

David Yip – Honorary Degree Acceptance Speech

Pro-Chancellor - thank you and all the members of the staff at the University who have made this award of an Honorary Doctorate to me, possible.

Thanks also to the people who organised today's ceremony and made all the arrangements for looking after my wife and myself.

I would also like to thank Matthew Lloyd, the associate director of E15 for the kind and flattering Citation. It feels a bit like hearing your own obituary but without the sadness.

This award is truly one of the highlights of my life.

I have always said that I fell into acting as though in a dream. Still today, I find it amazing that I actually get paid for doing it.

Between 1969 – 1971 I was working as an ASM at The Everyman Theatre in Liverpool. The late Alan Dossier was the artistic director and the work of the Everyman Theatre had gained fame and praise throughout the UK and Europe at this time. Its reputation for bold and daring new writing and the way it seemed to find young actors and turn them into major players. A lot of those actors trained at E15.

Roger Sloman and a few other actors in the company at that time encouraged me to apply to go to E15. I didn't really know what a drama school was but I applied and was offered a one-day audition workshop in Loughton.

This meant I had to take two days off work, unpaid and go to London. I had a wonderful time throughout the day in the workshop. I was amazed at the different kinds of people who were auditioning.

I won a place at E15 and started in September 1971. I left Liverpool to move to London with all my worldly possessions in a tea chest, including Roger

Sloman's fencing foil and mask, which he'd sold to me. Oh! And a brand new leotard!

E15 in the early seventies was challenging and inspiring but the conditions were very basic to say the least. But it prepared us well for the profession we desired to enter.

My wife and I were invited to the celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of E15 at the campus in Loughton. We watched a brilliant production of 'Oh What A Lovely War.' which took place across the whole of the campus. I was so proud of everyone involved with the production.

We also had a tour of all the incredible facilities that the school now has for its students. Since becoming part of the University of Essex, the facilities are state of the art. The tutoring staff, work in the industry and bring that knowledge and experience back to their students.

Gone is the long wooden port-a-cabin in which in my student days, we did dancing, fencing and rehearsals. In the summer it was like an oven and in the winter you had to break the ice to get in! Some say the good old days? You don't know what you're missing.

This is my forty-ninth year as a professional actor. All through my career, I have been driven by the desire to have the British Chinese Community heard. Using their own voices. Today this has been broadened out to all British East Asians.

Betty Brookes and Loy Yip met during the early years of the war in Liverpool. He was a Chinese seaman on the Blue Funnel Line who had made his way from South China via Hong Kong to arrive in Liverpool in 1942. She worked in a wartime factory and they met at the tea dances held in The Rialto in Toxteth.

They married in 1946, Mum's family having disowned her. But they went on to have eight children: seven boys and one girl. The social climate was not kind or considerate to mixed-race couples at this time in our history.

In fact, when the Official Archives for this period were opened they found government documents, which stated that “.. Any woman who would marry or cohabit with a Chinese man must be of the prostitute class”.

An apology from government officials for that crass statement was finally made over ten years ago.

You don't make a career choice to become a role model. But all through my career, I was determined that whenever I did play a Chinese or East Asian character that it would not be in any way a stereotype. Following on from the success of *The Chinese Detective* on the BBC.

I am heartened by the increasing numbers of writers, directors, producers and actors that have emerged, year by year, from the British East Asian Communities.

Our long-lost and hidden family stories are starting to be told. Opening up these worlds with our own voices and talents. My own contribution to this ground swell came twelve years after I had become a Nichiren Buddhist - a lay organisation, of humanist Buddhism.

As a Buddhist I had to come to terms with taking full responsibility for my life and everything that happened to me. Valuing your father and mother is a key element of our Buddhist practice. So I had to heal and change the disrespect that I had allowed to grow within me, about my father, who had died in 1994.

Gold Mountain was the multi-media theatre piece that I wrote and acted in. It was a co-production with The Unity Theatre in Liverpool and Les Deux Mondes Theatre in Montreal.

It was based on my relationship with my father. After two years of workshopping the piece on both sides of the Atlantic, Gold Mountain had its premiere at The Unity in Liverpool in 2010.

It was no longer about my dad and me, although we are in there somewhere but it is about larger themes of: History and Family. Understanding, not condemning.

Trying to see why events happen in the way they do? Why people react the way they do? More importantly, that there is always the possibility of redemption. In Buddhist terms - a human revolution.

As a seventy one year old man, a grandfather,

I look to the young for hope and inspiration. The future is yours and your children's and their children onwards. So, looking at this sea of young, beautiful, eager, clever young people in front of me, I am touched by the potential that you all have.

Today another chapter closes in your young lives, another peak climbed. But when you wake up tomorrow - not too hungover! The next chapter awaits you, a clean sheet for you to inscribe your dreams and desires upon. Another peak to tempt you to challenge yourself again and to dare.

Congratulations to each one of you as you are about to receive your hard-earned degrees.

Thank you all for allowing me to share in your Graduation Ceremony this morning. I wish each of you true happiness on your journeys through your lives. Be kind to yourself and others.

I would like to finish by quoting a great Buddhist teacher and philosopher - Daisaku Ikeda.

“A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, can even enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.” Nan-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.