

For one who cuts out a pattern, but never sews it, completing projects has become a chore of duty and not delight. I find that school might rob my secret-door desire to not finish my tasks. I must not just begin with listening to the lecture; but also, finish with the assignments and test dates. Then the degree comes after several quarters, not just a twelve-week gig of tooting from one classroom to another.

It was 1975 when thought of completion made shreds of what was threaded too soon. There was a certainty at graduation my education was done. Completion hits a sour point; just as a lollipop with a stick left over. If you are like me, you bite on the stick for awhile for any remaining flavor absorbed onto the rolled paper, not really satisfied.

The high school giggles among the sophisticated college chatter surrounded the day when I was to accept my Associate Degree in the Arts. The chip-dip and the frosting on the cake were just to hide that final moment when we could sit and wait past the sobering speeches to hear the praised announcement of our own name. Many of the older graduates, such as I, dressed for the weather, not the occasion.

That June day's sun quivered warmth that made us forget the two winters when we huddled together in the chilled classrooms writing down notes with numbed fingers to our pens while our hands were warming their frostbite around coffee cups from the vending machine. Our thick coats padded our backs, our knitted caps and scarves crawled on our wrinkled skulls.

Today we could wear our loose polyester pantsuits and be too proud for the artificial cap and gown. We could stroll down the aisle to Baccalaureate tunes that strummed as smoothly as "Amazing Grace".

We could handle our degree books as if it had held the diploma of hard work that was earned and paid for. There was my husband up in the balcony, as proud as any relative, with his flashbulbs sprinkling the assembly hall. I was a *star!* I was a *celebrity!*

But the degree was cased in a blue and gold binding, with only a picture of the school. The paper itself was missing. As inappropriately not present as a birth without a birth certificate. Vaporized. We were to have the actual diploma mailed to us later. My name in beautiful scroll letters never came. There was a mistake. I was three credits short of a Humanities requirement.

It was the indignity one feels when falling flat into the water from a high dive. It hurts. It's shameful. The next guy can laugh. I didn't think it was funny. When I did enter that school again, I was going to make damn sure I'd get three credits in Humanities. That diploma sits in the bookshelf now amongst all those books I never read....at least, I think it's there.

Had I not finished that degree, I may not have the guts to study for another one. As my husband needs me to find his socks, to locate his checkbook, and to adjust the television antennae; he also wants me to have the education necessary for a profession I desire.

So I may be designing in my mind the locations of the digestive system. The test tomorrow may include that. As I glance over my book, he is telling me a problem from his job, "They are reorganizing the buildings, that means I'll have to work a different location....they want me to handle the supplies for the other three areas."

I say, "Have an aid do that, that's not your job." I'm thinking, "ESOPHAGUS, STOMACH, PYLORIC SPHINCTER..." while chewing my lollipop. Then the man in the terry cloth blue robe across from me on the couch is holding onto his cigarette, fumbling with the remote control buttons to watch the football pre-views, and seems nearly like an invisible spirit from the fourth dimension. "...LARGE INTESTINE, SIGMOID COLON, RECTUM, ANUS...". Once again I look up at him and the bearded man is still there, but this time I remember he is my husband. After all, didn't I give him the now dusty black lampstand with the bamboo lampshade that greets a reflection of light on the room for an anniversary gift...which anniversary was that?

"I'm sorry, Hon, I just finished the digestive system," as I embroidered little feather stitches into my apology. "If it is such bad management as that, couldn't the men pick up their supplies at a certain time, say 5:30 p.m." He seemed resolved that I had listened to him. The light shining off his nearly hairless scalp reminded me of the flashcubes that one nearly complete graduation day. I returned to the book that was bloating my appetite....*anorexia, ascites, choledocholithiasis, bilirubin*...will it ever end besides at the anus?

Listening to tape lectures on DNA cell reproduction after putting two quarters in the laundry, a coffee break of reviewing the organization of the hospital, and the black morning waiting for the cat eyes of a bus to crawl my way while I snivel and shiver in the cold to come back home to go to work. This is not normal!

There must be a day that I don't know about. A day when snow and ice will become a melting lawn and opened up blue sky. Maybe that

day I can really be a graduate and really get a degree. Sort of like the day I got allowance money and could go back to the candy store for another lollipop...with a real degree, who knows--maybe a real profession! I wonder what that day will be like that I don't know of, but only know in dreams.