

Graduation ...

# What's the big deal?

□ Graduation is great; Ceremony isn't as much fun as fifth grade

**G**raduation. The big day is coming fast, yet I find myself growing tired of it already. I can't seem to get excited about the pomp and circumstance of being thrust into the real world. Perhaps that's because I'm going to law school in August, putting off the real world for another three years.

I remember when graduation used to be exciting. When I graduated from fifth grade into middle school, we had a big picnic, our first "dance," lots of balloons and cake and generally felt like we were moving up in the food chain.

When I graduated from middle school, my class had the privilege of being the first to go through all three years at our spiffy, new, three-year-old middle school.

I don't recall getting any presents then. I do recall working feverishly, in my best "special occasion" clothes, to finish varnishing my woodshop project. It was a little box-like thing that opened on top. My dad still uses it to store old bills and junk mail. My legacy.

I also remember someone in the band dropped a tuba during the ceremony. And then, it was off to high school.

Four years later, along with 500 people whom I never knew and don't remember, and similarly clad in blue- and gold-gowned attire, I walked across the stage, received my empty diploma cover and wondered where the family was going for dinner.

Actually, it was almost the graduation that wasn't. That year our principal decided to move the graduation ceremony from Portland's austere Civic Auditorium to the cavernous echo-palace that is the University of Portland's Chiles Center.

The senior class, in a moment of 90210-like unity, made it quite clear that no one would be attending a ceremony at the Chiles Center. The principal said the Civic was booked solid. We said tough. He moved the ceremony back to the Civic. Power to the people.

I got a guitar for graduation. It was an Ibanez electric/acoustic and a little amp that my parents probably later regretted having purchased. But I was free, released from the bondage of 12 years of indentured servitude to the state and was the master of my own destiny. I was going to turn my amp to 10 and there was nothing anybody was going to do to stop me. You can't kill rock 'n' roll.

Community college. The minor leagues. I suppose a 1.96 GPA will do that to you. But I had applied to Oregon State. How picky could they be? Picky enough. So, having sunk below even OSU's admittance standards, I crept off to do my time at a two-year power house, Mt. Hood Community College.

The following year I transferred to OSU, (helpful hint: if you blow off high school, do a year at a community college, get a 2.0 and transfer). As a Beaver, I learned a lot about socializing. I experienced a diversity of alcohols. I watched Gary Payton get thrown out of my dorm for being a tad loud at three in the morning. I needed my then girlfriend, now wife, to call around and find out where my finals were.

The following year I was back at MHCC. Go figure. Three years and as many majors later (including two years in the Navy), I graduated with a General Studies degree. I chose not to attend the graduation ceremony — how could I be excited at having taken six years to graduate from community college?

Looking back, I see that may have been my mistake. Because I missed that graduation, I'm being forced to attend this one. My wife, parents, etc. are demanding I walk across a stage, while wearing a gown nearly a foot short, to receive another empty degree cover.

For the last month I've been fielding inquiries as to what I want for graduation. What does anybody want? Money. However, that doesn't seem to wash with the relatives. Everybody wants to make their gift personal. How about a mutual fund in my name?

Actually, I'll be surprised if I get much of anything. I never sent my thank you notes after high school graduation or after my wedding. I'm a selfish, unthinking boob. But that hasn't stopped me from sending out the requisite invitations and putting the burden of ignoring me and my moment of glory on others.

But material possessions are not what graduating is all about. It's about maturing, becoming an adult (if you aren't already — but hey, aren't we all really kids inside?) and entering the work force (a.k.a. the unemployment line). Well, one out of three ain't bad (if you're playing baseball).

I have managed to weasel out of attending the Autzen Stadium ceremony. I convinced people that it was too far to walk from Allen Hall to the glorified dirt pile and that we would do better to go straight to brunch. Saved by the buffet.

My little brother, four years younger than I, graduated from college last month. Talk about a blow. I'll regain the lead, however, graduating from law school before he graduates from medical school. But he took the straight route, right out of high school and has his B.S. at 21. I'll have my B.A. five days before turning 26 and my law degree shortly before 29.

Will I be excited then? Who knows. I can't really say I'm looking forward to more than

\$30,000 of indebtedness. And besides, the real world frightens me. I'm afraid of change — change is bad.

Perhaps I've simply grown callous in my waning years. The magic and mystery of life has passed me by, leaving a strewn pile of notebooks from classes I don't remember having taken.

Shortly, we will find out whether we learned anything from any of those classes. I know college graduates who can't find the Pacific Ocean on a map (no joke), or who can't spell to save their lives. Yet, they walked across a stage, received an empty degree cover and went to lunch. Seems they never quite came back.

Wouldn't it have been easier to simply write a check for \$12,000, received a piece of paper and been our way? Would we be any better/worse off than we are now? Could anybody in the real world tell the difference? Probably not.

So, as the big day approaches and we all put on our black gowns, black hats and colorful tassels, keep this in mind: Your loans come due in six months.

Happy graduation.

— Martin Fisher



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