

GARY CRISTALL - UBC SPEECH- Honorary Degree

Thank you... to the folks who suggested me. I'm honoured. I assume that now I'm a doctor I can bill appropriately. The doctor of laws has confused some of those who know me well- they assume it represents the ones I doctored, twisted, bent and broke.

I also want to thank the folks on my guest list, and others I worked with, without whom I could never have done the things I am being honoured for. It is never individuals who are solely responsible for their deeds- good or ill- it is groups of people defined one way or another. So... I'll accept this honour on behalf of many and not me alone.

That said, I did some stuff. I led a group or two of folks and I'm proud of it, as inadequate as it is and was. I did the things I did through mule headed stubbornness and no respect for the rules of the game as they were defined. Many of the things we cherish from votes for women to full citizenship for Asians to justice of a sort for victims of the residential school system to saving the trees, air and fish here and there- have only been accomplished by challenging the conventional wisdom of the day. I did that in my small way in my small part of the world in the arts. I recommend that you never accept the status quo anywhere and always challenge the "way it is supposed to be."

One of the great things about working in the arts is that you get to meet many creative individuals and hear and see the work of others. I learned very young that I could absorb ideas better through songs than through speech and I apologize for being unable to sing you this brief presentation. I will, however, recite a few chunks of songs and a piece or two of advice given to me by a few great artists. May they serve you well as they served me.

First- The great German poet Berthold Brecht- from Mahagonny where a man is about to be executed for the crime of having no money-

"Let no one restrain you
Your life's no measly stuff.
So gulp it by the gallon
When death extends its talon
You won't have drunk enough

- Next- Dave Van Ronk- epic blues singer, on the function of art- "I can tell a lie but I can't sing one."
- U. Utah Phillips- The Golden Voice of the Great Southwest- "Never give the audience what they want. Give them what you think they need."
- Mary Kar/Rodney Crowell- Never eat at a place called Mom's. Don't play cards with a guy named 'Doc.' If you're running around the wrong part of town, stuff your big bills in your socks. ..And if you find someone who loves you, give it a whirl.
- Greg Brown- "You young ones, it's up to you. Fight the fight and I hope you do. I see in your eyes that you know how. It's your town now.

2015 is an anniversary year connected to war- the end of WWII and the anniversary of Gallipoli and other battles of WWI. An anniversary that will remain obscure is the 100th anniversary of the Zimmerwald Manifesto- the declaration of a handful of anti-war socialists. In it they wrote- "All civilization, created by the labor of many generations, is doomed to destruction. The most savage barbarism is today celebrating its triumph over all that hitherto constituted the pride of humanity."

One hundred years later these words still ring true. Poverty, injustice, refugees drowning by the thousand while an indifferent world looks on, climate change threatening human and animal life as we know it.

That is the legacy we have left you. Sorry. Now, as Greg Brown says, it's up to you.

Everything I did that this degree is based on was to fight against these things and they still exist. In that sense I am unworthy. But I did what I could. Now I'll give you one last quote- again from Brecht-

CHANGE THE WORLD- IT NEEDS IT.