

**Jeff Chiba Stearns Acceptance Speech for the 2010 Emily Award
Graduation Ceremonies, Chan Centre
Saturday, May 1, 2010**

When I first received the email that Dr. Ron Burnett wanted to talk to me, I thought, well it has been nine years since I graduated, I guess it's about time they're finally hitting me up for a donation! Although, much to my surprise, I found out that I was being honored with the Emily Award and honestly this couldn't have come at a better time in my career as an independent animation filmmaker. So, thank you Emily Carr University for this recognition.

I was shocked to hear I was the recipient of this year's Emily Award, considering that two years ago I was rejected after applying to the Emily Carr Masters Program and ten years before that, I was rejected from the Emily Carr animation program. But as things would have it, I was placed on a waiting list. Luckily, the stars aligned and in 1998, someone gave up their seat in the animation program - which led me to giving up a full fine arts scholarship from my hometown university. All to chase a dream that started when I was eight, after watching the Academy Awards with my parents and discovering you could win an Oscar for making cartoons. A dream I still aspire to, to this day.

And even though I didn't get my Emily Carr masters degree, as things would have it, I used that fuel of rejection and jealousy to self reflect and in turn would inspire me to create what would be my most successful and award-winning film to date, *Yellow Sticky Notes*, which, ultimately led to me to being awarded this honor today...weird...I know!

The great Looney Toons director, Chuck Jones once had his art-school professor say to his class "All of you have one hundred thousand bad drawings in you. The sooner you get rid of them, the better it will be for everyone." Going through the Emily Carr animation program helped me get out a few of those really bad drawings, and although it took me a few years after graduation to realize it, developing a personal style would be more important to me than being able to draw well enough to get a job at Disney, much to my parents disappointment. And that personal style has led to where I am today - at a point where as one of my greatest inspirations, the great mythologist, Joseph Campbell, would say, I have found my bliss!

Although early on, following my bliss led me to think being a pro snowboarder was a good career path...until I broke my drawing wrist, and being in a punk band would lead me to stardom...until the band broke up. It has been a strange and crazy road chasing my bliss of becoming a full time filmmaker. Getting to this point, took a lot of tough decisions. A year after graduation, 911 would destroy the animation industry in Vancouver and with no jobs in sight, I swallowed my pride and moved back in with my parents in Kelowna. From there I became a high school art teacher in hopes of a steady paycheck - only to realize that my parents were proud of me no matter what I did and being an art teacher is a noble career - and is one of the main reasons many of you are sitting in that seat you are now. And now even though I don't teach high school anymore and I moved out of mom and dad's, I rarely ever turn down instructing a workshop, giving a guest lecture, or offering advice to future animators. Because as Emily Carr graduates we owe it to others to inspire and pass our knowledge to future creators who would give anything to one day be sitting where you are right now.

Through some perseverance, I eventually started my own production company, I just finished my first feature film and after traveling to multiple film festivals around the world for the last five years, learned that no matter what part of the world you are from everyone values honesty, no body likes egos, and integrity is a mighty asset. These days I often find myself working 17 hour days 7 days a week but I work for myself and I am finally able to make a living solely through creating. Although, my most important achievement is that I have held true to the filmmaking philosophy I developed at Emily Carr; to produce content for children and adults that combine different philosophical and social elements together to create humorous, inspiring and entertaining stories. Even with commercial projects, I never stray from this philosophy because integrity is what brings meaning to my art and my life.

When I look back at my experience attending Emily Carr, I realized it wasn't just about learning a craft, it was about maturing my art making and most importantly growing up. Emily Carr for me wasn't about putting excrement into a Ziploc bag, sculpting genitals out of clay, or leaving meat sculptures to rot in the concourse gallery. Although after watching so many students do that year after year, I also realized that going to art school wasn't just about achieving a higher form of education, it was about making mistakes, working through clichés, taking risks and failing, and cringing nine years later when I watch my grad film. Emily Carr was a place where I had a chance to get out some of my bad art and take pride in some of the good art I did create, and that, has made all the difference. Now that you've graduated, you are capable of making only good art. Although, knowing what is good art will take you a lifetime to discover. No matter what route you take after graduation, I wish you all the greatest success following your own bliss no matter what that may be! Thank you.