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

[Honorary Degree Comments](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGx3h3mnIyI) & [Convocation Quoem](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Quoems/What_Are_Quoems.pdf) by [Lynn Conway](http://www.lynnconway.com)

University of Victoria, November 9, 2016

[Madam Chancellor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shelagh_Rogers), Leaders and Faculty of the [University of Victoria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Victoria), what a joy it is to join you, on this special ground, at this great university.

I am deeply moved [to receive this honor](https://web.archive.org/web/20161026182623/http%3A/www.uvic.ca/research/transchair/what-we-do/events/index.php), and in turn, [to help you honor and celebrate all the young people](https://www.uvic.ca/convocation/past/2016-nov-09-am.php) receiving degrees here this day.

And on nearing [Remembrance Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Remembrance_Day), I’m reminded how appropriate it would be to envision our futures through the words of earlier pathfinders.

[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.”*

Remembering too, as [Steve Jobs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Jobs) says,

*"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 that

*"A ship in port is safe, but that’s not what ships are built for."*

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

*"You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take!"*

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!"*

So, do be careful! Don’t just build ‘expertise’ and sit on it as time passes. Remember [B. B. King](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B.B._King)’s cool comment: *“The beautiful thing about learning is nobody can take it away from you!”* Bottom Line:

Follow [Bob Noyce’s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Noyce) advice, and *"Go off and do something wonderful."*

During dangerous passages along the way, be realistic, yet passionately persistent. 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.*

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!*](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Talks/UVIC/Inside_Story_Talk.pptx)*"*

That can be wild but you can get to love it, as [Kurt Vonnegut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Vonnegut)reveals when saying, *“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.”*

And, as rock climber [Lynn Hill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lynn_Hill) observes, *“When the pursuit of natural harmony is a shared journey, great heights can be attained,”*

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!"*

Poet [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?"*

During your journey, reflect now and then on the young people who follow you, streaming through universities of the world … eager to learn the ropes, navigate the seas of life, and join you in exploring the future.

Think ahead: what words will YOU leave to guide those young ones, and their children and children’s children? – to help them also go boldly adventure-surfing, high-atop ever more [wondrous waves of human exploration, innovation and experience](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Talks/UVIC/Techno_Social_Talk.pptx)? . . . What words?

Then I remember the words left by legendary French aviator and writer, [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.”*

Thank you again [for this honor today](http://www.uvic.ca/research/transchair/assets/images/misc/conway_event_poster.jpg). It means more to me than you can possibly imagine. I wish you all good fortune in the adventures ahead!