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TIMES CHANGE, PEOPLE CHANGE, DREAMS CHANGE

By Martin Connelly '08

I've recently begun to entertain notions of moving to Alaska, but when I say this people inevitably bring up the long, dark winters. Still, I wonder if they've ever been outside on a snowy night—especially when the moon is out. It's not so much dark as a different kind of light. Alaska, all the way up on the map and off by itself, seems like it must be just a bigger version of Maine. They say people move to Alaska when they're running away from something, and Alaska does have that mystical, faraway quality. "Things not working out at home? Have you considered moving to Alaska?"

Alaska is appealing right now because it represents promise and potential, a whiff of the way life could be. Alaska is appealing because I have no idea where I want to go or what I want to do there.

Except, that's not really true. I do know what I want to do. I want to buy land, build a house with a hexagonal sauna, get married, and have lots of children. I want to buy a sheepdog to make sure they (children, not sheep) stay near the house. I'd like to keep in touch with friends and work at a stimulating job that lets me travel some and provides enough to keep the family solvent. The exact details of this job are still pretty hazy, and that's bringing the whole plan down.

When I started as a freshman, I had a clear idea of what my future held. I would major in Asian studies, achieve perfect Chinese, and graduate to a job as a foreign correspondent stationed in Beijing. Maybe I would get re-stationed in 10 years to somewhere equally cool, and, after a long, fruitful career as a journalist, I would return to the United States a hard-bitten reporter, take a job teaching Asian studies or journalism, and get around to the whole house/kids/dog part of the plan. My wife would be someone I'd met abroad, somebody beautiful and exotic who rolled her R's, a Moroccan Jew perhaps, or an Italian art dealer. It would be great.

At this point I guess that plan could still work out, but it's looking increasingly unlikely. For one thing I've realized I don't like news very much. It's boring: "Town Officials Say..." Or it's sad: "Suicide Bomb in Baghdad..." Either way it's not very appealing. And as for the exotic women,

well, I'm not really looking around these days. I'm doing all right in that part of my life and would prefer the status quo to the vagaries of a new relationship.

In a way, graduating seems very much like choosing a college four years ago. Chances are good that life will be decent and people will be interesting no matter where you end up, but the potential for worry is so great that you can't help give in to it a little bit. That's because, with the exception of a few good planners and future investment bankers, most people I know seem like they're as up in the air as I am. The question, "So, are you thinking about jobs?" usually evokes a grimace. Nobody knows and everybody is asking.

My set answer was developed over a week's worth of Christmas house parties. Whether talking to people I knew or people I'd just met, the question came around inevitably, usually while I was chewing. I'd swallow, and then I'd solemnly say, "Well, I've been thinking about getting a job. And trying to support myself." For some this was enough, but others wanted more. To these, I gave the litany of possibilities. There's China (where I've already worked). There's Maine. Then there's Alaska.

All these possibilities are the result of liberal arts. My classmates and I have been given an education in how to think about problems, how to draw connections, how to read critically, and how to argue for things we don't really believe in. It's fantastic, and Colby has done a good job in preparing us, but for what?

For some the answer is easy. There are people who were born to be doctors or lawyers, veterinarians or real estate moguls. But for the vast majority of my class, the future is a mystery, and I think that comes down to options. We have an incredible array of choices, which is both terrifying and exhilarating, and I think we can thank the liberal arts for that.

Martin "Moxie" Connelly '08 hails from Brunswick, Maine. He has lived and worked in China, and, in addition to his academic activities at Colby, he was a member of the Woodsmen's Team and produced podcasts and vodcasts for insideColby, the magazine and Web site produced by students.

