

# Tim Minchin: Address to University of Western Australia

The British-born Australian comedian, actor and musician [Tim Minchin](#) speaks to graduates after being awarded an honorary doctorate at the University of Western Australia.

The transcript can be downloaded from his website, [timminchin.com](http://timminchin.com). The video is [on the University of Western Australia's Youtube channel](#).

Tim Minchin:

In darker days, I did a corporate gig at a conference for this big company who made and sold accounting software. In a bid, I presume, to inspire their salespeople to greater heights, they'd forked out 12 grand for an Inspirational Speaker who was this extreme sports dude who had had a couple of his limbs frozen off when he got stuck on a ledge on some mountain. It was weird. Software salespeople need to hear from someone who has had a long, successful and happy career in software sales, not from an overly-optimistic, ex-mountaineer. Some poor guy who arrived in the morning hoping to learn about better sales technique ended up going home worried about the blood flow to his extremities. It's not inspirational – it's confusing.

And if the mountain was meant to be a symbol of life's challenges, and the loss of limbs a metaphor for sacrifice, the software guy's not going to get it, is he? Cos he didn't do an arts degree, did he? He should have. Arts degrees are awesome. And they help you find meaning where there is none. And let me assure you, there is none. Don't go looking for it. Searching for meaning is like searching for a rhyme scheme in

a cookbook: you won't find it and you'll bugger up your soufflé.

Point being, I'm not an inspirational speaker. I've never lost a limb on a mountainside, metaphorically or otherwise. And I'm certainly not here to give career advice, cos... well I've never really had what most would call a proper job.

However, I have had large groups of people listening to what I say for quite a few years now, and it's given me an inflated sense of self-importance. So I will now – at the ripe old age of 38 – bestow upon you nine life lessons. To echo, of course, the 9 lessons and carols of the traditional Christmas service. Which are also a bit obscure.

You might find some of this stuff inspiring, you will find some of it boring, and you will definitely forget all of it within a week. And be warned, there will be lots of hokey similes, and obscure aphorisms which start well but end up not making sense.

So listen up, or you'll get lost, like a blind man clapping in a pharmacy trying to echo-locate the contact lens fluid.

Here we go:

#### 1. You Don't Have To Have A Dream.

Americans on talent shows always talk about their dreams. Fine, if you have something that you've always dreamed of, like, in your heart, go for it! After all, it's something to do with your time... chasing a dream. And if it's a big enough one, it'll take you most of your life to achieve, so by the time you get to it and are staring into the abyss of the meaninglessness of your achievement, you'll be almost dead so it won't matter.

I never really had one of these big dreams. And so I advocate passionate dedication to the pursuit of short-term goals. Be micro-ambitious. Put your head down and work with pride on

whatever is in front of you... you never know where you might end up. Just be aware that the next worthy pursuit will probably appear in your periphery. Which is why you should be careful of long-term dreams. If you focus too far in front of you, you won't see the shiny thing out the corner of your eye. Right? Good. Advice. Metaphor. Look at me go.

## 2. Don't Seek Happiness

Happiness is like an orgasm: if you think about it too much, it goes away. Keep busy and aim to make someone else happy, and you might find you get some as a side effect. We didn't evolve to be constantly content. Contented Australopithecus Afarensis got eaten before passing on their genes.

## 3. Remember, It's All Luck

You are lucky to be here. You were incalculably lucky to be born, and incredibly lucky to be brought up by a nice family that helped you get educated and encouraged you to go to Uni. Or if you were born into a horrible family, that's unlucky and you have my sympathy... but you were still lucky: lucky that you happened to be made of the sort of DNA that made the sort of brain which – when placed in a horrible childhood environment – would make decisions that meant you ended up, eventually, graduating Uni. Well done you, for dragging yourself up by the shoelaces, but you were lucky. You didn't create the bit of you that dragged you up. They're not even your shoelaces.

I suppose I worked hard to achieve whatever dubious achievements I've achieved ... but I didn't make the bit of me that works hard, any more than I made the bit of me that ate too many burgers instead of going to lectures while I was here at UWA.

Understanding that you can't truly take credit for your successes, nor truly blame others for their failures will humble you and make you more compassionate.

Empathy is intuitive, but is also something you can work on,

intellectually.

#### 4. Exercise

I'm sorry, you pasty, pale, smoking philosophy grads, arching your eyebrows into a Cartesian curve as you watch the Human Movement mob winding their way through the miniature traffic cones of their existence: you are wrong and they are right. Well, you're half right – you think, therefore you are... but also: you jog, therefore you sleep well, therefore you're not overwhelmed by existential angst. You can't be Kant, and you don't want to be.

Play a sport, do yoga, pump iron, run... whatever... but take care of your body. You're going to need it. Most of you mob are going to live to nearly a hundred, and even the poorest of you will achieve a level of wealth that most humans throughout history could not have dreamed of. And this long, luxurious life ahead of you is going to make you depressed!

But don't despair! There is an inverse correlation between depression and exercise. Do it. Run, my beautiful intellectuals, run. And don't smoke. Natch.

#### 5. Be Hard On Your Opinions

A famous bon mot asserts that opinions are like arse-holes, in that everyone has one. There is great wisdom in this... but I would add that opinions differ significantly from arse-holes, in that yours should be constantly and thoroughly examined.

We must think critically, and not just about the ideas of others. Be hard on your beliefs. Take them out onto the verandah and beat them with a cricket bat. Be intellectually rigorous. Identify your biases, your prejudices, your privilege.

Most of society's arguments are kept alive by a failure to acknowledge nuance. We tend to generate false dichotomies, then try to argue one point using two entirely different sets of assumptions, like two tennis players trying to win a match

by hitting beautifully executed shots from either end of separate tennis courts.

By the way, while I have science and arts grads in front of me: please don't make the mistake of thinking the arts and sciences are at odds with one another. That is a recent, stupid, and damaging idea. You don't have to be unscientific to make beautiful art, to write beautiful things.

If you need proof: Twain, Adams, Vonnegut, McEwen, Sagan, Shakespeare, Dickens. For a start.

You don't need to be superstitious to be a poet. You don't need to hate GM technology to care about the beauty of the planet. You don't have to claim a soul to promote compassion. Science is not a body of knowledge nor a system of belief; it is just a term which describes humankind's incremental acquisition of understanding through observation. Science is awesome.

The arts and sciences need to work together to improve how knowledge is communicated. The idea that many Australians – including our new PM and my distant cousin Nick – believe that the science of anthropogenic global warming is controversial, is a powerful indicator of the extent of our failure to communicate. The fact that 30% of this room just bristled is further evidence still. The fact that that bristling is more to do with politics than science is even more despairing.

6. Be a teacher.

Please? Please be a teacher. Teachers are the most admirable and important people in the world. You don't have to do it forever, but if you're in doubt about what to do, be an amazing teacher. Just for your twenties. Be a primary school teacher. Especially if you're a bloke – we need male primary school teachers. Even if you're not a Teacher, be a teacher. Share your ideas. Don't take for granted your education. Rejoice in what you learn, and spray it.

## 7. Define Yourself By What You Love

I've found myself doing this thing a bit recently, where, if someone asks me what sort of music I like, I say well I don't listen to the radio because pop lyrics annoy me. Or if someone asks me what food I like, I say I think truffle oil is overused and slightly obnoxious. And I see it all the time online, people whose idea of being part of a subculture is to hate Coldplay or football or feminists or the Liberal Party. We have tendency to define ourselves in opposition to stuff; as a comedian, I make a living out of it. But try to also express your passion for things you love. Be demonstrative and generous in your praise of those you admire. Send thank-you cards and give standing ovations. Be pro-stuff, not just anti-stuff.

## 8. Respect People With Less Power Than You.

I have, in the past, made important decisions about people I work with – agents and producers – based largely on how they treat wait staff in restaurants. I don't care if you're the most powerful cat in the room, I will judge you on how you treat the least powerful. So there.

## 9. Don't Rush.

You don't need to already know what you're going to do with the rest of your life. I'm not saying sit around smoking cones all day, but also, don't panic. Most people I know who were sure of their career path at 20 are having midlife crises now.

I said at the beginning of this ramble that life is meaningless. It was not a flippant assertion. I think it's absurd: the idea of seeking meaning in the set of circumstances that happens to exist after 13.8 billion years worth of unguided events. Leave it to humans to think the universe has a purpose for them. However, I am no nihilist. I am not even a cynic. I am, actually, rather romantic. And here's my idea of romance:

You will soon be dead. Life will sometimes seem long and tough

and, god, it's tiring. And you will sometimes be happy and sometimes sad. And then you'll be old. And then you'll be dead.

There is only one sensible thing to do with this empty existence, and that is: fill it. Not fillet. Fill. It.

And in my opinion (until I change it), life is best filled by learning as much as you can about as much as you can, taking pride in whatever you're doing, having compassion, sharing ideas, running(!), being enthusiastic. And then there's love, and travel, and wine, and sex, and art, and kids, and giving, and mountain climbing ... but you know all that stuff already.

It's an incredibly exciting thing, this one, meaningless life of yours. Good luck.

Thank you for indulging me.

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## **Lady Gaga: Don't Ask, Don't Tell: "Prime Rib" Maine 2010**

[Lady Gaga](#) is an American singer and songwriter. In this September 2010 speech she argues against the policy in the US military of gay servicemen and women having to leave the military if they were open about their sexuality.

The complete transcript is available at [the MTV website](#).

A video with better quality audio is available on the [WMTWTV Youtube](#) channel.

Lady Gaga : Good afternoon. Can you all hear me?

I wrote this speech, this address, myself, (Video starts here) I've spent 48 hours trying to find the perfect thing to say. My address to you today is called "The Prime Rib of America."

I do, solemnly swear, or affirm, that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States, against all enemies foreign and domestic, and I will bear true faith and allegiance to do the same, and I will obey the orders of the president of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the uniform code of military justice, so help me God.

Unless, there's a gay soldier in my unit, sir.

That is the oath taken every day by service members of the Armed Forces when they enlist to serve their country. Equality is the prime rib of America, but because I'm gay, I don't get to enjoy the greatest cut of meat my country has to offer. There are amazing heroes here today, whose stories are more powerful than any story I could tell, any fight I've ever fought, and any song that I could tell. I'm here because they inspire me. I'm here because I believe in them. I'm here because "don't ask, don't tell" is wrong. ... It's unjust, and fundamentally, it is against all that we stand for as Americans.

The Pentagon and senators such as John McCain have cited that the military is a unique institution, they have cited that homosexuals serving openly cause disruption to unit cohesion and morale. So what this means is, that they're saying that straight soldiers feel uncomfortable around gay soldiers, and sometimes it causes tension, hostility and possible performance inadequacies for straight soldiers who are homophobic. And even though some studies have been done to show an overwhelming and remarkable lack of disruption to units with gay soldiers, I will, for a moment, entertain this debate. As I am less concerned with refuting the fact that, in the workplace, in any workplace, there are tensions, there is

even more of a possibility to have tension when you're fighting for your life. But I'm more concerned that John McCain and other Republican senators are using homophobia as a defense in their argument. As the nexus of this law, openly gay soldiers affect unit cohesion, like it's OK to discriminate or discharge gay soldiers because we are homophobic, we are uncomfortable, and we do not agree with homosexuality, and I can't focus on the field of duty when I am fighting. "We have a problem with you." Wasn't that the defense of Matthew Shepard's murderers? When they left him to die on a fence in Laramie, they told the judge, 'Oh, Matthew's gay, and it made us uncomfortable, so we killed him.' 'Oh, he's gay, it makes me uncomfortable, send him home.' As a side note, both Matthew Shepard's killers have life sentences in prison, and laws have since been passed that homophobia cannot be used as defense anymore in hate crimes in our judicial system.

Doesn't it seem to be that "don't ask, don't tell" is backwards? Doesn't it seem to be that, based on the Constitution of the United States, that we're penalizing the wrong soldier? Doesn't it seem to you that we should send home the prejudiced, the straight soldier who hates the gay soldier, the straight soldier whose performance in the military is affected because he is homophobic, the straight soldier who has prejudice in his heart, in the space where the military asks him to hold our core American values, he instead holds and harbors hate, and he gets to stay and fight for our country? He gets the honor, but we gay soldiers, who harbor no hatred, no prejudice, no phobia, we're sent home? I am here today because I would like to propose a new law; a law that sends home the soldier that has the problem. Our new law is called "if you don't like it, go home." A law that discharges the soldier with the issue, the law that discharges the soldier with the real problem, the homophobic soldier that has the real negative effect on unit cohesion. A law that sends home the homophobe, a law that sends home the prejudiced. A

law that doesn't prosecute the gay soldier who fights for equality with no problem, but prosecutes the straight soldier who fights against it. Or perhaps that was a bit spun. ... To be fair, it sends home the straight soldier who fights for some freedoms, for some equalities, but not for the equality of the gay. He is the one – or she is the one – under this new proposition who will be discharged for disrupting the military. If you are not committed to perform with excellence as a United States soldier because you don't believe in full equality, go home. If you are not honorable enough to fight without prejudice, go home. If you are not capable of keeping your oath to the Armed Forces to defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic, and I will bear true faith and allegiance to do the same, unless there's a gay soldier in my unit, then go home.

Or, moreover, if you serve this country, is it acceptable to be a cafeteria American soldier? Can you choose some things from the Constitution to put on your plate, but not others? A buffet, perhaps. I'm not talking about citizens – we have a right to grieve, to protest, we have a right to this rally – but I'm talking about soldiers. Should the military be allowed to treat Constitutional rights like a cafeteria? In the military, is it acceptable to be a cafeteria American? What I mean to say is, should soldiers and the government be able to pick and choose what we are fighting for in the Constitution or who we are fighting for? I wasn't aware of this ambiguity in our Constitution. I thought the Constitution was ultimate. I thought equality was non-negotiable. And, let's say, if the government can pick and choose who they're fighting for, as exemplified in laws like "don't ask, don't tell," shouldn't we as Americans be made aware of this imbalance? Shouldn't it be made clear to the citizens of this country, before we go to war, shouldn't I be made aware ahead of time that some of us are just not included in that fight? "We're going to war for you and you and you and you, but not you, because you're gay." You can risk your life for this country, but in the end,

you're not fighting for yourself; you're fighting for straight people. ... You are not included. You are not included when we say "equal." You are not even fully included when we say "freedom."

I'm here today in this park, in Maine, to say that, if the Senate and the president are not going to repeal this "don't ask, don't tell" policy, perhaps they should be more clear with us about who the military is fighting for, who our tax dollars are supporting and, ultimately, how much does the prime rib cost? Because I thought this was an "all you can eat" buffet. This equality stuff, I thought equality meant everyone. But apparently, for certain value meals, for certain civil rights, I have to pay extra, because I'm gay. I'm allowed to stand in a line next to other men and women, I'm allowed to get shot at and shoot a gun to protect myself and my nation, but when it's time to order my meal, when it's time to benefit from the freedoms of the Constitution that I protect and fight for, I have to pay extra. I shouldn't have to pay extra. I should have the ability, the opportunity, the right to enjoy the same rights – the same piece of meat – that my fellow soldiers, fellow straight soldiers, already have included in their Meal of Rights. It's prime rib, it's the same size, it's the same grade, the same cost, at wholesale cost, and it's in the Constitution.

My name is Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta. I am an American citizen, to the senate, to Americans, to Senator Olympia Snowe, Senator Susan Collins – both from Maine – and Senator Scott Brown of Massachusetts. Equality is the prime rib of America. Equality is the prime rib of what we stand for as a nation. And I don't get to enjoy the greatest cut of meat that my country has to offer. Are you listening? Shouldn't everyone deserve the right to wear the same meat dress that I did? Repeal "don't ask, don't tell" or go home. Go home. Thank you.

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# Rita Connolly: I Arise Today

The video has Rita Connolly singing a [Shaun Davey](#) song at the inauguration of Michael Higgins, the ninth president of Ireland in November 2011. The words are from the early [St Patrick's Breastplate](#) via [Cecil Frances Alexander](#) and the German linguist and Celtic philologist [Kuno Meyer](#).

Many Irish versions exist:

Críost liom, Críost romham, Críost 'mo dhiaidh,  
Críost ionam, Críost fúm, Críost os mo chionn,  
Críost ar mo dheis, Críost ar mo chlé,  
Críost i gcroí gach aoinne smaoiníos orm,  
Críost i mbéal gach aoinne labhraíos liom,  
Críost i ngach súil a dhearcas orm,  
Críost i ngach cluais a chluineas mé.

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Críost liom, Críost romham,  
Críost i mo dhiaidh, Críost istigh ionam,  
Críost fúm, Críost os mo chionn,  
Críost ar mo lámh dheas, Críost ar mo chlé,

Críost i mo lúi dom, Críost i mo sheasamh,  
Críost i ngach gcrói ag cuimhneamh orm,  
Críost i ngach mbéal, Críost i ngach súil,  
Críost i ngach cluas, a éisteann liom.

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Críost liom, Críost romham,  
Críost im dhiadh,  
Críost ar mo chion-sa, agus Críost fúm,

Críost ina chónai i mo chroí-se,  
Críost fós ó dheas díom, Críost ó thuaidh.

An early version of the lyrics can be found at the [University of California \(Davis\) website](#). A medieval Irish version can be found on [Wikisource](#). The second video is unfortunately unaccredited and unattributed, but has interesting photos and lyrics.

Rita Connolly (singer): :

I arise today, through the strength of heaven;  
light of sun, radiance of moon,  
splendor of fire, speed of lightning,  
swiftness of wind, depth of the sea,  
stability of earth, firmness of rock.

I arise today, through God's strength to pilot me;

God's eye to look before me, God's wisdom to guide me,  
God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me,  
from all who shall wish me ill, afar and a-near  
alone and in a multitude.

Against every cruel merciless power  
that may oppose my body and soul,

Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me, Christ in me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,

Christ when I arise, Christ to shield me.

Christ in the heart of every one who thinks of me,

Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me,

I arise today.....