Mr. Chancellor, for six days each October at the Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival, thousands of book lovers sit in rapt attention as renowned and emerging writers bring their words to life. Today, we honour the individual whose vision gave birth to this annual celebration of literature that so enriches the cultural life of our community; whose finely attuned ear to unique literary voices has made her synonymous with writing and publishing in this country, and whose efforts have given Vancouver such a prominent place on the map of the English speaking literary world.

Alma Lee emigrated from Scotland in 1967 and quickly immersed herself in the literary life of Canada. A perceptive, talented administrator, she served as the Founding Executive Director of the Writers’ Union and later of The Writers’ Trust. Her advocacy of writers earned her the respect of the entire literary community.

In 1984, she made Vancouver her home and just three short years later, she founded what was initially called the International Writers Festival. As its Artistic Director, Alma Lee has marked the Festival indelibly with her wit, wisdom, and grace. She established lasting relationships with publishers and writers, implemented a sound financial strategy, and developed a loyal audience. Indeed, from the very outset, Alma nurtured the special relationship that exists between authors and readers and recently renamed the Festival to honour that unbreakable bond. Recognizing also the importance of nourishing young people’s love of stories, she created Spreading the Word, an education programme for British Columbia’s schools. Today, the Vancouver International Writers and Readers Festival attract more than 12,000 people annually, and Vancouver has earned an international reputation as a place where writers and readers are cherished.

Alma’s special gifts of kindness extend to the broader community as well. She has served on the Boards of AIDS Vancouver and the Alliance for Arts & Culture. We, too, have sought her support and counsel. Alma gave freely of her time and advice to our Writing and Publishing Programme during its formative years. And more recently, she has been an enthusiastic and devoted friend of our Centre for Scottish Studies, using her influence to bring writers from her home country to Simon Fraser University.

Mr. Chancellor, Alma Lee has received many honours for her commitment to the literary community, including the Jack Award and the YWCA Women of Distinction Award. This year, she was installed as a Member of the Order of Canada. She is treasured by her peers as a creative thinker with an unerring instinct for excellence in writing. We are indeed fortunate to have her in our midst. On behalf of the Senate of this University, I ask that you now confer upon Alma Lee the degree Doctor of Letters, honoris causa.