a bit.

I feel like with this first message, it's a good time to explain how I have ended up here tonight. I promise you, if you'd told me back in 2009 when I first came to Eman - that I'd be here - I would have laughed.

College for me was another social world, ready to be explored. While my attendance was near perfection for the social calendar, I sometimes neglected my studies. But like nearly all college kids, along the way I found enough balance to get through.

And even though I didn't know it at the time, the personal growth I experienced at college prepared me for my launch.

When I graduated from UQ with a dual Bachelor of Journalism and Communications I drove straight to Sydney. I worked in a small advertising business there for years which I hated at first and then adored, gathering friends and mentors along the way. Then that company was bought by oOh media and that was when I decided to jump in the deep end again.

I packed up and moved to New York where I hustled my way into a job at the startup Morning Brew which some of you might have heard of as it's now owned by Business Insider.

I was the fourth hire there, so I really saw what it took to grow a business from ground zero, and being responsible for bringing in all the business' revenue (which was through ad partners) was my biggest professional responsibility yet.

After a rollercoaster ride at Morning Brew - and hitting the annual targets we'd set out to - I was ready to return to Australia and harness what I'd learnt, doing something new, back down under.

But, when I came home from New York, I knew I wanted to upskill too. When I thought about the things I liked most about my past jobs it was the sense of building something with a great team. *And* I realised I wanted a change from advertising. I thought about doing an MBA but I didn't want anyone pigeon holing me into the only industry I'd had experience in. So I decided to embrace something *very* new to me, and study post grad law at the University of Sydney.

This was the best decision because I felt like I was unlocking a new part of my brain and it was the perfect time in my life to do it, because I was hungry for it. I also found a new appreciation for all the law students I heckled during my college years for not abandoning study and coming out. This is my public apology to them.

But while I was working my brain muscles, I was also starting to think about what my next career move was. I couldn't shake the feeling of wanting to build something.

And that's where my partner, and Co-Founder, Sam Clarke - who's here tonight - came in. He told me about this cool idea he'd had, when he was between jobs, and he wanted to pick up some casual labouring shifts but there wasn't really an easy place to do this online. He thought that an app should exist to connect businesses who need workers and people who want flexible work. He told me about it and carried on life as normal, but something was sparked in me. I became a dog with a bone.

I knew this idea was great, and from things I'd learned in my sales, startup, marketing and (more recent) legal paths - I knew we could build something awesome. Fast forward two years from that first spark, and Casu is live in Brisbane. We received investment from various investors, including a VC, and now we are growing each day - with over 650 workers and 60 businesses on the app.

I tell you about these milestones through these past 10 years because this strange stumbling path has led me right where I'm meant to be now. What that summary doesn't really articulate are the mishaps and moments of doubt *but* what I know I did right - was to constantly push myself to try something new - and not worry about how far I was down a certain path when making a decision to try another. So that is my first message: **Try something of everything.**

And to those of you in the room who are natural introverts - that's great. You don't have to be outgoing to learn new things and put yourself out there. But you do need to have some fire in your belly - even if it's silent to outsiders.

My next message is a nice segway to elaborate on some of these said stumbles of mine - the message:

You are the author *AND* storyteller of your own story.

The author part is more obvious, you have to be the one to make things happen in your own life... but what I mean by storyteller, is that it doesn't matter if you feel like you've made mistakes - it matters what you do with them. It matters what *story* you tell yourself and what story you put out into the world.

Was something you did a failure or a learning?

I'm not encouraging lying but if you don't have a positive outlook on your own life, own career, and own mistakes - no one will!

When I decided to leave my job and return from New York after 18 months, there was a big part of me that felt disappointed. I had always envisioned staying longer but based on what was happening with the company, and what was happening in my life, it was the right time - and I desperately missed the Aussie lifestyle.

One version of that story is that I just couldn't cut it in a startup.

Or another one was that I went over - hustled my way into a competitive job that went on to play such an important role in my career - even if it wasn't the longest tenure.

And by thinking of my New York story in that light, that made it positive - because it *was* a positive story. The company I worked for has gone on to do incredible things, and being one of the first employees, I contributed to that. And when we've secured investors for our new business - that's the part of my professional journey many have cared about the most - they're most interested in the hardest part.

So, when you inevitably misstep or face a challenge, like all humans do - don't shy away from it. Make it a good part of your story. **You are the storyteller.**

And my final message: (and this one was easy)

Enjoy your twenties

Enjoy the phase of life you're in because you'll always look back and long for things that have passed.

Enjoy being silly and not needing to take yourself too seriously - there will come a time when your decisions and responsibilities hold more weight and that is made much easier by knowing you've got some lessons under your belt and can have confidence in your decisions. You may as well enjoy the learning process in these more carefree professional years.

Because I'm not quite the generation above you, I don't feel too old in giving this advice and I know a 40 year old could be giving me exactly the same vein of advice to me in my 30s.

But the unique part about your twenties is that you're expected to be learning and making mistakes so go forth and do just that. And you may as well enjoy yourself along the way.

Lean on your friends who are all going through the same things and will grow with you.

Honestly the biggest thing I miss since college is the freedom to say to a friend - what are you doing right now, or tonight, or this weekend - and there are so few commitments in your lives - that you can make that hang out happen, right away.

So go see your mates, stay curious, work hard, keep a fire in your belly, and enjoy this next chapter.

And maybe one of you will be here in 10 years saying the exact same thing to the next wave of Emmanuel leavers.