

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

Honorary Degree Comments & Convocation Quoem by Lynn Conway

University of Victoria, November 9, 2016

Madam Chancellor, Leaders and Faculty of the 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, and in turn, to help you honor and celebrate all the young people receiving degrees here this day.

And on nearing Remembrance Day, I’m reminded how appropriate it would be to envision our futures through the words of earlier pathfinders.

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 says, *“Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life.”*

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 says *“You miss 100 percent of the shots you don’t take!”*

As social philosopher 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’s cool comment: *“The beautiful thing about learning is nobody can take it away from you!”* Bottom Line:

Follow Bob Noyce’s 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 reminds us:

*“We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust the sails.”*

[http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Talks/UVIC/What\\_Words\\_Will\\_You\\_Leave\\_to\\_Guide\\_Them.pdf](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Talks/UVIC/What_Words_Will_You_Leave_to_Guide_Them.pdf)

[http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Quoems/What\\_Are\\_Quoems.pdf](http://ai.eecs.umich.edu/people/conway/Memoirs/Quoems/What_Are_Quoems.pdf)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGx3h3mnlyI> (VIDEO)

In extrema, as gonzo journalist [Hunter S. Thompson](#) coolly observes, *"When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro!"*

That can be wild but you can get to love it, as [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](#) 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](#) 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](#)? . . . What words?

Then I remember the words left by legendary French aviator and writer, [Antoine de Saint-Exupéry](#):

*"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](#). It means more to me than you can possibly imagine. I wish you all good fortune in the adventures ahead!