

## Commencement address continued

liberating truth. Hemingway became a reader for these reasons: because he needed the company and the example of the great and original minds of the past, to show him and remind him how they saw the world anew by sticking what felt truest to them. The more time you spend with those great minds, the more you'll be able to do it yourself.

But as I say, it's easier said than done. Because when you step out of these doors two or four of six or eight years hence, or maybe even next week when you begin classes, people will say to you, you have to make do with less. You have to be realistic. In short, you have to get a job. And there are no jobs, remember? We have to make do with less. There are no jobs for teachers...medicine's a goner...public service is hopeless, all blame and no power...in fact, the only way to do what you want is to make some money and buy yourself some freedom, which means becoming a lawyer. Except that...there are no jobs for lawyers, either.

But I am going to tell you a little secret. Forget about getting a job. If you pursue your passion, you will make work for yourself. If you really love the law...and follow that love wherever your instincts and your passions and your obsessions take you...and they will take you to some pretty weird and wonderful places...and if you are disciplined and know your passion well enough to deal with it honestly and authentically and gracefully...it will reveal things to you, and you will find work. Because the deeper your passion goes, the more individual it becomes, the more universal it becomes as well. I guarantee this. Your only task is to be bold, and then bolder.

And I don't care what your passion is, how conventional or wacky. If you really love the constitution — and if you do, you're a rare bird — pursue it. If you really love hockey, pursue that. There's no reason a deep study of hockey can't fit into a Canadian history program. Maybe you will find that the hockey stick is this country's most enduring symbol of Canadian consciousness — more important than the constitution and language debates and universal health care defined. Maybe you'll find that what really unites a lot of people is not free trade, but their memories of how we all tape our hockey sticks. Because there were all those styles, after all. There was the minimalist taping stage, and the maximalist taping stage, and the shiny-versus-matter electrical taping stage. There was the brief, and some would say sexually suspect stage where we all used white tape on our hockey sticks. We're ashamed of it now, but it happened. I suspect you could make a case for the hockey stick as an important symbol of Canadian unity. I know you could make a senior thesis out of it. You might even make a best-selling book out of it. But it's not on the approved curriculum. You get there only by pursuing your passions.

A few weeks ago I was in Scotland for *Sunday Morning*, talking to three new Scottish writers. Wonderful writers, all in their 30s, telling very literary but very violent and very sexy stories. I asked them what their literary influences were. They looked at me as if I was mad. What did you read, I said. The English — Did you read the novels of Amis and Murdoch and Woolf and Forster. "Are you nuts?" they said. "The English haven't known what to do with the novel since Joyce threw all the rules out the window. All the English ever write about is middle-class people having boring sex with inappropriate people." Which is true enough. So, I said, what were your influences? And their answer astonished me. "Movies and TV," they said. "Everything North American. Movies taught us about character and pacing and dialogue. Elvis Presley and music told us what touched people. The jazz of Miles Davis taught us how space and silence

could say as much as words." And I knew, right there, that I was hearing something astonishing. Here we novelists, literary novelists to boot, claiming that their main formative influence was movies and jazz. They were being true to themselves. Of course, if you listen to the orthodoxies of our time, or to the

*Globe and Mail* or often the BCC, you might conclude that TV and movies have destroyed literature. But not in Scotland. In Scotland, they have helped reinvent the novel.

The only drawback to pursuing your passion is that it's lonely. If you really pursue what you know in your heart to be true, you end up on the far end of a lot of strange limbs. You get into trouble. You find yourself dating the collapse of Canadian culture to the day they introduced the aluminum hockey

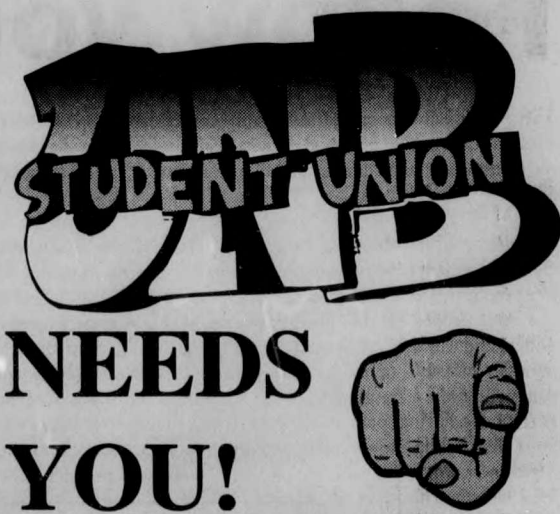
stick. And even great artists and students feel this way. An interviewer once asked T. S. Eliot, the poet, about an essay he'd written at the age of 30. In that essay, Eliot had written that a real poet never knew for sure that he wasn't wasting his life, pushing words around on paper. He never knew if he wasn't being totally irrelevant. Now that you're 70, and widely considered one of the greats of the 20th century, now that you're rich and famous, Mr. Eliot, sir, do you still feel the same way? To which Eliot replied, well, there may be honest poets who never have any doubts, but I still do, to this day. But I loved poetry. I couldn't help myself. Poetry was the only passion Eliot could pursue without lying to himself about what he cared about.

And pursuing your most impractical passions as a student isn't only lonely; it's also seldom appreciated. The spirit of individualism and diversity — and diversity is really just individualism, and the tolerance of it in others — the spirit of pursuing what you really love, is under attack these days. It's under attack politically, as Canada devolves from a nation with ideals into a sea of carping regions with agendas. It's under attack institutionally, as places like the BCC and the National Film Board — which were never anything but spaces, in which people dedicated to their passions might emerge — are being drastically cut back, both in terms of their finances and their mandates. And it's under attack in universities, where cutbacks made in the spirit of "more efficient economies" — that old telephone switchboard, make do with less philosophy — have reduced staff and resources.

But there is one place where a dedication to the passions of the individual mind will always be safe — and that is within your own heads. They can't get at you there, not if you guard against them, and dedicate yourself to the pleasure of the brain. This place — this old university, with its old thick protective walls — will help you protect your mind, will help you shore it up, at its best, against the enemies of passion and individualism. This place will let your mind flourish, if let it help you. Certainly it seems to me that universities such as this one, and minds such as your own, are one of the few places left where we can foster the energy that grows out of a genuine dedication to mental pleasure. It may be that places like this and minds like yours are the little hope left for the future of this country. So I urge you to use this place well, to let it please you, to use your time here to stay true to your authentic self, and not to some invented self that has been dropped into your brain from elsewhere.

That is all I have to say to you. Except for observing that the likelihood of your meeting a great number of attractive Swedes of either gender here in Fredericton is slim. But nothing's impossible. Good luck to you. And, as they say in Scotland: Be brave.

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**Grad Class Executive:** Responsible for grad class projects, and events for graduation '96-'97. Honoraria available

**Toonie Movie Series coordinator:** Responsible for choosing, delivering, set-up, ticket sales, and return of movies. Honoraria available

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**Friday, Sept. 27**  
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Reception @ McConnell Hall 6:00pm

**Saturday, Sept. 28**  
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**For appointment contact:**

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c/o Ruben & Kingston  
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