

Graduation advice from an old friend: don't use your liver, find the buffet

By: Noelle Hancock

Earlier this week, the scene editors asked me to write a piece about Commencement, so that the graduating seniors would know what to expect next month. They mentioned my journalistic excellence, my gift of wit, my overall brilliance, and something about a shortage of articles for this week that we don't need to get into. Whatever the means, here I am. So let's discuss graduation or, more importantly, what I think about graduation.

It all starts when you return from Myrtle, and your class decides Senior Week will not be done right unless you actually succumb to liver failure while on the graduation stage. By the seventh day, expect to be sitting in a bucket of ice, pleading with your organs not to flee. Meanwhile, as your organs are trying to transplant themselves, your stomach is being taken to the limit. Every event this week somehow incorporates a free buffet, which pretty much sold me. In my Heaven, there is eating. And there is only eating. A buffet is pretty much all that's required out of an event to get me to show up. Hell, I'll attend an execution if there's unlimited cheese cubes and pie. That said, it's a good thing a graduation gown is essentially a mumu because "moo" is right.

This brings us to the graduation gown. First of all, is there anything funnier than dressing up like everyone else so a keynote speaker can lecture you on the importance of uniqueness and individuality, and implore you not to be a conformist? You couldn't make this stuff up. My gown actually turned out to be quite unique, however. The length was fine but the arms, inexplicably, extended a good three feet past my fingertips. Plus, they were sewn shut. I looked like I should have been in a cage eating bananas and throwing feces. My Master happened to have a back-up gown from the '70s. The material was so flammable, I was scared to breathe on it, lest the heat from my breath cause me to detonate.

Once you have your gown, graduation kicks off with the Baccalaureate service. Now, this was not only the high point of graduation, this was the high point of my life. You enter Woolsey Hall, flashbulbs are popping, and the crowd is waving and screaming. It's total anarchy. Mind you only, like, two of those people are actually waving at YOU and screaming YOUR name, but it doesn't matter. That was my red carpet moment. As someone with a general lack of talent who's never been cheered on by a large crowd, I found this to be excellent. When I have enough money, I plan to hire a large posse to enter every room before me, and cheer when I walk in.

Next comes "Class Day" on Old Campus, which, like most things in life, would be greatly improved if turned into a sporting event. First of all, it should be acceptable for you to boo all of the people you dislike. Encouraged, even. Secondly, no one should know beforehand who's actually going to graduate. After the name is called, the prospective graduate should step up on the platform. Then, if they didn't have enough

credits, the floor would drop out from under them like it did for Veruca in "Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory." At this point, the class day speaker (someone like Dick Vitale or Pat Summerall) would shout, "Oh, you HATE to see that!" Or, if the person had completed all their credits, Dick or Pat would jump in with, "And it's gooooooood!!" Then the dean would hand over the diploma, give the person a chest-up, and slap them on the ass to send 'em on their way. It could be broadcast on Sports Center. The possibilities are endless.

Instead what ACTUALLY takes place on Old Campus is, essentially, a parade of people who are better than you. This is when they hand out the Neener, Neener Awards. As in "Neener, neener, I got an award and you didn't," which is what is going through the recipient's head as they cross the stage. I know this because this is what was going through my head when I accepted a bajillion awards at my high school graduation. This is also when they give every senior a bag of tobacco and a porcelain pipe, the meaning of which still escapes me. Apparently after graduation, you're supposed to break this pipe in some sort of grand gesture. What this symbolizes, I don't know. All I know is mine broke when I accidentally sat on it, the implications of which I have chosen not to ponder.

The ceremony is pretty fun, overall, and good for a tasteless joke or 12. The problem is the ending. In a stunning turn of events, Yale prohibits students from throwing their caps at the end of graduation! Something about poking someone's eye out or something. There's actually a paragraph in your graduation pamphlet precluding it because cap-throwing is "extremely dangerous." Now, if this had been mentioned in my Yale acceptance letter, I would have gone to college somewhere else entirely. That's how much I was looking forward to it. I'm a traditionalist, dammit! I don't demand a lot from life, but I want the plastic people on my wedding cake and I want to throw my cap at my friggin' graduation. I threw it anyways, but it was kinda lame.

Everything wraps up with the distribution of diplomas in the residential colleges. I thought this was going to be McGraduation -- a "Thank you and please drive thru" kind of thing. I had no way of knowing the humiliation before me. All of the diplomas were handed out, and I was giving myself a hearty slap on the back for surviving four years of all-nighters and liver damage. Suddenly, the master decided to recognize the achievements of "some" of the students. They were to stand up when their name was called and remain standing. She then named the people graduating summa, magna, and cum laude, people graduating with distinction in their major, people who'd published their senior essays, people who'd sold the film rights and had Gwyneth slated to star, people named Sam, people who didn't like green eggs and ham. This went on and on until finally the only ones still sitting were, like, me and the other guy, looking like a pair of defrocked priests.

And there wasn't even a buffet.

Now bear in mind that what happened to me was a "results not typical" kind of a thing. If you did more in college than write a column about yourself and, uh, breathe, you're probably in the clear. But if you lack my indestructible ego, you may want to excel at

something in the next few weeks to avoid this moment.

Well, that pretty much covers commencement. After that, you're on your own. Literally. Just turn in your keys by noon, and don't forget to turn off the nonexistent overhead lights on the way out. The rest is up to you. So I'll leave you now just as I left Yale a year ago -- neither wiser nor richer, and still carrying a certain disregard for personal hygiene. And I also leave you with one last thought: Never forget that, so long as you keep looking to the sky, you may be hit with a graduation cap.