UC SANTA BARBARA
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And the Award Goes to ...

One of Hollywood's most critically acclaimed film producers was honored by UC Santa Barbara Alumni June 2 in a ceremony at the campus's University House.

Lisa Bruce, producer of the 2018 Academy Award-nominated film "Darkest Hour" received the university's Distinguished Alumni Award.

"This is a special honor for me," said Bruce. "I can honestly say I would not have had the career in film [that I do] if it wasn't for my experience at UC Santa Barbara."

In particular, Bruce credited UCSB film and media studies professors Dana Driskell and Charles Wolfe for their contributions to her film education. "I didn't think of myself as an artist," she said. "I had the misconception that artists are born." Driskell, she added, helped her understand they are "made."

Bruce's first — and not so auspicious — effort at UCSB was a comic horror film that centered on houseplants taking over a keg party. When the film was sent to the processing studio, however, it was discovered the filmmakers had neglected to open the frame on the camera. "It was totally black," Bruce recalled.

That might have spelled the end of her nascent career, but with encouragement from Driskell she got back behind the camera, producing — with classmate Farfallah Borah — the film that would earn her acceptance to the prestigious New York University School of Film. "[At UCSB] I learned everything I needed to know to make bigger features," she said.

The rest, as they say, is history. Bruce went on to a distinguished career as a producer, and now has more than 20 feature films under her belt. Among them is the 2014 award winner “The Theory of Everything,” which chronicles the life of acclaimed theoretical physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking. In addition to more than 100 international award nominations, the film received three British Academy of Film and Television Arts Awards, two Golden Globes and an Academy Award.

Bruce also produced “Darkest Hour,” which details Winston Churchill’s leadership of Britain in 1940 as Adolph Hitler was threatening the destruction of the British Isles. The 2017 film was nominated for an Academy Award for best picture. Gary Oldman won the Academy Award for best actor for his portrayal of Churchill.

The Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes outstanding alumni contributions in a wide variety of endeavors and careers. Past recipients include Zappos founder Nick Swinmurn, Oracle Board Chair Jeff Henley, Olympic gold medalist Jason Lezak, Nobel laureate Carol Greider and musician Jack Johnson.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.