

GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

GCU Convocation Address

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Good afternoon, new students, returning students, their families and friends, Sisters of Mercy, President Marbach, Provost Warner, the deans, and my colleagues.

What a beautiful day!

Let me invite you to breathe together, nice and easy, three times from your nose and out through your mouth. Breath in and out at your own pace. As you take your last breath, visualize your breath nourishing your entire body, mind, and spirit and releasing all resistances and obstacles.

What an honor to receive this award! I would like to thank a colleague of mine who wrote a beautiful nomination letter. A thank you to the recent Virginia Graham Award recipients for reviewing my dossier, visiting my classes, and making recommendations. I would also like to show

my gratitude to the Healy Family Foundation, which has made this award possible at GCU annually since 2002. A thank you to all students and alumni who let me interact with and made me think and act for a better world. Lastly, a thank you to my husband and my daughter, who provide me unconditional support while being the vocal critic of my actions for all these years.

When I received this award, I became very curious about who Virginia Graham was. I researched through the GCU library's databases and with Sister Barbara Williams's support, here is what I know today. At GCU, she was one of the 24 graduates in 1931. I could not find the statistics in 1931, but according to [Statista](#), in 1940, 3.8% of females and 5.5% of males had completed four years or more college education (Statista). In contrast, in 2020, 38.3% of females and 36.7% males have completed four years of college or more. In 2021, 10.1% of females and 8.6% of males earned doctoral degrees ([Statista](#)). So, Virginia receiving her bachelor's degree at GCU in 1931 was a much rarer opportunity than earning a doctoral degree in 2021.

Ninety years ago, in 1931 at GCU, there was a tradition to invite back a GCU alumna who graduated five years prior to speak at the Commencement. Her Commencement speaker was Barbara Ludwig, then-president of the Catholic Girls' Club of Trenton. She spoke on "College Graduates and Catholic Action" (*New York Times*).

According to her yearbook, Virginia Mary Graham was "Gay—generous—sincere—unspoiled—piquant—mischievous—interested and interesting—above all, lovable and lovable and then again

lovable.” The activities in which she was involved (that was not required of all students) are:
Secretary of the Student Body (3); Treasurer of the Student Body (2); Vice-President of the Class (4);
Sodality of the Blessed Virgin (1, 2, 3, 4) & President (4); Senate (2, 3); Courtier Staff (3, 4); St.
Cecelia’s Club (1, 2, 3, 4); Cervantes Club (3, 4); French Club (1, 2, 3, 4); Dramatic Club (3, 4) &
Business Manager (4); Class Basketball (2); Cheer Leader (2). [Number indicates year in college:
1 = first year; 4 = senior]

Three years after her graduation, Virginia’s parents announced her engagement to John A. Healey, son of Mr. and Mrs. T. J. Healey of Red Bank, N.J. The *New York Times*’ society news stated, “Miss Graham is a graduate of Mont Mare School and Georgian Court College. Mr. Healey is a graduate of Fordham University and the Yale Law School (*New York Times*, Sep. 26, 1934). She had two sons. They, through the Healey Family Foundation, are committed to offer the Virginia Graham ’31 Award for Teaching Excellence at GCU until 2030.

Were you able to imagine who Virginia Graham was? Did you find any connections with her?

When Virginia graduated from GCU, my mother was 5 and my father was 8 years old, being raised in the farmland of Japan. My mother had three sisters and four brothers. Her parents—my grandparents—had all my uncles complete college degrees, but they did not allow my mother and my three aunts to go to college. My mother became a schoolteacher, but her father had her quit her teaching career to support her family’s farm because World War II caused a shortage of male

farmhands. During World War II, my father was a first-year college student at a private college in Tokyo, just like many of you here today. During the middle of his first year in college, his draft waiver as a college student was banned and he was drafted to the Japanese military. His dream of continuing his study of English, German, and Japanese literature in college was shattered completely. In the military, he became pre-diabetic (or possibly Type II diabetic) which means his blood sugar was elevated above the normal range. Under normal circumstances, becoming diabetic may not be a desirable health status, however in this unique context, his pre-diabetic status kept him from fighting on the front line, thus I am here speaking to you today.

Who could tell if your misfortune or suffering may bring happiness and prosperity or vice versa? My father's survival during World War II is exactly the type of story that Huainanzi (淮南子) wrote in Chinese classics. In the original Chinese story, an old man had one horse, but one day, his horse ran away (misfortune). Then his horse brought back a superior horse with it (fortune). The old man's son rode this new horse and broke his leg (misfortune). His broken leg saved him from being drafted and dying in the war (fortune). This Chinese classic saying was translated into Japanese and pronounced as "Ningen banji saiou ga uma (人間万事塞翁が馬)" (Kotawazajiten). This may be less dramatic, but another true story was when I did not get into one of the national universities after going through its entrance exams. There were seven subject exams over the course of two days and one day of practicum exams. Later, I was admitted to a small private women's college, which was not my first choice. I met my husband through the collegiate Ballroom Dance Club, and we enjoy our 39th year of continuous marriage today.

Can you recall any similar experiences in your own life? I would love to hear your story sometime in the future.

Every summer, I introduce something new to myself to learn, whether it is juggling three apples in the air, learning a new musical instrument, or practicing the splits. This summer, a colleague and I attended a 10-week workshop titled Radical Self Care that was facilitated by Suzanne McMurray. The main goal for me was to embody self-care planning and self-care practices. When we teach the IH210 Self Care Planning course, it is not a knowledge transfer, but rather a true facilitation of the learners going through their development of self-care practices from our embodied self-care planning and practice experience. Let me share a portion of my Week 2 activities. After a few revisions, I wrote my five core values: health, cooperation, dedication, trustworthiness, and life. Based on my five core values, I wrote my vision statement as: "I live my life to its fullest through working together for a common purpose and binding myself to a course of action. I am dependable and enjoy being an observer of all living things." Based on this vision statement, the intentions for my body, emotions, mindset, and spirit were identified. Then a few self-care practices for each domain were created. For instance, my intention for my physical body was "I am full of vitality." My physical self-care practices for my body were stretching daily, walking five times per week, and sleeping for seven hours each day. The outcome of it was extraordinary to me. Like Tai Chi practice or meditation practice, direct experience is the only way to fully perceive the benefits of self-care planning and practice.

In my view, there are no boring moments or boring lives. If you disagree with me, please listen carefully to the next and final segment of my speech. If you think one of these phenomena extraordinary, I welcome you to a life full of unknowns and potentials to uncover.

Have you ever had a premonition? The sense of knowing what is to come before it happens. Or have you ever had the feeling that your mother knows everything even though you did not tell her the truth? For students, have you seen your mom's text message or voicemail when you really wanted to connect with her because of your distress or life happenings? According to Bianchi and her colleagues' research in 1996 (Bianchi et al., 1996), it was discovered that the fetal cells can continue to circulate in the maternal circulation for up to 27 years after birth. So, anyone who is younger than 27, your cells may still be circulating in your mother's body and continuing an intimate connection with your mother.

This will be the last phenomenon I share with you today. I was diagnosed with mitral valve prolapse when I was denying my excessive shortness of breath and tooth-achy chest pain for a while. I was working at an acute care hospital as a physical therapist, and while I was pushing an IV stand and assisting my patients' walking, I suffered a shortness of breath before my patients got winded. The leakage of blood from the bottom chamber to the top chamber of my heart was visible and audible through echocardiogram and auscultation using a stethoscope. The general knowledge about this condition is once you are diagnosed with it, it remains true forever; no cure unless you repair or

replace the mitral valve surgically. At least, that is the current medical knowledge or widely accepted knowledge. I made a conscious effort in all aspects of my life, starting with my food, avoiding over-exercising, introducing Tai Chi, etc. In 10 to 15 years, I was confident that I did not have mitral valve prolapse anymore. My family doctor suggested I do another echocardiogram to prove my internal knowledge. I did it, and the result was that I no longer had mitral valve prolapse or any signs of leakage through that valve. I remember asking the sonographer to show me and tell me that I no longer had it. She confirmed it and later the radiologist's report was written based on her report. Who can tell you some conditions will be permanent while our body is going through constant changes? One hundred million red blood cells are created every minute. Stomach lining regenerates in approximately a week, so does a liver in 6 weeks, and the outer layer of the skin in a month. Almost all cells except for the lenses in your eyes and neurons of the central nervous system are constantly replacing the old with the new (Milo & Phillips, 2015). It can be estimated that 98% of all atoms of the body are replaced within a year. In seven years, 100% of the atoms in the cells are replaced (David, 1991). Isn't it extraordinary that we are constantly changing and living?

As we begin this new academic year 2021–2022, let's keep "Ningen banji saiou ga uma" in mind. The current pandemic may have caused significant challenges and restrictions, but we may gain something more significant in the future. We just cannot predict everything. When you observe or experience an extraordinary phenomenon, enjoy it, and please share it with me. I would love to listen to your stories.

Thank you!

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