



AN AGING ODYSSEY: ETERNAL YET CURRENT

AN ADDRESS BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF HIS INSTALLATION AS

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Thank you all, for being so welcoming to a former Bruin.

I'd like to let you in on a little secret. As someone who has spent time at Stanford and UCLA, two of USC's biggest football rivals, I have to say that we were always curious about the unparalleled passion and devotion of Trojans.

We always wondered what the magic was at USC. Why are the fans so fervent? Why are alumni, faculty and students so proud to bear the name of Troy? What was this "Trojan family" everyone always talked about?

A few months after accepting the position of Dean at the Davis School, I can honestly say that now, I understand. I have experienced it firsthand. I see that it is more than fight songs, traditions and Traveler-the-horse—although those are part of it—but there is something special about the Trojan spirit. It's the board

members who take the time out of their busy day to drive downtown to give me advice. It's the administrators who responded so warmly to my calls and emails with encouragement, no matter how late at night.

It's the faculty and students who asked me questions about my vision for the School, while sharing their own. It's all of you, and every Trojan, who inspire me, and I am so very proud to join your ranks.

Thank you, President Nikias and Provost Garret, for your leadership and vision of USC as an endlessly innovative institution that is in a great state of growth.

In his Address to the Faculty this year, Max spoke of our unique Trojan journey, saying that, despite all of the amazing things we have already accomplished,

We have further to go, so that we might lay the cornerstone of a new City of

Troy, which shall be the envy of the world, and an inspiration to that world.

Sharing, upholding and enhancing the president's amazing vision is Provost Garrett, whose own character and leadership speak to the very best of our Trojan ideals. One of the many reasons I was excited about USC was that the university is undergoing, as Beth said in her own installation, **“a sudden, almost magical, transformation.”** We are fortunate to have administrators who believe in this transformation and in the limitless potential of USC, and I would also like to particularly thank Michael Quick, Rob Cooper, Beth Meyerowitz, Randy Hall and Marty Levine for their wise counsel.

Thank you to Jim Birren, the founding dean of the USC Davis School, as well as one of the fathers of the field of gerontology. Thank you to the previous deans of the School: Ed Schneider, who shared many deanship pearls with me, Elizabeth Zelinski, Gerry Davison for the smooth transition, and, ever so briefly, Marty Levine; all of whom have given me excellent guidance and sage advice. Thanks also to my colleagues who are helping me shape the future of our school: Vice-Dean Kelvin Davies, who was recently knighted by the French government, Eileen Crimmins, who is not only the head of the School's Faculty Council but was just elected to the Institute of Medicine; as well as Associate Dean Maria Henke and the newly appointed Associate Dean of development, Jeff Kliever.

Thank you - to all the friends of the Davis School, whose generosity enables our faculty, students and staff to conduct their life-changing work: none of this would be possible without the thoughtful assistance of friends like you, whose donations, support and enthusiasm have been unparalleled, essential and deeply, deeply appreciated. In particular, I am especially indebted to Dr. Richard King, the new chair of the school's board of councilors, for his invaluable advice, his unique insights, and his enthusiasm regarding our mission. Anything I have ever achieved is because of my family's loving support and shining example especially that of my grandfather Pinchas Cohen

who was teaching biology over a century ago as well as my father, Gidon Cohen, who was also a biologist. — *Biology is my family business.*

Words cannot express the gratitude and love I owe my wife Vinci and our children Ilana and Gidon, who have also become enthusiastic Trojans.

Finally, thanks to my new family: the students, staff, alumni, supporters and particularly the faculty of the Davis School, whom I will mention in greater detail later on.

My fellow Trojans — *it feels good to say that* — I am delighted to begin this journey alongside you.

In my remarks today, I want to touch on three things: first, the unique past and present of our School; second, the revolution in aging that is taking place around us; and finally, my vision for the School.

OUR HISTORY

I am deeply honored to become the new dean of the School of Gerontology, and I honor the giants who paved the way, including Leonard Davis and Ethel Percy Andrus, two of the greatest friends and champions that we have ever had. Because of their shared desire to ensure retired Americans received adequate insurance coverage and support, the two became close friends and allies.

Leonard Davis was a successful, energetic businessman who was also socially aware. He shared the pioneering vision of Ethel Percy Andrus, a USC alum who founded AARP, which changed the lives of older adults around the country thanks to its array of programs and services.

Financed mostly by small donations from grateful AARP members, USC welcomed the creation of the Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center in 1964. In 1975, thanks to a generous gift from Leonard Davis, the USC Davis School of Gerontology was established. Leonard Davis

epitomized the Trojan spirit: he was an entrepreneur-philanthropist with a social vision.

Gerontology is the study of aging across the lifespan. Not just the aged, although we love and honor them and their wisdom, but *aging* across the lifespan, from cradle to grave.

We recognize that aging brings many challenges, we also believe it brings opportunities as well.

- Opportunities to advance the very limits of science and medicine.
- Opportunities to enlighten society as to the worth of seniors.
- Opportunities to share that special wisdom and beauty that only come with age.

The course charted by Ethel Percy Andrus and Leonard and Sophie Davis is one that our School has followed proudly, and I promise that it will continue to do so.

OUR FACULTY

I see that same spark that motivated our founders in the faculty of the Davis School today.

I would like to take a moment to honor the amazing women and men whose work I greatly admire, and whom I am proud to call my colleagues and my heroes.

Please join me in celebrating our superb interdisciplinary faculty composed of Biologists, Social scientists, Epidemiologists, and cognitive scientists.

I am also proud of our faculty's wisdom in recognizing the importance of collaboration across disciplines. I am excited to help enhance these connections between our School and many others at USC, including Medicine, Engineering, Pharmacy, Letters-Arts-&-Sciences, Business, Public Policy, Dentistry and Social Work. These collaborations are key to success in an era of interdisciplinary science and education, and

represent the future of research. Their work is our work: the betterment of humanity.

With great pride, I salute all the forward-looking, ever-burning faculty lights of USC. I praise their unparalleled scholarship as well as their continued dedication to our university and its mission. May their fire — our fire —illuminate a new and better world.

A REVOLUTION IN AGING

I now turn to a scientific revolution occurring around us: a revolution in aging.

While aging is a universal phenomenon literally as old as time itself, it may surprise you to hear that gerontology is one of science's youngest fields.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit with Jim Birren. He shared with me the 1939 anthology *Problems of Ageing*, described as “the first serious attempt to assemble present day knowledge of the phenomenon of ageing.”

Reading through it was an education in itself. It was an amazing reminder of just how far we have come. Over the last century the major causes of death have changed from infectious diseases such as pneumonia to what we call today “chronic disease” such as atherosclerosis and cancer. It thus becomes our challenge to discover new treatments—and, dare we say—potential cures.

Changing, too, are social attitudes towards aging and older adults, whose issues and wellbeing increasingly dominate political discussions of public policy.

Foreign policy experts, these days, talk about the “Stans”: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and so on. I like to talk about the “**Spans.**” The first “span” that gerontology dealt with was **life span**. American life span has doubled over the period since USC has been in existence. In fact, US life expectancy has gone up by ten percent since the founding of our school! Work done in our own

school—even work done in my own lab—is constantly developing new avenues to further extend life span.

And while life expectancy has doubled over the last century, so have the aging-related challenges and opportunities. Not unexpectedly, with the increased life span coupled with the bad habits we pick up during our lives, a new issue has emerged, which is “**health span**.”

The goal of bio-gerontologists is to increase health-span to the same degree that we have advanced life span. Indeed, disease prevention through “healthy aging” is the goal of our school and our field.

Furthermore, absence of disease is not the only goal we have for seniors. We are working on increasing the “**wellness-span**” by identifying practices that continue to improve quality of life to the oldest possible age. Our team of scientists (in the economical and policy arenas) are also working to define, study, and enhance “**wealth span**” to ensure that we can afford to live well into our eighties, nineties and one hundreds.

As you can see, gerontologists have their work cut out for them, but this, to me, is enormously heartening for what gerontologists can—and will—accomplish in our lifetimes and beyond.

MY VISION

I’ve spoken of our School’s history, and of the revolution in aging. Now I want to share with you my vision for the School.

As Aristotle said, “Education is the best provision for the journey to old age.” My vision for the School is to reestablish and reinvent the concept of aging research. As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, we are in the midst of two major scientific revolutions:

- The first is the advent of genomics that has already changed the field of medicine completely.

- The second is the rapid expansion of the Web-2.0 and social media.

As my friend Paul Irving, the COO of the Milken Institute, has eloquently stated: “The greatest engines of economic growth occur at the intersection of major innovations and massive demographic shifts”. Well, as we experience, both in this country and throughout the world, unprecedented growth in the senior population (the so-called “**silver tsunami**”), gerontology will provide tremendous opportunities and prospects for interdisciplinary practitioners in both of these arenas.

I am excited to witness the science of aging undergoing a parallel transformation as it connects to both “high-tech” and “bio-tech.” These opportunities will occur both in the private sector as well as in the academic and non-profit worlds.

The USC Davis School should take a leadership role in both of these areas.

Two major initiatives will position us to do so.

The first, which I call—“**digital aging**”—will capture the opportunity, and position us in the center of, the various Internet-activities related to aging. The creation of a Digital Aging Center at USC is of utmost importance to the School.

The digital and social media revolution has seen older adults make up the fastest growing and increasingly savvy group of individuals to make use of this technology. That affords tremendous business, research and entrepreneurial opportunities, which the Digital Aging Center at USC will enable us to capitalize on.

One of the first things we have already done in this new center is to open a competition among our gerontology students to create new iPad, iPhone and Android “apps” that will serve the elderly.

Our students’ remarkable and enthusiastic response has resulted in multiple novel ideas, including new tools to help the elderly access

services, protect them from fraud, record memoirs, create advanced directives, generate emergency alerts to family members, and manage their medical prescriptions. My favorite, however, is the one I call the “Jewish Grandmother App”. It monitors how frequently your children and grandchildren call, and text them if they forget!

I was delighted to see these marvelous proposals and with help from appropriate engineering and software development colleagues we plan to try to advance some of them to further development.

The second initiative I propose for the School is a concept I call “**personalized aging.**”

Many of you are familiar with the concept of “personalized medicine”, which has harnessed the technology known as “genomics” and already transformed many aspects of the field of medicine, particularly cancer treatment. It allows physicians to tailor specific treatments to specific patients based on the individual genetics of their disease and their defense mechanisms. It’s time to apply this concept to aging.

Personalized aging will take genomics and demographics and go beyond personalized medicine. If we initiate the right steps now, we will soon be able to examine individual genetic variability and apply it to healthy aging, not just disease. We can discover what strategies work best for different individuals and move away from the “one-size-fits-all” concept when it comes to diet, exercise and lifestyle that will promote successful aging.

Along this line, I am calling for the creation of the Los Angeles Multiethnic Aging Study or the **LAMAS**. This will be a groundbreaking, all-inclusive study to answer a completely new set of questions people have about aging.

We at USC are uniquely positioned to explore these questions. We will serve constituencies that have been largely neglected in previous aging studies and will be using modern scientific tools that were unavailable until recently.

I am also committed to advancing our existing assets such as the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence, while promoting newer programs such as the USC Free Radical Institute, the Longevity Institute and the proposed Nutrition and Healthy Aging Center and the End-of-Life Care Institute. Furthermore, as the care of the elderly is increasingly managed by nurses, we have conceived a Gerontology-Nursing Leadership Program that will be based here at USC.

To look forward, as President Nikias reminds us, is to look east. Inspired by his call for the university to “embody the intersection of the Pacific Century and the Biological Century” as “the center of gravity in our world is shifting from the Atlantic to the Pacific [Rim],” I wish to expand upon the remarkable inroads the Davis School has made in Asia, the area of the world where aging will have the most immediate and dramatic impact.

We have already had the good fortune to partner with Tokyo’s Yamano College of Aesthetics to create and implement an ambitious online gerontology course. I’d like to thank Mike Yamano for his leadership and vision, and for recognizing how invaluable a gerontological education is to any career.

China is also an area of key importance to the School. With China’s rate of elderly-population growth being substantially greater than in the Western world, we can expect to see there the full scope of aging’s impact on societies as well as individuals. We are building relationships with universities as well as eldercare institutions in China, and other Asian countries, and we hope to be part of the emerging solutions for dealing with the unique challenges that the Pacific Rim will experience.

We are witnessing the emergence of a truly interconnected world, where information, resources and technology passes freely among countries and hemispheres to improve the quality of life for all older adults.

I want our School and Center to be at the forefront of the cresting “silver tsunami,” and I believe that we will be able to increase our knowledge of life-, health-, wellness-, wealth- and connectivity-span(s) and, eventually, to harness these lessons for the benefit of all.

A NEW BEGINNING

One of my heroes is Albert Einstein, who once said:

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.”

By promoting curiosity and yearning for knowledge we hope to create a culture of passion and interdisciplinary collaborations that will allow students and faculty of the Davis School to set themselves apart.

I’d like to quote Alan Davis, son of Leonard and Sophie, to remind us where we come from, and where we’re going:

My father felt there needed to be a place to train future leaders, a place where people applied science to the issues: what are the real answers, what are the possible solutions? Gerontology crosses all the disciplines. For our School, the potential is limitless.

We are embarking on an aging odyssey that reminds us just how interconnected every discipline, every breakthrough, every person truly is. I draw inspiration from all of you, my

fellow Trojans, as well as the countless others who seek to improve and advance our field and our world.

In closing, let me share some heartening results of a survey conducted by our friends and neighbors, the USC’s Emeriti Center. Their research compared all the major sources of information about health, from WebMD to the Mayo-Clinic.Com. The results show that the USC Davis School is, in fact, *the* most trusted name in aging. The trust placed in us by people around the world is one we take seriously, and we pride ourselves that our name stands for institutional integrity and singular recognition of gerontology excellence.

As we begin this new adventure in the storied annals of the Davis School, let us remember the courage and vision of Leonard Davis and Ethel Percy Andrus.

Let us remember how far science, medicine, social policy and technology have come in our lifetimes, and how much farther they will go.

Let us remember our awe-inspiring responsibilities to all aging people.

Let us remember what it means to age, and how that process unites virtually everyone.

Gerontology is the story of us all, and I can think of no cause nobler—or more necessary.

Thank you and Fight On!