



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Harvard Club of Australia

**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich
at the Harvard Club of Australia 50th Anniversary Dinner,
Sydney**

(As prepared for delivery – November 10, 2011)

First, thank you all for inviting me here tonight, and congratulations on the 50th Anniversary of the Harvard Club of Australia.

Today, there are 2,100 Harvard Grads in Australia today; and a week from today when President Obama arrives we will have 2,101. By the way, he also turned 50 this year, and he sends you his congratulations.

This association is by far one of the most active and successful Harvard Alumni Clubs in the world, and that is a testament to you. Any organization that can establish a joint chair between Malcolm Fraser and Gough Whitlam obviously has the skills we need in Congress. President Obama may send you guys to the U.S. Senate.

I'm very honored to be among the members here including the Founding Members – Ted Blamey and Clive Gard who were honored tonight with the Legends Award.

Indeed, this room is full of dignitaries, and the Club has many famous Australian Harvard Graduates – Jim Wolfensohn, former head of the World Bank; Harry Seidler the great architect, David Clarke, founder of MacQuarie Bank, Julie Bishop, deputy leader of the Liberal Party, Don Farrell, Member from Adelaide, Nick Grenier, for NSW Premier.

It is traditional at occasions like this to talk about the famous and successful progeny of Harvard. And I could go on talking about famous Harvard graduates, but that would just make the rest of us feel badly about our own accomplishments. Recalling the famous graduates of Harvard is rarely as interesting as talking about the infamous Harvard Graduates.

Of course, our most famous of this category was the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski, class of '62 who used his law degree to help him move to a small shack in the woods and build bombs. He follows in the fine tradition of Richard Whitney, 1888, whose descendents arrived on the Mayflower, and whose thieving ways sent him to Sing Sing prison. Keeping up the White Collar traditions of Harvard, we've seen a parade of grads



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Harvard Club of Australia

go on to careers in insider trading and second home in federal prisons. These included Jeffrey Skilling of Enron and more recently Eugene Plotkin of Goldman. Even our professors, Andre Shliefer who taught economics was indicted for international insider trading, and my Economic Professors Glen Lowry was convicted of cocaine possession and beating a person with a shod foot.

So as much as everyone at Harvard always marvels at how on earth they got in there. We can take some comfort in knowing that there were some people who deserved to get in even less.

There is one group of Harvard students who should give us concern, however. This is the one group that seems without fail to experience great success and make the rest of us feel like failures. And those are Harvard drop-outs.

First there's Bill Gates. He dropped out after one year, and became the wealthiest man in the world after he founded a small company called Microsoft.

If that sounds like a fluke, I have three words. Mark Zuckerberg – Facebook.

Then there is literature. The poet Robert Frost. To be fair he dropped out of Dartmouth first. Then was admitted to Harvard and dropped out of there too. He won 4 Pulitzer prizes and he got an honorary degree from Harvard anyway.

Inventors. Edwin Land, who invented the Polaroid dropped out of the class of 1930. Unhampered by an actual degree, he had 500 patents (second only to Edison). Like Frost, Harvard awarded him an honorary doctorate to stop him from flaunting his drop-out status. So did Dartmouth.

Likewise, Buckminster Fuller had to leave school early. In his case he used to skip school to go to Broadway, which proved to be more than a distraction from his studies. During one trip he treated actress Marilyn Miller and her entire chorus to dinner, blowing all of his tuition money. He had to go to work as a factory worker in Quebec. Readmitted, he dropped out again. His reward for dropping out of Harvard twice was making a fortune inventing prefabricated homes.

In the field of journalism, there is William Randolph Hearst. Now, to be honest, in this case, it is not clear if he dropped out or if he was pushed. William Randolph enrolled in 1885, as the son of a millionaire. Although some of his professors might have called him the son of something else. Among other things, he kept a pet alligator named Champagne Charlie that terrorized his dorm. Already on probation, William ingratiated himself further by purchasing a jackass which he snuck into a professor's office, with a note around its neck saying: "Now there are two of you."



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Harvard Club of Australia

Artists also seem to fare better if they don't stay to complete their degree. Pete Seeger the folk singer and activist was the son of a Harvard educated musicologist. He dropped out, became a folk music icon, and sang "We Shall Overcome" in Harvard Square. Matt Damon dropped out to make a movie. He ended up making the film "Good Will Hunting" about a brilliant guy who doesn't fit in at Harvard. He won an academy award for it. I won't depress you by telling you that Bonnie Raitt dropped out of Harvard, too.

But if the trend weren't obvious, let me finish with my own category: politics. There's John F. Fitzgerald, the Mayor of Boston, Jacques Chirac, the President of France, Frank Carlucci Secretary of Defense, but here in Australia, above all else the next one is the one that really, really hurts.

John Key, the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

How do they do so well?

The famous Harvard Professor and former U.S. Ambassador to India had the following theory. He said that the reason Harvard is the greatest repository of accumulated wisdom in the world is that its students bring so much with them, and take so little when they leave.

So tonight I congratulate us on being accepted to Harvard. And I extend condolences to all of us who actually stayed and graduated.

Now it is the hallmark of a great institution is that it has the perspective and confidence to laugh at itself. And so I have great confidence in the Harvard's future.

But I wasn't asked to speak tonight about Harvard's future. I was asked to speak rather about the future of Australia and America. But in many ways, the answer is the same. The future is right here in this room.

Our future, our best and brightest future, is Americans and Australians being among the best educated people in the world.

Our nations do not have the world's largest populations, or the most natural resources. We are not the only democracy or the only free market. And so why are we two of the wealthiest nations in the world per capita?

Our advantage in the world is that we can make things that no one else in the world can make; we dream things no one else dares to dream. Our advantage has been that we are four times more likely as the world's average to go on to gain a college degree.



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Harvard Club of Australia

These are the minds that invented things that no one ever imagined in 1961 when this Organization was founded. In our lifetimes, these were the minds that invented personal computers, the internet, that put people on the moon, that produced the iPod, social media, that are inventing fuel sources and electric cars.

Fifty years ago, no one ever imagined that each and every one of us could access all of the information in the Harvard Library from any place in Australia simply by typing the word “google onto a pad that we carried in our hands. That we would all carry with us a small thing that could call anywhere in the world, take photos, video (no one knew what video was), calculate, and instantly send and receive your mail. It is the minds that conceived, funded, deployed, mastered all of these innovations that we have created.

And that is why an organization like this club is so critical; why it represents our future. The Harvard club that funds the Menzies Scholarship to Harvard, the Australia-Harvard Fellowships, the HCA Non-Profit Fellowships. The greatest minds of a generation creating opportunities for the greatest minds of the next generation.

Each of us lives today in one of the wealthiest and most beautiful and safest and cleanest places in human history not by divine right, but because others invested in schools like Harvard and built it from the ground up. Being part of this night, being part of this association, means that you are someone who pays it forward. So on behalf of your friends and allies on the other side of the Pacific Ocean, I thank you. Are future is bright because you recognize that for our nations to maintain the peace and prosperity that we have enjoyed, we must continue to invest even more in building the best minds of the next century.

So thank you for what you do. Thank you for letting me celebrate with you. And happy 50th to the Harvard Club of Australia.