

Commencement Address
Technical University of Nova Scotia
May 9, 1992

Citation
Millard D. Fuller
Doctor of Engineering, Honoris Causa

Mr. Chancellor:

I have the honour to present Millard D. Fuller, a person whose achievements are truly inspiring.

At age twenty-nine, he changed his life by giving away a self-made fortune and is presently devoting himself to the elimination of poverty housing throughout the world. He founded and leads Habitat for Humanity International, an organization which has built over 13,000 houses in 38 countries using volunteers, donated materials, contributed funds and partnership with churches, civic groups and corporations. Thousands of poor families who could not have achieved decent housing in any other way have worked in partnership with Habitat for Humanity International and now enjoy pride in community and home ownership. Based in Americus, Georgia, Habitat raises and directs \$100,000,000 annually towards the elimination of poverty housing, and builds 4,500 homes per year. Each year these numbers grow.

Neither an architect nor a planner, Millard Fuller has shown innovative approaches for those disciplines. His principles have provided decent shelter where traditional public and private sector approaches have failed. Working directly with the people who will live in the houses, building with an economy of means, using the act of building to develop the spirit of flourishing communities are principles which Habitat for Humanity has put forcefully to work. At the Faculty of Architecture we share belief in these principles.

Whether wielding the hammer in the construction crews or working with leaders in various fields, Millard Fuller is developing further the principles, the resources and the organization to build more and more houses each year. He has shown that marvelous places can be created from ordinary ones, that faith and idealism are the strongest forces in achieving practical results, and that individuals can make a difference on a global scale.

Millard Fuller has written four books, including *Love in the Mortar Joints* and *The Excitement is Building* (co-authored with his wife Linda). Among his many awards are the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Humanitarian Award (1987), the American Red Cross International Humanity Service Award (1989) and eight honorary doctorates.

Mr. Chancellor, for his outstanding contributions to housing and community development worldwide, Senate has recommended to Convocation that the Degree of Doctor of Engineering, Honoris Causa be conferred on Millard D. Fuller.

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BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

Chancellor Jodrey, President Adams, Mr. Nautes, members of the Board of Governors, Faculty, fellow honorees, family and friends, Alumni and members of the 1992 graduating class:

It is a distinct privilege and a high honor to be your convocation speaker on this momentous occasion. So, both personally, and on behalf of the other honorary degree recipients, I want to express

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profound gratitude to the University for the invitation to be a part of this Convocation and all of the related activities of this exciting graduation weekend.

I feel a kinship with you at this fine University because I launched my higher education career in a school of engineering. My first major at Auburn University in my native Alabama was Agricultural Engineering. I pursued that course of study for two years before falling from grace and switching to economics. I graduated with a major in economics and minors in mathematics and physics. Then, I went to law school.

I have always been grateful for my training in engineering. The knowledge I gained has been useful to me over the years, especially in connection with my work with Habitat for Humanity.

I know all of you graduates here today are grateful, too, for the training you have received over the past few years. And, especially grateful for the degree you are about to receive! You should be. You are receiving a degree from a most prestigious school, the only independent technical university in Canada, with a long and distinguished history going back to 1907 when Nova Scotia Technical College first opened its doors.

You are graduating from a university that supports or is associated with more than a dozen research institutes and Centres. And, your university provides training to technical professionals through its Continuing Education Division. I'm sure that many of you will benefit from this Continuing Education Division in the years ahead.

Your university is of such renown that it has attracted students not only from the Atlantic Provinces, but from all of Canada and from over 50 countries and 43 universities around the world.

The first graduating class of 1910 had only nine people in it. Over the years, the University has graduated thousands of young men and women who have fanned out across Canada and around the world to make their mark and contribute to society. Many of those who have gone before you have risen to the highest positions in their professions.

Now, it's your turn.

Today, you are graduating with various kinds of degrees in Engineering, Architecture and Computer Science. For the past many months, and even several years, you have studied and mastered,

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to one extent or another, mechanical design, materials science, engineering systems, fluid and thermodynamics, differential equations and linear algebra, theory of housing, history and theory of urbanization, computers in Architecture, memory management, hardware and software, decoders and microprocessor technology, and a whole lot more. But, today is graduation day. There really is light at the end of the tunnel!

Some among you will go on for still more education, but most are going into careers in business, industry, government, education or to work with any number of other organizations.

These are exciting times to be graduating in your respective fields of engineering, architecture and computer science. So much is happening in these fields. The world you are graduating into has computers which sit on a desk that have the processing power of a roomful of hardware less than ten years ago. Artificial Intelligence Systems help land airplanes, build cars and route phone calls. Parallel processors with more than ten times the processing power of today's largest mainframe computers will enable businesses to work with large databases and transaction volume like never before. Video phones and hand held wireless communication devices are changing the way we do business.

Houses and other buildings are being designed by computers. And, innovative techniques are revolutionizing the speed with which structures are built. In Habitat for Humanity, we broke the previous world record, when in October 1990 in Nashville, Tennessee, we built an entire house from the foundation up in less than six hours!

Technology in many forms is increasingly changing the world we live in. And, your services will be in high demand as businesses and other organizations strive to apply this technology to increase profitability and market share.

Despite the many positive changes and technological advances however, there are huge problems which remain unresolved. Consider homelessness, poverty housing, a deteriorating environment, population explosion and ethnic violence, just to name a few.

You have a role to play in solving these problems. Technology is morally neutral. It can be used to make the world a better place to live, or it can exacerbate the problems. It's up to highly educated people like you to make sure that knowledge is used to build a better world.

And, to build a world where people are respectful of one another, realizing that technology has truly made us a global village. We increasingly need to see the world the way God sees it and the way humans have seen it in recent years for the first time from spacecraft. From four hundred miles up you don't see national boundaries. You just see one world, a huge ball hanging in space, tied together with land masses and gigantic oceans. But, in spite of its size, space travelers tell us it looks very fragile. We must take care of the earth. It is our home.

Three years ago, we hosted three officials of the Soviet Peace Fund at our international headquarters of Habitat for Humanity in Americus, Georgia. In that delegation was Svetlana Savitskaya, the first woman cosmonaut to "walk in space". She has made two journeys into space, her first in August 1982. It was on her second voyage when a space capsule linked with a space station that she spent three hours "walking in space".

At a reception held in our Habitat Center for Svetlana and her two companions, this attractive young mother sat down with a group of children. She told them a story. It went like this. "Children, if you walk down the street from your house and someone asks you where you live, you reply '105 Sixth Street'. If you go out of town and someone asks you where you live, you say 'Americus'. If you leave the state and an inquirer wants to know where you are from, your answer is 'Georgia'. When you leave your country, though, and someone wants to know where you live, you respond 'the United States'. But, children, what if you leave the world? Then, where is your home? I had the privilege of leaving the earth and looking back at it. I realized that Earth is my home and it's yours too. We are from planet Earth...we're neighbors and we ought to be friends."

That's a simple but profound insight and it should guide all of us in our decisions as we apply our knowledge in the years ahead.

Problems and present trends do not need to scare us. They continue only if talented, educated and good people don't take positive and corrective action. You can change things. Believe that. Act

on that belief. Together, we can change things and build a better world, for ourselves and for our children. We can build a world where people can be neighbors and friends.

F. Scott Fitzgerald once said, "The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise."

In the face of almost unbelievable poverty across the land and around the world, we in Habitat for Humanity have put up our banner and declared, "No More Shacks", no more poverty housing and homelessness. And, from a tiny beginning in South Georgia, we are now building thousands of houses every year in over eight hundred locations in thirty-eight countries, including many places in Canada.

I challenge you today to put up your banner somewhere. Maybe you'll join the movement of Habitat for Humanity or some other such group. Or form your own. Determine to stop the loss of our forests. Figure out how to arrest the depletion of the ozone layer. Solve the garbage problem.

Don't sell out for a big salary, a picket fence and 2.3 children. Those things will take care of themselves if you aim high and go for the joy and reward of a life of accomplishment, excellence and building a better world.

May the blessings of heaven be yours as you go forth to make your contribution to the world... always with a heart full of deep concern and love.