Mary Ann Hopkins ‘87, G’89

Well good morning! I don’t think I would be alone in saying this is not a typical Saturday morning for me.

It is an absolute honor to be back here at SU and back in Manley field house where I started by own journey as a student-athlete in 1983.

I wanted to start off by congratulating the graduates here today and also congratulating everyone else who helped make it possible, the faculty and staff and the families and friends.

Success comes to those who work hard and dedicate themselves to a goal but it also comes through tremendous support by those around you. From my time at Syracuse I know the entire faculty and staff is dedicated to support the LCS students and do it in a more hands on way then many other universities. They genuinely care about your success and we should all thank them for that.

We should also take time to congratulate and thank the families and friends who helped make your graduation today a reality. Thank them for the important emotional support and encouragement they provided but also congratulate them on surviving your years here at SU.

As parents many of you may have experienced the emotional highs and lows right along with your child as they shared (and maybe overshared) many of their college moments with you in near real time with a text, a snapchat, a facebook post or instagram photo. You may have loved it at times or may have longed for the days when there was one payphone at the end of the dorm hallway and a once a week, 10 minute check in with the parents sufficed. Ah the good old days...
And how about this graduating class. I am extremely humbled to be here today with the undergraduates of LCS. Every year the quality of student at SU increases and the bar keeps getting raised higher and higher. You have set the new standard and you have much to be proud of today, but I know it can also feel bittersweet to have achieved something so monumental, but to also have it end. But every end becomes a new beginning and this will be one of many transitions you make during your lifetime.

It is only natural as you begin your transition to something new to want to understand where it may be taking you next. If you think back about making your decision to major in engineering or computer science and come to a great school like SU you may have been a little like me, I really had no idea what I was getting myself into. There were no engineers in my family to show me what it was like to be an engineer. I knew I was good in math and science and I would have pretty good job prospects after college, but what was engineering all about, well SU taught me the principles and I have been applying them ever since.

Your career will be a little similar. Invariably I get the question “did you plan out your career at Parsons? How did you get to where you are? I always think the people asking the question are a little discouraged and a little disbelieving of my answer, which is I didn’t really plan out much. But I tell them that it is OK. It is OK to not know exactly where this journey will take you. Your career is the start of something unpredictable. It will be a series of experiences, some highs, some lows, but all memorable and building blocks to your future.

I was thinking back to some of my early career experiences and how at the time I wouldn’t have believed (and probably still can’t believe) that
any of them would have led me to where I am today. Some of the less glamorous things I did included;

- Climbing around half built Trident submarines as one of the only women in the shipyard as an 19 year old intern,
- Ending up on the hood of a rental car after being chased by stray dogs when taking stream samples in southern Virginia
- Getting sent to meet a scientist at his home outside Phoenix AZ to evaluate a technology he claimed could clean up Superfund sites with wood chips
- Sweating through several DC summers taking soil samples from beneath old Metro bus garages
- Driving through the five boroughs of NY to locate and then interview the owners of businesses who may have dumped industrial waste in sanitary landfills...needless to say some of these owners were not happy to see us

There were many more of these types of experiences but also many wonderful ones that developed me in some way. They certainly all helped transition me from being book smart to operating in the real world in a hurry. The one common element about these experiences is I never thought I was too good for any of them and I always gave it 100%. They say you get out of something what you put into it and I truly believe that type of engagement is critical to success.

I want to transition now and talk about what I believe are the tremendous opportunities you will have in your lifetime to be part of the solutions to some of the toughest challenges we face today and challenges yet to unfold in the future.
One of the things I have come to realize working for an engineering and technology services firm for 25 years is that much of what we do in our profession is make the world a safer and better place to live. Those are some pretty noble causes and as engineers and computer scientists something we can be passionate and proud about. As that famous cooking engineer Julia Child said, “Find something you are passionate about and stay tremendously interested in it”

Hopefully you will find passion in some of these challenges facing us. Challenges create opportunities to make a difference and we need bright minds like yours tackling issues like

- The extensive infrastructure needs in this country. The US has been given a grade of D+ for the state of its infrastructure which is affecting the safe use of roads, bridges, railroads, and drinking water to name a few. We need new thinking on the materials we use and lower cost ways to tackle this very expensive need
- The entire world will be challenged by impacts of rising sea levels and global warming. We need to address the resiliency of our infrastructure and also the food security issues around the world as the geography of crop production shifts with climate change
- We also have the opportunity to proactively address global warming through not only the increased development and use of alternative and renewable energy sources but also the design of more energy efficient equipment and facilities
- There has been an explosion in the use of big data and data analytics and we are at the forefront of the Internet of Things. These all hold great promise but we will need more robust
networks and dependable cybersecurity to ensure protection of these connected systems, and finally

- The advancements in healthcare have made it possible for us to live longer, not only in this country but around the world, which will drive the want and need for continued advancements in biomedical engineering solutions

It is my hope when you think about these and other challenges facing our profession you are excited to be a part of the solutions. I know I am excited to have more SU graduates out in the world taking them on.

Well I can’t leave the stage without talking a little sports. So my last bit of advice to you is to always go with your heart and take SU in your March Madness Bracket. If you don’t and they make it to the final are you really going to root against the Orange? Of course you won’t!

Thank you again for the opportunity to celebrate with you today and congratulations!