

Vice Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa, David Edward Fanning.

It's interesting that somebody who is so obsessed by stories only gained access to some of the stories of his own history in another country. In the mid 1960s, David Fanning, as an American Field Scholar, discovered that his American classmates were reading Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*. When they asked him to explain it to them he confessed: I haven't read it. It was considered "dangerous, too full of ideas and too subversive". At that time, remember, television was also too subversive for South Africa. It was **then**, when he found himself having to get inside the story of apartheid, to understand, to unpack the motivations, that he says that he became a journalist.

David Fanning is the executive producer of FRONTLINE, US television's longest running investigative documentary series, and has been for the last 30 years. He's produced more than 530 films and related projects and the glass cabinets at the FRONTLINE offices are cluttered with awards: 25 du-Pont Columbia awards, 15 Peabodys, five George Polk awards, 25 Emmys and a Pulitzer. The recognition extends to the Goldsmith Career Award for Excellence in Journalism, the Columbia Journalism award (the highest honour of Columbia's school of journalism) and the very significant National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Life-Time Achievement Emmy Award.

His story begins in Port Elizabeth, where he was born and schooled, and moves to Cape Town and UCT, where Fanning, who was actually studying a BA in Fine Art, became an "accidental journalist" through editing *Varsity*, UCT's student newspaper. The artist part of him liked "the physical making^[1]": the printing, the linotype, the ink and the smells. But it was the natural raconteur in him that became drawn into the story-telling possibilities of journalism.

He made a few documentary films in South Africa, including Martin West's *Amabandla AmaAfrika*, then set off for some world traveling and found himself in California, where he talked his way into a job at a little public TV station. He was given a camera and a fridge full of film and started finding stories but, more importantly, figuring out ways to tell them. FRONTLINE the TV series began as a few ideas scribbled on the back of a napkin ^[2]. The essence was to combine great journalism and great filmmaking; to produce not only literate television, but also television that people wanted to watch.

The clutter of awards in the cabinet is testimony to the fact that, for the last 30 years, whilst the production of television documentaries has been waning, FRONTLINE has excelled at making complex stories that take time to tell ^[3].

20 years ago, Fanning took a very bold step. He decided to publish the entirety of FRONTLINE's interviews and primary material online. This was not only a level of transparency that was unheard of at the time, but it was also a wise anticipation of the digital future of journalism. It was also a turning point – seeing the online world as the world's library – a far cry from having to move continents to discover a novel of his homeland.

Making a documentary is not like making a dramatic film, where the script contains the story. In a documentary, the narrative must be distilled from (at times) too much information; from found objects: from fragments of film, interviews, stock footage and accidental content. Week in and week out, Fanning has been crafting material in a fresh and surprising way. The secret of his success is that its not just about finding the story, its about shaping the acts of the narrative, the arc of inquiry, the moment of revelation, it's more than just telling a good story, it's about knowing **how** it needs to be told.

Vice Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Literature, honoris causa, David Edward Fanning.

1. Fanning, D., *Personal Communication*, 2 December 2014
2. Centre, M.L.R. (2007). "David Fanning: William J. Brennan, Jr. Defense of Freedom Award Recipient, 2007." *New York Magazine*. Retrieved 29 November 2014, from <http://www.medialaw.org/about-mlrc/awards/56-david-fanning>.
3. Jensen, E. (2013). "David Fanning & Frontline: Serious Journalism, Exceptional Filmmaking, And A Show Shaped To Its Times." Retrieved 8 December 2014, from <http://www.medialaw.org/about-mlrc/awards/56-david-fanning>.