

First I would like to thank my cohort of 2010 3M National Teaching Fellows for allowing me the opportunity on their behalf to extend our thanks and our gratitude for this great honour. We would like to thank 3M Canada (Brian Young, its president and Greg Snow, manager of communications), our media sponsor, MacLeans magazine (and Mary Dwyer, its senior editor), Suzanne Tyson and Leslie Goldie (the 3M Council sponsors), Arshad Ahmad (the program coordinator of the 3M selection committee), Sylvia Avery, and the members of STLHE. Thank you for creating and supporting this award, and for keeping it – and teaching -- in the spotlight throughout Canada and the world. The promotion of teaching is something we all do together, and I am proud to acknowledge these people and organizations who join us in valuing teaching excellence. Let us toast our sponsors.

I think I can speak for the cohort when I say that receiving the 3M National Teaching Fellowship is a landmark in our lives – not just our careers, but our lives. It validates and affirms what we do and what we value, and we are each humbled by and grateful for this recognition and vote of confidence. Certainly in our lives in the university we need this affirmation that what we do is important and that teaching is vital to creating the kind of society – and the kind of people – with whom we would like to share this world. Our love for teaching and our dedication to it is what brings all of us together at this conference, but what we do extends wider to teachers of all kinds throughout the world who are also dedicated to help people become who they are. Mostly we teach with positive reinforcement and positive stories, but we also teach reality, and sometimes reality, however painful, is also a good teacher. And it reminds me of a story I have told my own students about living and learning in a fully engaged way, and the tragedy of missed opportunities. I would like to share it with you as an object lesson.

It was one of those first-year classes when you need them to talk and you need them to get up on the board and work out problems, perform, make mistakes, be real. None of them wanted to do it. I don't know if it was the newness of university, or that they didn't know their peers that well, or that they just felt exposed that made them so reticent to speak up, to get involved. I knew that many of them wanted to be music teachers, so I also knew that they had to get over that shyness pretty darn quickly if they were going to prepare themselves to be someone essentially like me. That's easy for me to say, I guess, because as most people notice I just won't shut up. We talked about this one day, and they explained they just didn't feel comfortable speaking in front of other people. I thought they should understand what happens if you don't

learn to express yourself, if you don't put yourself out there; so I told them the story of a very talented woman I'd known, who I'd gone to school with and worked with, to illustrate what would happen to them if they didn't overcome their reticence. "We were in the same program," I began, "Music History at U of T. We all had to do presentations, like you do - 15 minute presentations or 30 minute presentations. And of course conversation, class discussion was expected, too. This woman (really a girl then) was doubtless the quietest person in class. Didn't matter what the subject, didn't matter what the context. She was so painfully shy that when eventually forced to say something occasionally she would blush profusely and had difficulty making eye contact with everyone; it was painful to behold. I don't know that it affected her marks, but there was no question that she had a very difficult time communicating with other people, just talking. She must have excelled in some work because she ended up graduating at the top of our class, but it wasn't on street smarts. It annoyed everyone else, because they always put themselves out there. I often wondered, "What will happen to this woman? What happens to people like that? Do they just work from home and end up watching the shopping channel? One of the few things you can do with a history degree is teach, and she wouldn't be able to do that, that's for sure - even when she does a presentation its written out, she can't extemporize. And what else do you do with a degree in classical music history?" As fate would have it, we worked together in a classical radio station, one of the few things you could do with our degree. We were now in the working world, and yet there were the same problems - in a staff meeting, in a department meeting, completely scared to say anything, to address a problem, to communicate to other people. It was still annoying, especially for those who are used to pulling their own weight, who put themselves on the line, who contribute. Once it was clear that the radio business in classical music was on the downswing, what other options could there be? No chance of promotion, likely, no chance of ever supervising people, because that itself demands that you confront, that you challenge, that you direct - hell, that you inspire when you get to a certain level. And again, there weren't that many career options for someone like her. What would a job interview be like? How did she manage to get *this* job anyway? And I wondered, "There but for the grace of God go I ...what is ever going to become of that poor woman?" That's kind of when we parted ways; I went to grad school, and she..." And so I left it there, with that warning ringing in their ears, that reminder that just studying hard was never going to be enough. And after a few moments, someone finally asked what they were all wondering, "So what *did* happen to her?" I said,

“That woman stands before you today.” And then there was some more silence. And then, after the silence, someone said “thank you.”

That journey from a place of uncertainty and fear to a place at the front of a classroom seems a very long journey indeed. The next journey, from the front of that classroom to the podium of this evening seems an even longer one – one that anyone who heard the beginning of this story would find implausible – perhaps even impossible, one that would have been, to that poor woman, utterly unimaginable. But that’s the power of teaching. Through my education, through my mentors, through my teachers, I found that voice and that certainty, that drive and that passion, that has brought me to this place. That same passion and drive is articulated in the lives and work of the 2010 cohort for whom I am privileged to speak tonight; and it burns in every other 3M Fellow across this country. We want to share that passion with our students, we want to show them what they can do and who they can be - to let them see that the light at the end of the tunnel is only meaningful when there is a tunnel in the first place. What we all do as teachers is extraordinary and important, more important than we will ever know. As we go out into the world after this night, let us always be mindful, with gratitude, of our students – their journeys, their struggles, their victories, *their* stories – which are ours as well. Let us prepare them so that when it is their time, they also say “yes” – that they also go out to teach.

Thank you.