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By Alexander Marsh
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A lawyer at last! Well sort of

They say: “Good job.” “Way to go.” “You did it.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” I think to myself. I do not feel so triumphant. I know that I cannot even call myself a graduate yet. That would be a misrepresentation.

True, I have endured three years of full-time study at The John Marshall Law School. I have been congratulated by family, friends, professors and waiters. I have even put on a big, fat robe and a hat fit for an abstract artist who moonlights as a muffin man to walk across a grand stage in a fancy Chicago hotel where I accepted what was referred to as my “diploma.”

There was applause, tears and a reception. It did seem as though I had graduated.

But the fact is that I have not yet received my grades from my final semester and the folder I took home from the May 22 convocation ceremony contained not a juris doctor’s sheepskin, but only a short letter stating that my diploma would be mailed to me upon receipt of my grades — a token of a possibility. And even if I can believe that no professor of mine would have the heart to fail a student in his final semester, there is still the little matter of the bar exam with which to contend.

But the past few weeks have seen a lot of premature celebrating nonetheless.

Because I figure, hey, if everyone I know and love is telling me I graduated, why should I doubt it?

Will I be so insolent as to second guess all these great people who have helped me hang on to (and, in some cases, regain) my sanity for three years?

No, I could never be so disrespectful. So, the words flow effortlessly: “Hold my beer while I uncork this champagne.”

I like to think it is all on purpose; the fact

that it was engineered so there is never a clear point when one has finished law school. Maybe it is subtly preparing us for the realities of the practice of law.

For instance, a lawyer could win a case on the merits, but fail to win the amount of damages he or she wanted. Or maybe the lawyer wins the case, gets the big judgment, but then fails to collect it from the defendant. If the lawyer cannot get his client his money, did he or she really “win” the case?

And after all this legal training, test preparation, magazine, newspaper and blog writing, if I fail the bar exam, did I really “get through” law school?

Or am I just a first-rate failure?

Yep, there are lots of questions.

Law school has been the single greatest experience of my life. It has taught me to be tough and self-reliant.

But it has also shown me that there are those who selflessly help others realize their potential.

These people are harder to find than the naysayers, but I found them in law school. I owe them a lot, too.

Writing for this magazine has been a pleasure. It has allowed me to release a lot of the creative frustration that built up while I sat passively in class waiting for the bell to ring (and it never did, because it was law school, not high school).

And I know they say that not much weight should be given to the critics, but I am humbled that people have been so supportive of my words, as evidenced particularly in the online comments regarding my last column.

What an honor it is to be the author of a work that someone took the time to call “a waste of space.” While some writers might get offended by such a characterization, I cannot

imagine a greater prestige. I am hoping to someday get the recognition I deserve as “the worst writer in the world.”

I anticipate competition for last place will be fierce and it will, no doubt, be a long way to the bottom.

So thank you, Lloyd. I truly appreciate the encouragement.

As this is my final column, I just want to say one more thing.

To firms that as a matter of policy only hire graduates from schools at the top of the list in *U.S. News & World Report*: Your days are numbered.

I am disgusted when I hear from a colleague how his or her interview with a firm went perfectly, but because the applicant did not go to the same law school as a Kennedy or a Bush, the interviewer told them there was really no point in going forward.

I thought hiring on the basis of prejudice went out in the ‘60s, but apparently it is still going strong.

Listen up, ivy lovers.

My generation does not take name brands as seriously as you would like us to and the generation after ours will care about them even less.

We understand that hard work, dedication, personality and imagination make good stories and sweet successes, not wrought iron fences and LSAT averages.

We know greatness is achieved individually and cannot be institutionalized. I know that if I am ever faced with the choice between hiring a recent graduate from Harvard and one from Cletus’ School for the Gifted, well, Juliet says it best: “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” ■

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