**“What Words Will You Leave to Guide Them?”**

[Commencement Address](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D78JVnip5v0&feature=youtu.be&t=4300) & [Quoem](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Quoems/What_Are_Quoems.pdf) by [Lynn Conway](http://www.lynnconway.com/)

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Dec.16, 2018

[A picture containing person, man, indoor, music

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[President Schlissel](https://web.archive.org/web/20180430150800/https:/president.umich.edu/about/biography/), [Provost Philbert](https://web.archive.org/web/20181206111903/https:/www.provost.umich.edu/about/philbert/philbert.html), [Regents](https://web.archive.org/web/20180615162156/http:/regents.umich.edu/about/bios/) and Faculty Members . . . what a joy it is to join you [on this very special occasion](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D78JVnip5v0&feature=youtu.be&t=2782)!

I’m deeply moved by the honor you’ve given me . . . and thrilled, in turn, to [help you honor the many students](https://www.uvic.ca/convocation/past/2016-nov-09-am.php) receiving degrees here today.

And to all you amazing students: This is [YOUR DAY](https://www.mlive.com/expo/news/erry-2018/12/c06157204d6090/your-guide-to-university-of-mi.html) to celebrate, enjoy, and build treasured-memories with friends, families and loved ones . . .

But before the celebrations begin, let’s take a few minutes . . . and together visualize the seas you’ll soon be sailing. Especially since you’re embarking in an era of accelerating social change, where our evolving technologies connect and empower us in previously-unimagined ways.

In the “[Social Age](https://julianstodd.wordpress.com/2016/10/17/12-aspects-of-the-social-age/)” ahead, waves of [spontaneous shared-team-consciousnesses](http://www.stevenstrogatz.com/books/sync-the-emerging-science-of-spontaneous-order) will rapidly arise, evolve and interact. While contributing inside (and across mosaics of) such-teams, you’ll encounter increasingly-diverse, often conflicting, ways of being . . . giving ever-deeper meaning to the old maxim *“*[*Consistency is for Small Minds*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-Reliance)*”.*

By focusing on building your social-capital as learners, contributors, innovators, [leaders](https://julianstodd.wordpress.com/2015/04/22/six-tenets-of-social-leadership/) and [explorers](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/IEEE_Computer/The_Disappeared_-_Beyond_Winning_and_Losing.pdf) . . . instead of merely seeking money, possessions, formal positions and the trappings of power . . . you’ll expand your social-agility, and your life-long opportunities to team-up with cool people, go exploring, have exciting adventures, and leave tracks behind.

And by embracing . . . rather than fearing accelerating social change . . . you’ll experience a most-wondrous effect: “*You’ll live far further into* [*the unfolding techno-social-future*](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Talks/Columbia/2016_Magill_Lecture.pptx) *than you ever dared dream!”*

Now, that’s all well and good . . . But you ask: How can WE stay out on the fronts of those waves . . . especially when seeing others slip back over their crests . . . and fall into the backwaters behind?

From the perspective of 80 years of age . . . I realize that “my guides” have been sets of “special words” left by earlier pathfinders . . . people [whose life-stories](https://vimeo.com/53286941) have deeply touched me . . . and whose words resonated ever-more-clearly *as I aged*. I’d like to share some with you. For example:

[Winston Churchill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winston_Churchill) gives us a compass for our life-journeys when he says,

[*“The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you can see.”*](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/winston_churchill_136790)

And as [Steve Jobs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Jobs) observes,

[*“Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life.”*](https://quotefancy.com/quote/5692/Steve-Jobs-Your-time-is-limited-so-don-t-waste-it-living-someone-else-s-life)

[Grace Hopper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Hopper) reminds us, as we’re about to set sail, that

[*“A ship in port is safe, but that’s not what ships are built for.”*](http://crayond.com/blog/5-most-essential-traits-for-a-long-term-entrepreneur/)

And as ‘The Great One’ [Wayne Gretzky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayne_Gretzky) says,

[*“You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take!”*](https://wallstreetinsanity.com/you-miss-100-percent-of-the-shots-you-dont-take/)

Then too, as social philosopher [Eric Hoffer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Hoffer) reflects:

[*"In a world of change, the learners shall inherit the earth, while the learned shall find themselves perfectly suited for a world that no longer exists!"*](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/51399-in-a-world-of-change-the-learners-shall-inherit-the)

So, do be careful! Don’t just build ‘expertise’ to rest on as time passes. As [B. B. King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B.B._King) keenly observed: [*“The beautiful thing about learning is nobody can take it away from you!”*](https://www.azquotes.com/picture-quotes/quote-the-beautiful-thing-about-learning-is-nobody-can-take-it-away-from-you-b-b-king-15-86-26.jpg)

Thus oriented, pay heed to Intel’s Co-Founder [Bob Noyce](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Noyce)and:

[*“Go off and do something wonderful.”*](https://www.azquotes.com/author/20148-Robert_Noyce)

During dangerous voyages, be stoically realistic, yet passionately persistent, for as historian and activist [Bertha Calloway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertha_Calloway) reminds us:

[*“We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.”*](https://i.pinimg.com/originals/0c/84/45/0c8445220eedc42f59edd322357b10ee.jpg)

In extrema, as gonzo journalist [Hunter S. Thompson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunter_S._Thompson) coolly observes,

[*“When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro!*](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/hunter_s_thompson_100513)*”*

That can get pretty-wild, but you can come to love it. As [Kurt Vonnegut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Vonnegut)says,

*“*[*I want to stay as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the center.*](https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92965746)*”*

Sometimes, you can even step across the edge, my own perspective being:

*“*[*If you want to change the future, start living as if you're already there!*](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/TSsuccesses/TSsuccesses.html)*”*

In her poem “[A Summer’s Day](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16CL6bKVbJQ)”, [Mary Oliver](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Oliver) poses perhaps the ultimate question:

*“*[*Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?*](https://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/133.html)*”*. . .

During your explorations . . . *always mentor* *AND learn from* the young ones who come after you . . . eager to learn the ropes and join your crews . . . for your fates are bound-up-together, in the same ships, atop a deep ocean.

Finally, thinking further ahead to when YOU are 80, what words will YOU leave to guide the young, and their children and grandchildren . . . as they nervously gear-up to [surf the wondrous-waves of life’s unfolding experiences](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Talks/Columbia/2016_Magill_Lecture.pptx)? . . . What words?

Then I remember ‘*The Words’* . . . words left to us by the legendary French [aviator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Night_Flight_(novel)) and [writer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Little_Prince), [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoine_de_Saint-Exup%C3%A9ry):

[*“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”*](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/antoine_de_saintexupery_121261)

The chance to share these words with you, on YOUR very special day, means more to me than you can possibly imagine . . . and I wish you all good fortune in the adventures ahead!

***GO BLUE!***

***[A group of people standing in front of a crowd

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