

USC Mrs. T.H. Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

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Dear Occupational Therapy Trojan Family,

During this holiday season, I look back to 1976 with the benefit of age upon the starry-eyed dreams that guided my decision to accept a faculty appointment in what was then called the USC Department of Occupational Therapy. Despite its grand reputation as the foremost occupational therapy program in the country, the department was surprisingly small – about 7 full-time faculty, at most 2 or 3 staff, and a total of about 50 students across all programs. Betty Yerxa had just been named Chair, and it was she who offered me a one-year contract, entirely funded on “soft money.” Somehow, I mustered up the courage to push myself beyond what was comfortable and to give up all that was familiar and secure. I resigned from my staff position as an occupational therapist at a government-supported facility on the East Coast and ventured across the country, spending most nights in a pup tent. I saw the desert sky for the first time in my life, and, although terribly excited, I was sad to be leaving family and dear friends. But there simply was no way I could resist her offer. I REALLY liked Betty Yerxa – she exuded love of USC, of Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center and of the people it served, of her colleagues, and of her students. My mentors, A. Jean Ayres and Joan Rogers, were on the faculty then, and I was eager to work closely with them in the future. Guided by the optimism and idealism of youth, I was convinced that USC was the mecca of occupational therapy education and scholarship. I wanted to be there. I wanted to be a part of USC’s great tradition of building the profession and positively impacting the lives of the people it serves. I wanted to be able to meet the distinguished senior faculty and alums with whom I had admired from afar – including, among others, Mary Reilly, Florence Cromwell, Carlotta Wells, Janice Burke, and Linda Florey. So, in August of 1976, I began my journey as a member of our Trojan Family.

There is a quote in the Talmud as follows: “Would that life were like a shadow cast by a wall or a tree, but it is like a shadow of a bird in flight.” Each of us can think of ourselves as born to move on when certain signs appear that the time is right. After a year of sabbatical, a confluence of unanticipated life circumstances, and much reflection, I have made the decision to retire effective January 31, 2018. Change is necessary for progress, and with it, new desires and hopes are ignited. In his novel *A Gentleman in Moscow*, Amor Towles writes:

Our lives are steered by uncertainties, many of which are...daunting; but that if we persevere and remain generous of heart, we may be granted a moment of supreme lucidity – a moment in which all that has happened to us suddenly comes in focus as a necessary course of events, even as we find ourselves on the threshold of a bold new life that we had been meant to lead all along. (p. 442)

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What is so clear to me at this time is that the 41 wonderful years I spent on the USC faculty (in so many diverse roles) enabled me to experience a precious gift – a life of heartfelt purpose. Retirement is a time of remembering...the ups and downs, the struggles and victories, and most of all, the people – the staff, students, and faculty who made it possible for so many seemingly improbable dreams to become realities. Retirement evokes a multitude of competing feelings, but the overriding one I am experiencing today is gratitude for so much that cannot be adequately captured in words. In this letter, I limit myself to ten, but there are, rest assured, so many others.

1. I am grateful for the Chan family for endowing our Division. I remember hoping for years that the Division would be secured into posterity before I left my position. Deep within me, I had doubts that this could happen, but, miraculously, it did. I now leave my position as the Mrs. T.H. Chan Endowed Professor of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy confident that the trust placed in the Division and in me by Ronnie and Barbara Chan will be amply rewarded by our future successes.
2. I am grateful to the USC administration that has, since the time of my appointment as Chair, allowed us to invest surplus revenue into Division initiatives. This policy afforded us the opportunity to demonstrate that truly extraordinary accomplishments were possible when adequate resources were made available to occupational therapy faculty.
3. I am grateful for the support I have received throughout the past 41 years from the administrators to whom I have directly reported – to Betty Yerxa who enabled me to somehow “land” at USC, to Joseph P. Van Der Meulen for placing his confidence in me when I was first appointed Chair, to Hal Slavkin who welcomed us as a Division in the School of Dentistry, and to Avishai Sadan who has not only supported my efforts, listened, and honored my perspectives, but who, beyond this, mentored me in how to be a bold and courageous leader.
4. I am grateful to our exceptional teaching faculty. Deadlines, professionalism, examples of respect and integrity, the exuding of love of your work, kindness and empathy are how I will remember you. Because of you, the quality of our educational programs continues to be top-notch, innovative, and among the best in the United States and throughout the world. It is hard to fathom that enrollment in our Minors program in occupational science has grown by 210%, our OTD program is one of the largest in the nation, our MA-I program is now five times larger than it was 10 years ago, and the MA-II program has been ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as the nation’s top occupational therapy graduate educational program for more years than all other programs combined.
5. I am grateful to our Division researchers who have been charting new avenues of science while, simultaneously, being responsive to pressing societal needs. I recall a time when the Division did not have a PhD program, the founding of a new discipline – occupational science – seemed like a pipe dream, and we could not conceive of actually successfully submitting an NIH grant. Today, because of your tireless efforts and resilience, the Division’s research portfolio has continued to grow and occupational science is alive and well. Your work has bolstered the reputation of the Division throughout USC, the nation, and the international community with similar research interests. And today we take pride in the fact that more than

four dozen graduates from our PhD program have been heavily recruited for academic positions throughout the nation and the world, including tenure-track positions in research-intensive universities as well as top administrative appointments as chairs or directors of highly ranked programs in occupational therapy.

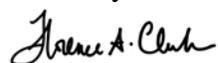
6. I am grateful for our admissions team, which throughout the years has been exemplary in its caring approach towards applicants. Those of you who are serving or have served on this team I will remember as being among the most kind, empathetic, hardworking, and thoughtful people I have ever met. It is largely because of you that each year we welcome into our programs the very best students, reflected not only by tangible metrics such as GRE scores, but also by their character, their creativity, their diversity, and their potential for leadership.
7. I am grateful, also, to those of you that opened my eyes to new ventures, sometimes even to ones that I initially resisted. Without your ability to advocate, to produce compelling proposals, and to be willing to start small on the path of big successes, the Chan Division would not have the special luster it has today. To this point, we would not have our widespread international outreach and successes, so many cutting-edge level I and level II internship placements and OTD residency sites, innovative autism initiatives, flourishing continuing education programs in sensory integration and Lifestyle Redesign, and branding that has now positioned the Division as a global presence.
8. I am grateful to the staff in the Division and in the School of Dentistry who quietly worked behind the scenes to make all of our efforts successful. They are the individuals who ensure that our web page remains up-to-date and captivating, that our work is disseminated nationally and internationally, that our grants are properly processed, that appointment letters are accurately prepared, that the parking boxes are there when we need them, and that the University Park administrators have a positive impression of how the Division functions with respect to financial, student affairs, technology, advancement, and facilities/space issues.
9. I am grateful, of course, to our faculty and staff therapists who are providing patient care. The growth of the Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice has been astounding and, throughout the Keck Medicine of USC community, our reputation for being “Beyond Exceptional” continues to soar. My appreciation for you is three-fold. First, thank you for demonstrating every day the value added in addressing patient needs when occupational therapy is included in care. Second, thank you for your dedication and hard work that make outstanding practice possible, and third, thank you for your willingness to be innovative and make clear the impact that occupational therapy has when it is grounded in occupational science. Because of you, the Chan Division is not only renowned for scholarship, education, and research (as it was when I joined the faculty), but is now recognized as a leader in the “real world” of patient care.
10. Lastly, I am grateful that we were able to orchestrate the smooth transition in Division leadership that has occurred over the past few years. Linda Fazio, Sarah Bream, Katie Jordan, Mary Lawlor, and Julie McLaughlin Gray were extremely instrumental in advising me on how to best ensure the future sustainability of the program. Not only were they a sounding board as

I deliberated on a plan, but they also were a rich source of fresh ideas. To this day, I am grateful that they remain in place to support Grace Baranek in her new role. And, of course, I cannot thank Grace enough for her willingness to serve as the new Associate Dean and Chair. It is a daunting position with so many challenges. However, as I have expressed to her many times, I could not have dreamed of a finer, more deserving, and more capable person to assume this leadership role.

Beyond this list, I would like to take this opportunity to give special thanks to those individuals who have worked closely beside me, without whom so many accomplishments would not have been realized. I want the Division Board of Councilors to know how much I appreciated their advice and support since its founding over 20 years ago. No longer with us, but forever in my heart, I want to thank Ann Neville-Jan for the many years she worked beside me with unwavering dedication. And, of course, I want to thank Jim Gordon, Associate Dean and Chair of the Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy, for being my partner in making sure that our divisions thrived. Many of the good ideas we adopted in navigating tough waters were those that Jim implemented first to quell the storms. I also want to thank Stephanie Mielke, who enabled me to get things done faster and with better quality than I could have ever imagined and for keeping me optimistic, Kiley Hanish for insisting I take care of myself and making it so much easier for me to do so, and Jeanine Blanchard for so being so steady, efficient, and loyal. Looking further back from my earliest years on the faculty to the present, I want to thank Janis Wise for taking the journey with me over the past 31 years and for being so trustworthy, conscientious, and capable. I especially want to thank Mike Carlson, my closest research associate, who remains my paragon of intellectual discipline and brilliance. Always on the highest moral ground, it is he who constantly reminded me that we needed to be resilient in the face of defeat, have faith, and dedicate ourselves to service in order to alleviate human suffering. And, finally, looking forward, I want to thank the Division's junior faculty who made the decision to accept an appointment at USC as I did so many years ago. My wish is that 41 years from now you will be as pleased as I am today with that choice.

Although I am retiring from my faculty appointment, my journey in the Trojan Family will continue. John and I will be living in Bishop, California, 15 miles from Betty Yerxa's home, surrounded by the High Sierra and the White Mountains, and the beauty nature has to offer. At night, I will bask in the light of the stars that had once guided my journey westward to California. So many years ago, I selected occupational therapy as my chosen profession and committed to serving those in need. These decisions ultimately brought me to USC, but most importantly, to an exceptional occupational science and occupational therapy community. Together, we have made far-reaching contributions, and I am proud that our efforts in the service of the public good have not, and will never, go unnoticed. On January 31, 2018, as I enter my new phase of life, I will rest assured that our tradition of excellence will continue on in your hands. My holiday wishes to all of you and your families, now and forever.

Sincerely,



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