# Convocation 2016 - Honorary Doctor of Letters Linwood Barclay

## 12 minutes 07 seconds in length

[Trent University logo]

[Applause]

>> LINWOOD BARCLAY: I tell you who'd of thought this would happen

[Laughter]

Now I have to just hold on to the speech so it doesn't blow away. Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, members of the graduating class, faculty, family, and friends. Well thank you so much. What a wonderful honour. It's such a pleasure to be here for this and I think I struggled more over this speech than some of the novels I've done.

So I was so anxious about what to say so what I did was I have speech number one and then we've got speech number two and I thought we'd let you folks decide which one I'll do and just you know they're both the same length

[Laughter]

So it's a bit like Let's make a Deal so if we have a vote for sort of who wants to hear speech number one we'll just sort of see nobody

[Laughter]

I could have – like I couldn't have predicted that so

[Laughter]

So speech number one not too many. Speech number two would like to hear – alright

[Applause]

So we have an over overwhelming response for speech number two, so what I'm going to do is give speech number one

[Laughter]

And this is going to be your first lesson in going out into the world that people may say they want your opinion but they really don't.

[Laughter]

I was I was in Ottawa couple weeks ago for a literary festival and I ran into someone that I went to school with here. She had a room over in Lady Eaton and it came up that I was getting this Honorary Doctor of Letters and I'd said to her you know if I had known they were just going to give this to me later I wouldn't of had to work so hard while I was here and she said yeah you worked so hard.

[Laughter]

But its a – I don't know that's how I remember it. Where's Gordon? I remember working hard, I think. But evidently I've reached a point in life where I'm asked to give a convocation address because the folks that run this place I think by now that he must know something beyond what was in the Coles Notes. People like your President here who's has a – I may say – has a kayak in his office down at the back here by the river and I'd be interested to see what happens if they had given him the office on the top floor how that would have gone. Probably a hang glider I suppose but – and of course we also have your Chancellor, Don Tapscott, who is easily the most brilliant guy on the planet about what the future holds, about what sort of technological revolutions are coming and yet if you ask him to come to your house to fix your printer he acts like he doesn't know you. You know?

[Laughter]

But I have to be honest and tell you know I was in this spot I guess 39 years ago and I have no idea who gave the convocation speech when I was graduating and so I you know is so I would you know I will I will forgive all of you if some 39 years from now you haven't got a clue who spoke to you today but they probably whoever it was and who ever was spoke to me probably said something like you know seize the day, go change the world, go to all these wonderful things you know the kind of things they always say in convocation speeches, and I was probably thinking like you know –. I mean seriously? You want me to go out and change the world? I just need a job.

[Laughter]

I'm paying off my loans you know like give me a break. So I can't claim to have changed the world. If anything the world is probably worse off than it was 39 years ago. We've got climate change, we've got a Mideast in chaos, we've got threats of terrorism, we have a kind of I think these days a celebration of ignorance, and we've got worst of all we've got Donald Trump.

[Laughter]

Please don't hold me accountable for these things especially the last one.

The truth is I haven't changed the world, but I think that maybe the world has changed me. Sitting where you are right now you know back in 1977 I had it all figured out. I knew exactly what I was going to do when I left here. If my life were a book I had the plot all worked out. I was going to be a best-selling novelist right out of the gate. I'd write a brilliant crime novel every year just like my hero the writer Ross Macdonald. That was the plan. And you know I can't – I can't even get these pages apart because of the wind. So I lived only – I lived only a 50 clicks from here in Bobcaygeon and I'm basically was running my mother's cottage resort and trailer park since my father had passed away when I was 16. In fact that was why I had chosen Trent because it was close to home and I could still run the family business while I attended university. So the post Trent plan was I'd run the resort in the summer and I'd write the bestselling novels in the winter. It was a great plan. I had a head start to because I had already written a couple of novels you know in my late teens and into my twenties and so and I had one of my professors God bless him, Lee Beach, who taught an English and Psychology course allowed me to write a novel for his class instead of an essay. I would write fifty thousand words if it got me out of doing footnotes and a bibliography.

[Laughter]

I could never figure where the dots and the semicolons went and all that stuff. It was just beyond me and so I figured while I was in good shape to kick-start my career. But then came the plot twist. My books were terrible.

[Laughter]

Now this for those of you who have read a lot of things like perhaps Fifty Shades you might not think that's a drawback but

[Laughter]

But for me it was and you think you think that email and texting are fast you know. Like I could go to the post office and mail off my manuscript to some New York publisher and by the time I got home the rejection slip was there.

[Laughter]

So in the words of my GPS I had to recalculate. The world as it turned out had other things in mind for me. It hadn't really occurred to me to get a job at a newspaper but I thought well I like to write and you get to write every day at a paper. So I got a reporting job down the road at the Peterborough Examiner. I was hired for a hundred and twenty dollars a week, which actually back then was not a lot of money.

[Laughter]

And my first assignment was to interview hospital candy stripers you know the young girls who help out and volunteer around the hospital. It was not really the stuff of Raymond Chandler. But I didn't know then how lucky I was that my plans had been derailed.

I spent two years at the Examiner, five if you count over time and it was a great couple of years. I covered Cavan Township council, and cattle shows, and fraud trials, and Ontario Municipal Board hearings and if those sound boring you are correct. And bank robberies, and plane crashes, you name it. A few times I actually got to go into Warkworth Penitentiary to cover events and I was always grateful that they let me leave. So those books that I had written at that early age they were rejected for a reason. I didn't know anything. I had nothing to write about. I had nothing to say. I hadn't been out in the world. I hadn't experienced things. I needed to get out into that world and Peterborough County was a pretty big one for me at that time. By 1981 I ended up at the Toronto Star but again things there didn't even go according to plan. I had applied for a reporting job but they didn't need reporters at the time, they needed editors – copy editors. Did I have copy-editing experience they asked and I said sure? Here's a tip you know never lie on your resume. Never claimed to be something that you aren't on social media. But in a conversation a simple ah sure will probably not haunt you forever.

I got the job and fortunately it turned out that I could edit and before long I moved up the ranks. I was Assistant City Editor at the Toronto Star. I was News Editor, Chief Copy Editor, the Life Section Editor and then 12 years after joining the paper, 16 years after abandoning that dream of being an author an unexpected opportunity came along to write three columns a week. Okay it wasn't crime writing but it was real writing, writing about what I wanted to write about. It was a job I did and I loved and I did it for 14 years and about ten years into that job I thought maybe it's time. Maybe it's time to write a book, the kind of a book that I wanted to write when I was your age. So I did it and with the aid of a literary agent I sent it off to a publisher. This time it didn't come back. So after 30 years of working in newspapers I was finally doing what I wanted to do when I was 20. Now that might sound really discouraging. I mean you're thinking I’ve got to wait 30 years to do what I really want to do and that's really not my intention.

You know you think – what worked out for me was you know I'm okay with the way things turned out. I'm not someone who kind of believes in fate or that you know things happen for a reason. I'm not that kind of a guy but I must confess that I agree with the cliché that often it's not about the destination it's about the journey. So have that goal but don't be so focused on it that you aren't willing to deviate from the path you had in mind. There are great opportunities out there waiting for you that you can't even imagine and doing nothing while you wait for just the right thing to come along is worse than standing still. It's moving backwards.

My wife, Neetha, who Gordon referenced here who I met here and married not long after graduating. I left Trent with a degree and the love of my life, which is not something Trent mentions a lot in its promotional material but I think it's something they might want to take a look at, you know? But anyway Neetha is really very wise and she sees a lot of value in having a bad job because a bad job shows you what you don't want to do for the rest of your life. Back when I was running that cottage resort and fishing camp, one of my daily duties was to bury fish guts. All that stuff that was left over after our guests clean their catch. They go out fishing and they there was this table down by the lake and they cut the fish and dump the stuff they didn't want into a pail and it was my job to haul it into the woods and bury it. And the day that the bottom of the pail broke haunts me to this day.

[Laughter]

But you don't have to bury fish guts for all that long before you come to the conclusion that it offers a limited career path.

[Laughter]

So I left here with the plan and it didn't happen at least not for a very long time and I can't think of anything I would go back and change. So be open. You have plenty of time for detours and wrong turns. Go out there. You have no idea what's coming and that's what's so fantastic. Let the world happened to you. Thank you.

[Applause]

[Trent University logo]