

Is this middle age?



Maybe it's a strange rite of passage or a clear sign that you have reached middle age when you are asked to be a commencement speaker. Whatever the reason, I was amazed and truly honored with an invitation last month to address the graduating class of the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

In my Canadian playbook, it was simply an invitation to speak. It wasn't until the ALS staff gave me another wonderful lesson in American culture that I learned that a graduation, especially from university, is a momentous occasion and a cause for celebration in the United States. One of the things I admire about Americans is their dedication to celebrating their country, their communities, and their families. It's one of the things that makes America great! For Canadians, celebrations and flag-waving (unless it's the Olympics) isn't as much a part of our national psyche. Canadians tend to be understated and less prone to public celebration. My frame of reference is my own graduation, way back in the late 1970's, when graduating from the University of Western Ontario was not a big deal. We were just glad to be finished with the endless assignments and happy to be searching for that perfect job in library land.

Since accepting the invitation, I have been mulling over the possibilities and reading famous commencement speeches. For example, JFK encouraged the Class of 1963 at American University to search for world peace. In 2004, Toni Morrison pushed Wellesley College graduates to "Be Your Own Story." My personal favorite is the visionary Steve Jobs speaking eloquently to the 2005 Stanford grads about finding what you love and doing it!

So, what should I talk about? Intellectual freedom? Open access to information? Library science as profession? After much deliberation, I returned to what I write about every week: the connection between libraries and the community they serve and how libraries and humanity intersect. Perhaps, I should speak about how when all is said and done, it is passion and fun that will grow and sustain your career.

I ask you, my readers, what do the graduates need to know to keep that passion alive for the next thirty years? Your words of wisdom are most welcome as I ponder May 16th.

Thanks, as always, and have a great week.

Kitty Pope
kpope@alliancelibrarysystem.com

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