**Jordon Milroy – Ōritetanga Learner Success Conference, August 2019**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

I spent the last month in Samoa sailing nice and warm. A typical student I left everything for the last moment, minute, like my speech. So, I’m suddenly asked, on email, we need your speech. So I sat there to write a speech, and then I realised, I can't write it. It's a bit awkward, but here we go.

There's a Samoan saying I want to start with. It's, "Let the sea determine the worth of my canoe." OK. So am I the canoe or am I the sailboat? So, Talofa lava. As warm, humid air rushes through my never-ending shakiness of my cerebral palsy, the waves gently rake against the sides of my sailboat as I drift out to sea.

I'm a Samoan, as you can tell, I'm a white Samoan. I'm a white chocolate. But as a Samoan, I realised the injustice of my people. As a Samoan, the injustice of people with disabilities.

Part of this speech, the word "inspiration" was a criterion. I don't like the word "inspiration" because people come up to me and go, you're so inspiring for going shopping by yourself or putting on your shoes. The word "inspiration" is more self-empowerment.

I remember my academic journey started when I was a six year old in Samoa. The year one teacher took one look at me and go, no, I don't want you in my class. You might do something to other kids. I'm like, like what? I don't know, you might bite them. I'm like, OK, I never bit anyone in my life. And then I remembered my last paper in my undergraduate, the lecturer came up to me and go, I don't want you in my class because I don't understand you. I'm like, OK.

I graduated, and the feeling of success walking and rolling across that stage with a Bachelor of Communications. It's a bit ironic but-- let's go with it. And then for this degree they created this piece of paper was a token gesture, with a family, support, culture to say thank you. But when I got this bit of paper, I felt disappointed. After five years of study, now what? And so I said to myself, I want to be normal. Why would you want to be normal? So I went and got a real job, nine to five, boring stuff.

And then I remembered my sailing roots. As a sailor, we sail through storms, rough seas, everything. Do you know, safe harbours do not make for good sailors? So you need to have rough times in life. So, I said to myself, why not go back and study a Master’s. Master’s of Human Rights, nothing else to do. So I approached a teacher and the support of AUT the disabilities support that you heard a couple minutes ago. When you're a sailor, we never count on people supporting you, it's the same as your academic and we have people supporting them.

Looking forward, always look forward when you sail. Really important, you might crash in to a wharf. And so, as soon as having completed my Master's Degree, marked on by the signing date. And the result was a new found appreciation for my voice, my disabled person voice. I'm proud to be disabled. I'm proud to be Samoan. And proud to be academic. Fa'afetai lava.

He hōnore, he korōria, Maungārongo ki te whenua. Whakaaro pai e, Ki ngā tāngata katoa. Ake, ake, Ake, ake, āmine. Te Atua, te piringa, Tōku oranga. Tōku oranga.