

Remarks by Tara Cullis at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre Event Celebrating David Suzuki's 90th Birthday on May 22, 2026

Thank you, *everyone*. What a completely wonderful, humbling evening. Thank you to everyone who participated, and to all those who put this together so well.

It's made me think back, to the contrast of where this all started. Pearl Harbour and genetics.

Because David's origins were not auspicious. His story began in poverty and racism.

Even though his parents were born in Vancouver in 1911, as a little six-year-old boy during World War II, David and his family were suddenly labelled "enemy aliens." Their house and possessions were confiscated permanently, and they were put into the Japanese-Canadian internment camps for four years. At the end of the war, the family was kicked out of B.C and sent to Ontario, where David worked as a 10-year-old child labourer on a fruit farm.

That's how he learned in his bones that "equality, social justice and human rights are easy to grant, when times are good. They only *matter*, when times are tough."

But once he got to go to a proper elementary and high school in Ontario, David studied hard. And won a scholarship to a top American college, where he fell in love with science – especially genetics.

The anguish he felt to discover that Hitler's Angel of Death, Dr. Mengele, used beautiful genetics to justify racism and genocide, taught David another lifelong lesson: that science is a double-edged sword and must be used with wisdom for the common good.

Most of you know David as a TV personality, but when I met David 55 years ago he had just been named top scientist in Canada under the age of 35. He had the biggest genetics lab in Canada. He was secretary of the Genetics Society of America.

When the American Jeffrey Hall won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine a few years ago, he was asked who his heroes were. And Jeffrey named “the Canadian geneticist, David Suzuki,” saying: “His work was crucial.... His approach and accomplishments in *Drosophila* ... were genuinely, sensational.”

So David is a scientist at heart. He felt science was too interesting, too important, to be left to industry, business, and the military: the public must have the chance to get excited, to understand the issues, to support basic science, and be equipped to push politicians to good decisions.

Over time, he realized the changes necessary if climate change, habitat destruction, and the decline of the oceans, are not to overwhelm us. And he learned that a very different attitude to nature is practiced universally by Indigenous peoples around the world, the people who’ve proved what attitude works, what it takes to survive and thrive for millennia.

And somehow you, the Canadian public wanted to hear that message. And so did others. So “The Nature of Things” was broadcast in 80 countries. It’s the longest-running science show in the world. Thanks to Canada. (There’s no show like that in the United States!)

The important thing to know is, he did *not* do this by himself! The whole CBC helped him. Greystone Publishing helped him. The David Suzuki Foundation helped him. First Nations helped him. Enviro allies helped him. But most important: the Canadian public helped him. It’s been an amazing story!

I’ve come to realize it’s because you and I share his goals. We see him as a means to achieve things *we know* are important. He’s become a sort

of figurehead that Canadians have nailed to the prow, but we, all of us, built that boat and we're rowing it.

It's not easy to be a galley slave in that boat.

It's not easy to be a figurehead out in front either, eyes wide open.

Carole Taylor told David once, "Everything you've warned us turned out to be true."

Food for thought.

Tonight, I thank you all for building that boat – it's a lifeboat -- and for rowing the very best you can.

Thank you.