

Another wave will rise from the labor pool and break along the job market this summer.

Teaming masses of people are going to scramble, resumé in hand, to find their niche in the economy. I will be one soul among them. After interviews, background checks and urinalyses, a lucky percentage of us will land a job. It's competitive capitalism, and it's how we've always paid the rent in America.

I've worked away summers in tourist traps and grocery stores, washed dishes and cleaned toilets. But this one is different for me; there's a new element. I'm looking for the summer job to end all summer jobs, literally. I'm less than three weeks away from getting my bachelor's degree. What I need now is permanent work, full-time, no longer punctuated by the sweet lull of the academic routine.

Once, I thought people walked out of college and into working life with a ticket to ride. In some ways, they do. The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates that men with bachelor's degrees stand to make about one million more dollars over the course of their lifetimes than those with only a high school education, and about 1.5 million more than high school drop-outs. But to slip into the income bracket of the fortunate (which has ugly class system implications I'll now side-step for brevity), I have to first find a job, which is easier than it sounds.

Twenty would-be employers and half a dozen editors have rejected me in the last two months. There are hundreds of people applying for the same positions I want, many of whom have more experience in the field, more published clips and nicer paper for their cover letters than I do. Journalism is a cutthroat profession, and in this economy, in this area, there just isn't much room to move.

Fear, however, does wonders for motivation. I'm scared shitless of waiting tables. I



The Graduate

— Searching for the summer job to end all summer jobs. — By Eric Hendricksen —

have nightmares about accidentally giving cheese to the lactose intolerant children of screaming, faceless yuppies. I shudder.

The next logical step is to do what I've always done when looking for part-time or summer jobs, what almost everyone has done or is doing to pay the bills: settle for work that is less than ideal. Making money by writing is my dream, but I'm practical. I can do other things. It's not like I'm missing the gravy train. Writers for newspapers like the one you're reading make about as much as teachers, who aren't exactly rolling in it.

So what else is out there? I'm not selling

out for anything less than double digits by the hour. You're dealing with an educated man here.

I studied video production along with writing in school. I'm trained in camera work and post-production editing. But most of those jobs are in Los Angeles, mostly in pornography. Sex is beautiful, but the sex business isn't. Porn is like war; it makes humans look like baboons. Besides, my grandmother would never forgive me.

How about marketing or some public relations work? I might still be able to do a little writing. My hero, Kurt Vonnegut,

worked as a PR man for General Electric before he became a famous novelist. I applied for a marketing job with a branch of the same company a month and a half ago. They sent me an email confirming they got my information. I never heard from them again.

Sometimes I'll spend the last part of the night applying to mediocre jobs online, only to turn off the computer and fall asleep thinking about how I would most like to make a living. I'll have visions of international travel, expense accounts and literary awards. I want young, misunderstood women to write me love letters from Delaware. Tweed suits with sneakers, all that aspiring writer crap. Reality, alas, is harder to avoid in the daylight. Every morning I wake up to the sound of my neighbor revving his engine on the way to his nine to five.

Really, that's all I want. I'm after the stability of a steady paycheck. I need a job that I can stand for 40-plus hours a week, month after month, year after year. This is supposed to be the ground floor to some kind of career. Instead it feels like I'm staring into a gaping void, just beyond the office cubicles in the ninth circle of hell.

An overstatement? Yes. The distinctive whine of the middle-class college graduate? Possibly. Still, from where I'm standing, the outlook is far from pretty.

According to the Oregon Employment Department's most recent statistics from April, 6.7 percent of Oregonians are unemployed, 1.1 percent more than the national average. That means nearly 128,000 people in this state are without a job but actively looking for work. At 7.6 percent, the unemployment rate is even higher in Lane County, where about one in 30 people are looking to get hired. If you have a job, this isn't the time to lose it, unless it's to me. Finding work is a job in itself, but I'm going to find something, and stay right here in Oregon. Don't let your boss catch you sleeping. **EW**

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