

Hector McIntosh Public Speaking Competition:

Winning speech by Lisa Jane D. '10 (Strathcona)

When I got up this morning, and looked at my calendar, I was faced with a very important number: thirty-seven. Thirty-seven! That is the number of remaining days until I am, officially, a high school graduate; an educated young lady, with a diploma to prove it. Nothing will be able to stop me, a fresh-faced dreamer, with a heart full of hope and a head full of wonder, breaking away and stepping boldly into the brave new world that is adulthood.

Can I tell you a little secret, though? I'm scared.

Growing up has always been drifting around in the back of my mind, mostly because everyone in the world makes a point of constantly bringing it up. Back in my earlier days, of sandboxes and puzzles and Pokémon cards, I would dread talking to adults. No matter how interested they pretended to be in your Play-Doh sculpture, they all waited about a minute before asking the same nefarious question: "What do you want to be when you grow up, little girl?"

I don't know, man! I'm, like, six years old. My primary concern is snack-time, and the closest thing I have to a long-term goal is learning how to tie my shoes, which, incidentally, I still don't know how to do very well. (Velcro!) But adults are a persistent bunch, so I came up with a catch-all response: "When I grow up, I want to be rich."

Usually they'd walk away right then and there, shaking their heads and muttering about how far society had declined from their day, when everyone wanted to be an astronaut ballerina. I used to feel a little bit guilty, dashing people's expectations of children as innocent beings, but then again, I had extremely important coloring to attend to. A six-year-old's work is never done.

About the time I was ten, I decided that I needed to diversify my plans beyond being rich, and put some thought into my future. At school, we were studying Ancient Greece— gods, togas, slavery, perpetual war and subjugation of women— totally appropriate subject matter for Grade Five. One class, we decided to study Socrates. For those of you that don't know, Socrates was a pretty cool guy: he obsessively criticized the authorities of the day, "corrupted the youth" of Athens with his teachings, and was eventually sentenced to death for annoying everyone.

As soon as I heard that, I knew I was destined to be a philosopher. Mostly that meant responding to any request with "why?" For a while it was okay, but just like the real deal, the authorities didn't take too kindly to my perpetual questioning of their ideals. Other kids would find themselves in the principal's office for breaking windows or not doing their homework; I was sent there for practicing Socratic Method. Not so good for my street cred, I guess, but I still felt pretty cool.

Since then, I haven't really come up with any comprehensive life plans. Both of my parents are doctors, so a lot of people have suggested I take the same path. Now, the thing that bothers me about this is that those suggestions are serious. Actually? Actually? Spending eight hours a day asking people about their hemorrhoids and their hormone imbalances? There are a large number of well-meaning people out there who have encouraged me voluntarily join a profession where waking up at three in the morning to stitch up a guy who got drunk and "accidentally fell on his knife" is a fairly frequent occurrence. Having doctors for parents teaches you one thing: don't become a doctor. Sure, it's a stable living, but I have a hard time seeing myself, Monday to Friday, wrist deep in small intestine. Not really my scene.

The trouble is my parents have a hard time giving me career advice, since both of them mostly know about medicine. When I asked them for help, their suggestions were a little unorthodox. As much as I try to dissuade her, my mum is still convinced that I'll come to my senses and start taking sciences again. Let's be totally frank and honest, though: the last time I used chemistry, I was using baking soda and vinegar to make a volcano. A career in the sciences? Not a chance. My dad suggested that I should marry for money, though, so I'm putting that into consideration.

A teacher of mine once said: "do what you like, because you're going to be doing it for a long time," and that to me sounds like good advice, so I wrote out a list of things that I enjoy. When I was finished, though, it occurred to me that my dream of being a sci-fi novelist slash film director slash comedian slash rock star slash unicorn was a little unfeasible at best. But what do I like, other than rocking out, making movies, and prancing through meadows, spreading magic throughout the land? I honestly can't think of anything else!

Feeling increasingly uncertain, I asked my university councilor for some professional advice. He recommended I take political science, but all you do with a poli-sci degree is become a politician. And what do politicians do? They just sit around, talk trash about other people, and give speeches.

Oh. Oh, I see.

Maybe the future will be bright for me after all.

And maybe, one day, you'll be seeing me on the ballot.