

# CHARTER

*Gonzaga's Journal of Scholarship & Opinion*



# VOCATION

2015-2016 — Vol. 53

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*Gonzaga's Premier Journal of Scholarship and Opinion*

2015-2016

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*If the wind  
will not serve,  
take to the oars.*

*—Latin Proverb*

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

In my three years at Gonzaga, nothing has so eluded me as the true meaning, the Platonic form, if you will, of vocation. It is as if, like with so many other questions, vocation defies simplification, or a single, definitive dogma—evidenced by my failed forays into the fields of English and Engineering (if one and three semesters can be called forays). As it stands, I am just as able to manufacture THE MEANING OF LIFE in a neat, aphoristic package as I am able to decipher the enigma of vocation—but therein lies the rub. The question of “what am I to do with my life,” is but a variation of the great ontological query “why the hell are we here, if for any reason at all?” Until a time when the Dali Lama, Stephen Hawking, and the ghost of John Lennon put their heads together to solve the riddle, we are left to our own devices, i.e. “I’m here, so I might as well do something.”

And, I intend on doing just that (doing that is).

I will do, and I will do well. I might do some good, if I’m feeling particularly inspired. I will be animate, driven, and a-whir. When it is all said and done, I will leave it to others—maybe my descendants or hobby historians—to make sense of my three changes of major, uncompleted

projects, tangential career path, and nebulous wanderings.

For now, I will be student-worker-editor-boyfriend-gardener extraordinaire. In the next ten years? Hopefully farmer-extraordinaire, but quite possibly mattress-salesman-extraordinaire. It matters not. I will break my back over plow or mattress.

To the writers who are featured in this year's edition of *Charter*, and to the thousands of Gonzaga undergrads doubtlessly sizing up their future, take heart: if you give typewriters to an infinite amount of chimpanzees and then give them an infinite amount of time, eventually they will put forth a highly lucrative teen pop-novel series. That is to say, if each one of us starts this very day feverishly doing something, anything, the only possible result is something equal to or greater than the sum of our creative energies.

With that, I exhort you, get typing!

Sincerely,

Cody Holland

Editor in Chief





# VOCATION

Called how and to what?

*Sister Joy Milos*

When I was a child and someone asked you if you ever thought about having a vocation, they meant one thing: Do you think you are called to be a sister or priest (at least for the boys on this latter one, of course!). Since then, that understanding has, thankfully, broadened significantly. Today we recognize that everyone is called to use the varied gifts they have in ways that are life-giving for them and the wider world. That's what vocation is really about. One of my favorite ways of articulating *that* sense of vocation comes from theologian and author, Frederick Buechner. He writes, vocation is "the place God calls you...the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." If I share that belief about a personal calling, what would that mean, practically speaking? And where and how do I discover it?

I don't know if you have ever seen the wonderful musical "Billy Elliott." It's one of my favorite shows. The play tells the story of 11-year-old Billy Elliott who is growing up in County Durham, England, during the seemingly endless and violent 1984 strike against Margaret Thatcher's closure of British coal mines. Billy's widowed father, Jackie Elliot, and his older son, fellow miner Tony, take a dim view of

Billy's poor record in boxing class, especially when they discover he sneakily transferred to the otherwise girls-only ballet class. Billy comes to discover that the great love of his life is dancing—something at which he is incredibly gifted. At one point in the show, in song and dance, he tries to describe what this awareness is like. (Check out a YouTube version of “Electricity” sometime!)

I can't really explain it,  
I haven't got the words  
It's a feeling that you can't control  
I suppose it's like forgetting, losing who you are  
And at the same time something makes you whole  
It's like that there's a music playing in your ear  
And I'm listening, and I'm listening and then I disappear

And then I feel a change  
Like a fire deep inside  
Something bursting me wide open impossible to hide  
And suddenly I'm flying, flying like a bird  
Like electricity, electricity  
Sparks inside of me  
And I'm free I'm free...

Whether you are a student, teacher, parent, writer, engineer, caregiver, or any other calling that clearly brings you to life, you know what Billy means. It's a sense that if I were not doing this, I wouldn't be responding to the life I'm meant to live. I wouldn't be the whole person I was called to be. Coming to that realization isn't always easy, nor is it necessarily a simple journey. It can also be a costly recognition, as both Billy and others have often discovered.

What happens if my sense of vocation isn't what my parents and friends have dreamed of for me, sometimes for many years? How do I deal with the expectations of others as I nurture that calling which is clearly growing within me? What if it means letting go of other equally good, or even wonderful options? Let me make a few suggestions about what I believe a real *discernment process* might look like in claiming a vocation.

First of all, I deliberately use the word *discernment* as one of the key Ignatian spirituality concepts that a Jesuit education invites students to embrace. If I believe that God is working in my life, I need to pursue the different channels through which God communicates. Taking time for prayer and quiet reflection has always been recognized as a way of listening for God's presence. If that hasn't been part of my practice, am I willing to risk entering into authentic openness to the very God who created and gifted me with life to begin with? If I'm not quite sure how to even do that, who might be a good resource in helping me learn? It's one of the essential elements of discernment. But, recognizing that God communicates through other channels encourages us to listen carefully in other settings, too.

Who are the people who know you well? And, by that I mean, who knows something of your heart and soul, where and what you think you want to do with your life? Are there people in your life who can ask hard questions, make you clarify for them and for yourself? Mary Oliver would ask in one of her poems: "What is it you plan to do with your one

wild and precious life?” And are they good enough friends, no matter their age or background, who challenge you to dig deeper, listen longer to the hidden riches within you, rather than taking the easiest option?

I'd like to add one more piece to the discernment process. It's a question that I believe is important to be aware of in considering the question of vocation. And it's this: What in the world is going on *in the world* and what does *that* have to do with me? What, to borrow Buechner's phrase, is “the world's deep hunger” that calls out to you? It seems to me that individuals who find genuine happiness in answering their vocation never do it in isolation, disconnected from the larger realities of life and the world. They are conscious of the bigger picture, can identify the needs which match their gifts and they have a passion to work for at least some of those needs. The interesting thing about this scenario is the fact that it isn't always in one's *job* that this occurs. It certainly can happen that a job I invest in also can respond to the needs of the world, but sometimes it's outside of the work schedule that I can invest myself in things I care about most. I think of a friend of mine whose job was heading the accounting department in a large GM office. And he was good at it. His real *vocation* though, throughout his career, was being a healer and reconciler who touched the lives of so many people he daily encountered. And that made all the difference in the world—to him and to them.

One final thought on vocation is the fact that a vocation is not a static call where I discover it and then move happily along with the rest of my life. Responding

to any vocation is an initial act of courage, recognizing who I am truly called to be and saying “Yes, this is it!” But it’s also an on-going invitation to recommit and renew it periodically. The world and I both change over time, as does the need to see how I live out my vocation in new and different times, places and relationships. Some may want to avoid ever acknowledging that calling, since there is a cost to courage. But, if we keep listening and then nurturing our vocation, we can, hopefully, share St. Catherine of Siena’s insight at the end of our journey: “Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire.”

# MASTERS

*Alice Hastings*

The problem I have with vocation is that I can't settle down. I want to do everything, because everything is interesting. Everything never gets boring.

I came to Gonzaga undeclared, like so many others. And, like so many others, I was having a bit of anxiety about that. "What should I do?" I asked my dad after a couple months.

He responded with, "You need to learn something that will get you a job. You've always been good at giving advice and being with people—what about Psychology?"

I declared Psychology and resolved that I would become a therapist and help people with serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia or major depression. I was happy with this. It made sense.

But then I was in a history class.

It was nothing special—just History 102, but my professor was the most interesting person I've ever known. In the first month, we learned only about different "meta-narratives" of history. You know, theories based on cyclical eras leading up to human destruction, the Mayan calendar, mushroom-eating psychics, and on and on. I thought to myself one day, "History seems pretty cool."

So, I dropped Psychology and declared History. I was going to be a professor, do research on different meta-narratives, and make students interested in history again.

But, then I was in an Italian class.

One day, when we were learning about colors of all things, I felt a surge of excitement. I was learning a language! I was going to be able to communicate with people who I otherwise couldn't. The day before, it would have been impossible for me to tell them, "My favorite color is blue." But suddenly, that was a thing I could say! I could travel to different places and actually talk to people. So, I dropped History and declared Italian.

But, then I was in an English class.

I could go on, but I'm sure you get the point. By the time I was a senior, I had changed my major fifteen times, trying everything from Classics to Economics. The Registrar's Office knew me by name, and I'm sure they hated it when I walked in the door with that little slip of paper.

I don't feel bad about this. I see the world as an endless array of interesting pursuits, and whenever I try something new, I love it, and I want to do it—at least for a little while. The only unifying factor in my chaotic path is the fact that I've never once considered a science major, but I also haven't disliked anything I've done. I would major in fifteen things if I could, but the desire to try something new always pushes me to change paths again.

This desire applies to all areas of my life. When I decided to study abroad, I spent about five weeks staring at a map trying to whittle down my options to just one country.



Eventually, I decided on Greece (even after studying Italian) because it was a place I knew almost nothing about. And then, six months later, I went to Ghana for the same reason.

Even in the most basic parts of my life—food and exercise, for instance—I always seem to be changing. I've tried running marathons (and given up very quickly), rowing, biking, and, currently, boxing. I've learned to cook Thai food, Italian food, Greek food, and on and on. The unknown is intriguing to me. Sitting in one place, learning nothing, is not an option.

I do, however, think of the future frequently, trying desperately to imagine where I'll be in twenty years. I can see myself in so many different places. I could be a professor sitting in a red velvet chair, pondering the evolution of sensationalism in poetry. Or an archeologist, flying to Greece to uncover ancient ruins with a shovel and a brush. Or a cartoonist, drawing all day under a flickering lamp to send my latest concept to the *New York Times*. I tend to romanticize these things, but only because I find these careers inspiring and I want to know what it's like to live a day in the life of everybody and everything.

But in the past year, I have found one strand of cohesion: art. Art allows me the eccentricity and constant change I need in my life. Sometimes I'll spend weeks writing, just to spend the next ten days painting or drawing cartoons. I have books, instruments, acrylics, Microsoft Word, and Photoshop within arms reach at all times. I realize this lack of focus might prevent me from ever becoming a Picasso, or even from being able to afford a two-bedroom apartment,

but art keeps life interesting. There's no limit to how much an artist can do or change.

When I told my dad that I was going to be a writer/artist after college, I might as well have been saying "I'm going to clown school" or "I want to be a hat collector."

"You're going to what?" he said, and I shrugged. What could I say? Getting a job that pays well is not my top priority, and, for my parents, that probably seems blasphemous. Maybe it is, I don't know. But my life would be very unhappy if I settled down into a 9-to-5 job with no change and no surprises.

A year ago, I was talking to a friend (this was when I was going to be a study abroad advisor so I could travel the world and help students learn about new cultures), who said there are two kinds of people in the world: the Jack of all trades, and the Master. She said the world needs both, because both offer something unique and valuable. Even though the Jack isn't always the wealthiest or most successful, they are able to apply many areas of knowledge to their current pursuit, which makes a more holistic view of the world for everyone.

So, I suppose, that's my answer.

# FINDING MEANING IN MANY THINGS

*Luke Johnson*

We all begin our lives as beings ruled by others, generally our parents. We act, not out of duty or calling, but because we are told to. When we set off to college, we see the world in a new light; there is a novel independence that brings about choices. It can be exciting to figure out all the different things that are possible to do in a lifetime. Some people may feel called to a particular major or career, seeing it as their specific role in the world. They may experience this as something separate from themselves, showing them the path that they should follow. I tend to disagree.

I think that life has no inherent meaning; we are not put on this Earth for any reason at all. We exist because we do, not because we are pawns in some larger game. We must *generate the meaning* that we want to add to the world. Now, I am not trying to say that there are no reasons to keep living, or even that we should allow every act because it may be justified in that person's short life.

Creating meaning in life is not an easy thing to do, and by no means is it a universal process or experience. Even within a single life, I think that generating meaning is a dynamic series of actions and reflections. I think that this give-and-take with our changing personhood is inevitable,

so certain actions that generate meaning fall flat, and things that previously had little worth, become important.

In my life, I have never experienced a calling in the sense that I found my life illuminated before me and I knew exactly what my role was supposed to be. Instead, the moments that I have felt most whole have been when I realized that I was in charge of my own happiness in a given situation. I could see that what I was doing was important to me and I could put everything I had into those moments. I created the meaning that I felt. I gave the experience the worth I thought it deserved. Had I been less invested in those times, they would have produced less for me.

This is true in all things for me: when I am doing something without any apparent benefit, I take a moment to reflect on the investment and engagement that I am putting into that experience. I am always getting less out when I put less in. The old proverb, “You get out of life what you put into it,” rings true in my ears, and I can feel the difference when I am truly present in an experience.

When contemplating what vocations would be fulfilling to me, I have to think about what I could see myself caring about even when I have nothing left to give. I am not a passive agent in this experience, waiting to be called. I am actively contemplating the value, happiness, and meaning in what I could do.

In general, people tend to really dread the questions that come with graduation about the future. While the “real world” may be scary and different than our Gonzaga home, our lives, careers, and identities are more flexible than we

may understand at any one moment. As a collection of people, we can associate value with so many different paths that it seems silly to think that there is only one path for each person. When the time comes, instead of trying to figure out my life, I just need to be reminded that I can find meaning in many things and that happiness is a way to see the world.

# POETRY MEETS BUGS, IN A BASEMENT

*Maria Mills*

After I graduated from Gonzaga this past May, I spent a week in the basement of my parents' home sorting through *stuff*. Much of the stuff had been down there for years—remnants from childhood I'd stashed, in case I ever found myself with both an unoccupied week of time and the cruel wish to stay indoors for most of that week. My mother, too, was in the midst of a minimalist strain of cleaning fever; she'd read a book on "simplifying" earlier that spring, which had evidently permeated her psyche with a simple question: "Is it bringing me joy?" A little-used pair of shoes, my sister's rock collection, a vase I'm fairly certain was a family heirloom—into the dumpster. "It's no longer bringing me joy." My father jokes that any day now my mom is going to squint at him and say the same.

I, too, wanted to simplify, to refine my nebulous notion of what I wanted from my life. When looking back on college, I spent a lot of time in stasis. I couldn't commit to one career, not even to the concept of choosing. My hesitancy to choose stemmed—and still does stem—from fear about my many-headed passions. Popular myth dictates that each human has a tiny flame burning somewhere in their abdominal region, and this represents

their passion, their calling. This flame is very focused, the story goes. It will lead us to one thing to do or be, and this will define us throughout our adulthood.

Children are allowed to blissfully experiment in the process of finding that flame. The relics in my parents' basement constructed the image of a kid who loved soccer, drawing, plant identification, sea critters, and writing. I wrote a lot. There were piles of diaries, essays, some pretty bad poetry (like, pretty bad: think rhyming "love" and "dove"). Looking at this loosely-termed "treasure" trove, it was tempting to think that I'd found my singular burning flame: writing.

Still, I was not a "writer," as in, that was not my identity. Writing brought me joy, sure, but my degree from Gonzaga was in biology, and I identified as more of a mad scientist than a writer. My childhood-self seemed to have a healthy dose of mad scientist as well. While flipping through the diary I'd kept when I was six, I found a section titled "Observations on Rolly-pollies" detailing appearance, behavior, and improbable hypotheses on what this enigmatic insect ate.

Writers and scientists share at least one trait: both are superstitious. There's a lot of poetry about ghosts and how it's "bad luck" to name research animals. As a twenty-one-year-old aspiring scientist and poet, I felt my childhood diary was a tiny, spiral-bound oracle that had foretold my senior year at Gonzaga, which I spent doing the same thing I did when I was six: write about bugs. My senior research paper was a collaboration on stag beetles. The diary had

prophesied me into being here, crouched before a pile of *stuff*, about to spend the summer researching at a marine lab in Florida before beginning a graduate program in poetry writing at the University of Washington in the fall.

The scientist in me, however superstitious, doesn't believe in destiny—in my mind, evolution does that work. Though the path I'd chosen felt like a series of spur-of-the-moment decisions, here was some evidence that my vocation, my calling, had been wired into my DNA in a precise helical pattern. And, it had felt spur-of-the-moment. I committed to Gonzaga on the day before the decision deadline. As an incoming freshman, I picked biology because...I think I liked it in high school? I had never heard of a creative writing graduate degree before October of my senior year.

Off-the-cuff is my style, but I confess, my inability to plan still makes me sweat a little. I fear that despite my love of research, despite the poetry degree, there will come a day when I'll end up living in this very basement of my parents' home, shuffling around the grocery store in a hoodie in the hopes no one I know will recognize failure radiating from me like heat. I fear stasis; my inability to commit will steal any chance I may have for having a career at all, whether that's poet, researcher, or (latest interest?) geneticist. More than my fear of failure or stasis, however, I'm afraid of this: moving through my life in a sort of post-apocalyptic zombie shuffle. Focusing on poetry in this chapter of my life is my small shout against that shuffle.

Now, I write a lot of poetry about bugs. I have to believe



my different passions inform each other, and I'm slowly gathering evidence that they do. Halfway through my first year in the poetry program, I'm working on illustrations to my poems in the hope that the two art forms will compliment each other as a potential manuscript. My more "poetic" interest in family lineage encourages my research interest in genetics. I write down daily observations, a pursuit which not only feeds my writing, but also intensifies my attention to this world. I feel like poetry is teaching me a different language of suggestion, of image, and of communicating.

Many of the people who hear that I'm enrolled in a poetry program ask, and I'm sure not maliciously, but still they ask: "Lots of money in poetry, huh?" or "So you want to teach?" My mom throws things away but keeps what brings her joy. Is the life I'm living bringing me joy?

For me, for now at least, yes. When it no longer does, I hope to, like a moth, follow another of my flames.

# WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?

*Christin Henderson*

It is Christmas break, and I'm a freshman in high school. The past few months, I have had a difficult time trying to make and keep friends. My sister is home from college and is getting ready to go to a high school friend's party. My stomach feels like it has dropped, but I better learn to live this way, because I think I'm stuck. My sister asks me what I'm going to do. Remember when I was five and would graffiti the kitchen table with Dad's shaving cream? She doesn't say anything. I wish I was someone else.

I'm a junior in high school, and on a Friday after track practice my coaches tell me to stay late for a chat. The night before, they ate pizza and talked about how my laziness is spreading to the rest of the team. They ask me what my plan is to change. I'm so mad that suddenly I'm screaming at two grown men. They don't know me. On the drive home, Amy Winehouse's song "Rehab" plays on the radio. I realize I don't know me. I wish I were someone else.

It is the summer after my freshman year of college, and I'm visiting my best friend at UC Berkeley. Since age ten, she thought she wanted to be a doctor, but she is not sure anymore. I think about the short, animated film "You are Special" that I watched as a kid. Why did I not believe

that message? Or, maybe I did, but it was easier to be numb to the responsibility that accompanies that sort of self-belief. And, anyway, isn't that profound self-love supposed to be the piece of the puzzle that will let everything else fall into place? Once you love yourself, you will believe in yourself, and once you believe in yourself, you will have the confidence to pursue your passions. What happens next is inevitable happiness, success, and fulfillment. Simple. Easy. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the movie because it will always end happily ever after.

So why has everything not been working out that way? Because it is too easy to blame your sibling, blame your coaches, blame your best friend for making you feel like a failure. They are the reasons why you sat in a slump for so long, feeling like everyone had "it" figured out except yourself. My real issue was that I was fine with being mysterious, fine with everything passing by, fine with sitting back. I had falsely thought that a vocation was bestowed upon each one of us at an opportune time, along with a complimentary yellow-brick road. On the train ride home from Berkeley, I finally decided what it was I would do. That night I bought two bottles of shaving cream and graffitied the kitchen table.

# TAKE A MOMENT

*Evan Olson*

If you are lounging in a chair in Foley, or Herak, or Crosby with your homework before you—maybe it's in neat stacks, done on the left and to be continued on the right, or maybe it's scattered like you tripped on your way to the table and spewed the contents of your backpack everywhere, or maybe you even have your green engineering paper out alongside a fine mechanical pencil and straight edge ruler and have just learned that for hours you have been drawing diagram 2b. when you should have been drawing 2c. Well, if you are lounging and you have this book open, then the one true thing is that you are not currently doing your homework. I bring this up because, wherever you are, I want to ask you this one question: *Are you doing what you love or are you doing what you are good at?*

This question had been on my mind ever since high school when the administration faith advisor asked me if I wanted to design a poster for the school dance. Inevitably, because apparently nobody else wanted to make advertisements in their spare time, one poster turned into more posters and soon I was making the event posters for student council and for the school. Soon I became the go-to marketing student for, “Hey I just need a quick poster so

do you know a student who can do it for free?" I began volunteering for the school's store and designed t-shirts as well.

In addition to this strange design aspect of my life, I built wood crafts in my parents' tool shop. I call it a tool shop, but, in truth, it was just a miter saw, a couple hammers, and a sander in my parents' basement. I developed how-to videos of these wooden crafts and posted them online for profit. The videos were a hit. The success of the craft videos turned me on to the idea that I was to become an engineer. Here's the important point: at this time in my life, as a sophomore in high school, I thought I had found my vocation as an engineer and someone who dabbles in design. Had I?

No. On my first day of class in college—and I remember it clearly, sitting in the third chair back from the center column of seats and watching the new professor tumble through two pages of Calculus II without so much as a, "Hello, I'm your professor, we're going to have a great year."—I left in a panic, myself arguably sweatier than the professor who had blown through a sickening amount of material. Probably, he had done so as a devious means of weeding out the people like me who weren't, in fact, engineers at heart. Within the hour after that class, I had become an "Undecided Major" in the College of Business with the hope that the few design classes offered there would usher me in my vocational direction. The following day, I would be taking Macroeconomics. I had asked myself, "What was wrong with me?" Engineering was supposed to

be my life, my calling. I could see myself reclining back in a leather chair in a windowed office high above Seattle, my hair garnering a streak of gray, my desk littered with completed engineering designs, the room quiet except for maybe a ticking clock—the clock an employee award I had gotten a few years back for contributing to society in some positive way—and the warm summer sunset outside fading to a cloudless, perfect purple. That was what I saw, and none of it would come true. How naïve I had been.

The truth is, I am not an engineer. I am not a designer either. As the months progressed on my business track, I grew sadder, and sadder. Business was not for me either. As time slipped by, and that narrow window of “You better find your major so you can graduate in four years” tightened, I knew I had to make a choice and stick with it. It was at this point that I asked myself, *Am I doing what I love or am I doing what I am good at?* From high school, I had experience designing posters and t-shirts. Outside of school, I had experience working with wood, with nuts and bolts, with metal and big saws, with the long hours into the night and the sawdust collecting on my arms. I had experience. I had a minor learned proficiency in tasks associated with engineering and design. But, did I love it?

Did I love it? That question hurt me the most. It stung because I knew the answer before I had even stepped foot on Gonzaga’s campus, and I had ignored it. I love telling stories. Throw me into the role that fits my hidden passion and it would be writing, and filmmaking, and art. I had ignored it because I harbored this silly thought that none

of what I loved would economically sustain me, that my passions were unprofitable, and that my survival in society (at that time meaning not living with my parents for a few years after college) depended on doing what I was good at and what earned money. That thought is straight up wrong.

In that daydream of myself at the top of a skyscraper, with me leaning back in that chair at sunset, I know my older self would have been wondering what I could have done with my true passions had I not stifled them. Everything then, every achievement and ticking-clock award would have been a brick on another brick to cover up the vibrant passions I had trapped underneath. That foundation of bricks would either collapse or become too heavy to dismantle.

So, I changed majors. By my sophomore year, I had switched to a double major in Broadcast Media Studies and English with a concentration in writing. I have felt at home with these majors ever since.

*Are you doing what you love or are you doing what you are good at?*

# TO BE WHOLLY OURSELVES

*Ally Clapp*

For a sizable portion of my childhood, I wanted to grow up to become a Wiggle. It was kind of a big dream for a girl who was neither male nor Australian, because along with a solid-colored t-shirt, those seemed to be the only necessary qualifications for Wiggle-dom. Maybe it was a gradual acknowledgement of these facts that caused my dream of joining Greg, Anthony, Murray, and Jeff to fade, but whatever the case, once it did, there went the most concrete answer to the question “What do you want to be when you grow up?” that I would have for a long time.

For a quite awhile, the pressure of “discovering my passion” deflated my ability to determine a future career. Deciding I was not the type to have a vocation was as simple as noting the differences between Steve Jobs and me. While he spent hours teaching himself to code with a kind of fanatical glee, I was content to flit from extracurricular to extracurricular, trying it all, and often enjoying the people I was with more than the activity itself.

I cannot compress my passions into functional, identifiable interests that might look at home on a job application. I wish I was endlessly fascinated with eyes and could profess a call to be an optometrist. Or felt



compelled to spend hours fixing up old cars like a future mechanic. But for me, as for many others, passion cannot be compartmentalized. I am passionate about stories and comedy and theology and typography and old audiobooks and a whole bunch of other stuff that does not make sense together, and certainly not as a career.

If vocation is reserved for Mozarts and Oprahs, or, at the very least, for people who have been saying they are going to be doctors since the age of four, then me and my jumble of interests are not among the chosen; but I do not think it works quite like that. I prefer to think of vocation as something you discover by living rather than by trying a bunch of things out. You happen upon your calling during times when you feel most alive. A quality that is intrinsic to you and your calling might be most noticeable in a moment entirely separate from your job search. Vocation can be stumbled upon amidst a range of interests and talents, victories and failures, characteristics and decisions. If vocation exists at an intersection of passion and talent, each person can have countless encounters with their calling just by looking out for the times when they feel most “themselves.”

When several moments link up, you might find they might lead to some sort of profession—or they might not—but a vocation can be lived out even in the most terrible dead-end job. For we are each being called to be wholly ourselves.

# COFFEE SPOONS

*Fiona Eustace*

## **Can passion and reason seamlessly co-exist in the fostering of a wonderful, fulfilling life?**

From innocent youth to ambivalent young adulthood, an internalized belief lurks; wedged in the corners of my mind is the social conception of the trinity of success: education, job, and marriage. This deeply embedded notion sometimes seems unassailable in the face of passion. When I'm the victim of unwarranted interrogation regarding my potential career plans, I feel the all too familiar melancholic tug of my inner Prufrock, it mindlessly measuring out my life with coffee spoons. On unexpected occasions, when the burdening echo of career plans is tenderly replaced with the comforting ring of passions and curiosities, I feel my inner Wordsworth unabashedly revealing itself, it relishing in the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings—a moment of pure tranquility rooted in true emotion.

Coming to college, I was troubled by the constructed reality that asserts that the arts and sciences are frivolous undergraduate majors for young people trying to achieve success post-graduation. But, as my freshman year progressed, passion slowly began to coexist with my future

plans. My undergrad experience revealed itself as an ideal moment of treasured brevity to pick something I truly love and to embrace the wonderfully frustrating experience it presents; but those narrow corners I often ignore inevitably leak thoughts of skepticism that loom large in my mind, and I presently find myself wondering, can vocation and passion co-exist?

**Perhaps our vocation in life is to uncover the unapologetic, sole existence of genuine passion that unflinchingly surpasses any social interpretation of success.**

For me, this existence is English. I love the profound ability of language to beautifully evoke emotion, the gilded frustration I experience as I fervently try to uncover the ambiguous, isolated words of Ginsberg that sweetly strike my bones, the tender pull I feel in my heart when Eliot subtly reveals, “That is not what I meant at all; That is not it, at all.” When I gaze upon the thoughtful construction of wistful words from Joyce, Fitzgerald, or Keats, I momentarily feel connected to something bigger than the immediacy of my small self and perceive the monotonous simplicity of my everyday life in the distance.

**When I write, I feel driven to lead a life with no boundaries or limits on what is perceived as normal or right.**

Language inevitably prevails as the existential foundation of our human experience. Words mysteriously intertwine with the writer to form an authentic attempt to understand love, sadness, and yearning. Although these feelings are almost certainly indescribable in the realm of our own temporal lives, they somehow become warmly iridescent in my attempt to construct scattered thoughts into platonic expression.

### **Can passion and reason seamlessly co-exist to foster a wonderful, fulfilling life?**

The way of uncovering passion resides in unexpected, sincere moments of revelation. Although these moments possess a sort of profound simplicity, they embody an implicit streak of reassurance that slowly blossoms into a contemplative life that's beautifully unmeasured, sans coffee spoons.

# GREY MATTERS

Finding color in the informal economy of  
North-Western Zambia

*Jeff Dodd*

Jeff Dodd, in his most recent trip to the Zambezi province in Zambia, took care to document the endeavors of a few amazing women. Each of these women possessed entrepreneurial savvy rivaling the likes of Steve Jobs. Unlike Jobs, though, these women were not billionaires, and were almost certainly not pursuing their “passion” in life; they were simply making ends meet. To cease doing business in order to search for their “calling” would mean no income, and, no food. The question, then: How does social class influence one’s vocational pursuits?

The market in Zambezi is a mix of stores and small restaurants with typically African fronts full of color and idiosyncratic aspirations—Modern Man Holdings, for instance, declares its desire to supply “your natural food”: “We Strive for Excellence.” Most of these shops are family-owned and handed down one generation to the next, a security for members of the small middle class in this town named for the river against which it’s settled. Many of these stores carry the same stock: packaged food like oatmeal and biscuits, cheap housewares from China or Dubai, sodas and candy, and on a good day, apples from South Africa’s Elgin Valley.

The shop owners represent a fraction of the market’s

merchants. The large majority of owners rent stalls of varying sizes for varying lengths of time. Some are established spaces in a designated commercial area covered by corrugated iron. Many others, less costly and less permanent, are little more than a tabletop and stool provided by the vendor and set up on the roadside. Those with means might lash a tarp across four posts for a little relief from the sun. The most meager spots are simple blankets laid out on the sand and covered with whatever the seller might offer. These vendors tend to trade in products both less regular and less regulated than the stores': recycled cooking oil; roasted ground nuts; small bunches of sweet bush bananas and ripe tomatoes; dried fish; bundles of castoff clothing from developed countries. This is the kind of place that 5-K finishers' t-shirts end up after they're donated to the thrift shop.

It's also the type of place with unspoken rules. Merchants offer *mbasela*, a little lagniappe thrown on top of a purchase in the form of an extra measure of dried beans or a couple of free oranges that function both as a thank you and an enticement to remember a particular seller in the future. Buyers are expected to share their wealth. No one does all of her shopping with one merchant. Communitarian principles run deep, and a person with money to spend is expected to support as many friends and family as she can. Two bunches of tomatoes bought here. A few kwacha spent there. Onions and eggplant from the woman by the broken-down billboard. This is the don't-spend-it-all-at-once advice your grandpa gave you with an ethical eye out for those around you.

The market center and the buses that arrive and leave daily for Solwezi and Lusaka are nearly the extent of the formal economy of the Zambezi District and its 90,000 residents in the remote and poor outlying reaches of Zambia's North-Western Province. There are small shops in outlying villages, and a handful of guesthouses and mechanics, but for most residents going about their daily lives the Zambezi market is the formal economy.

And it's the best place to begin learning about the informal, grey economy.

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Katendi arrives on the afternoon bus from Solwezi. She pays a couple of boys a few kwacha each to help with her cargo. There's no limit on baggage; if you can carry it, you can carry it. And Katendi has carried a lot from her current home in Mufulira to her ancestral home in Zambezi. Aside from enough personal belongings for a month and a few gifts for friends and family, she has a 25-kilogram bag of potatoes, 10 kilograms of link sausages, and half a bushel each of onions and tomatoes. In each case, she will make a profit selling goods that are unavailable or expensive for her seasonal employer in Zambezi but readily available to her in Mufulira. She'll be in Zambezi for a month, during which her contract will pay fairly for cooking and housekeeping services, but she'll start in the black by turning a profit on day one.

A week later she's asked her employer for an advance against her pay and is back in the market. She's been tipped

off to a roadside vendor selling chikanda, an orchid tuber the size of new potatoes. It's used to make a regional delicacy called polony, which has the look and feel of a soft bologna but is vegetarian. The tubers are cooked tender and mashed with chilis and groundnuts to make a flavorful, protein-rich meat substitute. Katendi's here to buy the vendor's entire stock, about 10 kilograms.

"I can sell this in Solwezi for three times the price," she explains with a satisfied smile, "and I'll sell it all in less than an hour."

In her spare time, she hawks the colorful bags she makes late at night in Mufulira and sells at a significant profit in Zambezi.

On a weekend trip to Chitokoloki she buys 150-kwacha worth of dried bush meat. The obvious whiff of rot consigns the bundle to the roof for the ride home and masks its practical value. "Maybe 300 kwacha in Mufulira."

Katendi's eye for profit is undeniable. She's got the legendary drive of capitalist success stories the world over, and seven children with a man who abandoned her two years ago.

For her, the grey economy of buying and reselling unregulated goods is not a mere pastime or natural aptitude. It's a necessity. While the shop owners in Zambezi sell mostly the same products, Katendi's ability to match a unique product to a profitable market is a wonder to witness. It's also what helps her pay rent and her kids' school fees.



Her legs afflicted by what appears to be an advanced case of muscular dystrophy, Edith walks with the aid of well-worn forearm crutches. The cuffs are stretched wide from years of supporting a middle-aged woman in the shifting sands of this flood plain.

She lives in Chingolala, a bedroom community to Zambezi that goes unnamed on google maps but is a very real warren of thatch-roofed family compounds hubbed around a couple of community water pumps.

Edith fills her little bit of spare time weaving baskets. She begins with a sheaf of grass from the flood plain along the river's eastern shore. The children in her compound collect the ubiquitous and colorful plastic shopping bags that end up strewn along the labyrinth of footpaths around Zambezi, and one of her sons tears them into strips a centimeter or two wide. Edith clutches five or six shoots of grass tightly and wraps them in plastic, cinching the roll tighter as she goes. A cord of three strands and all.

As she wraps grass in plastic, she curves the cord into a circle. When the curve overtakes itself to form a circle, she binds it with thread from deconstructed rice and maize bags. A few inches of metal repurposed from a broken umbrella make a sturdy needle.

In this way, wrapping and binding, Edith makes small coiled baskets with lids, and colorful pads that hold hot pans or decorate a table. In this way, a woman who struggles to move freely around her own compound, makes

an affordable product that was previously unavailable in the central market. Plastic storage bins have not yet arrived in much of the Zambezi district, so many of Edith's customers use the lidded baskets to store ground maize used to make the polenta-like staple *nshima*. Her most expensive basket sells for 40 kwacha (about \$5.50), her least expensive product is 10 kwacha, and in this way she provides a useful and decorative product at an affordable price.

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From the tiny village of Kalundyola, children walk 10 kilometers each way to the nearest bush school. The paved road, for what good it does these villagers, is 45 kilometers away. There is a borehole well that likely saves a few people each year from crocodile attacks while getting water, but this is about as remote and challenging a life as might be found in Zambia. As difficult as life in Kalundyola may be, its residents have two things going for them: geography and entrepreneurial creativity.

Kalundyola is settled into the "V" created by the confluence of the Kabompo and Zambezi rivers. Because of this location, it's home to abundant and sustainable quantities of a broad-leafed brush less readily accessible elsewhere in the region. Local women use these leaves in a way similar to Edith's plastic bags in Chingolala: wrapped tightly around a core of several strands of a thin hollow-stem species. Unlike the more rigid reeds that are split and woven to make the stiffer traditional basket common in the northern part of the Zambezi district, the grass available

around Kalundyola allows the women here to create a more tightly woven basket with a more nuanced curvature to its body.

The women of Kalundyola also have access to a vivid orchil-like purple dye that the grass holds well and that distinguishes these baskets from any others in Zambia. Access to these resources, and the knowledge of women who know how to use them, also allows these families to earn a little money. Travelers taking the sandy D293 “River Road” between Zambezi and Lukulu will regularly stop off in Kalundyola to purchase these baskets, seeking their expert construction and unique appearance. They’ve found a way to transact on a distinct heritage and rare commodities. To supplement the income they get from their own products, they’ll also sell small sheafs of the local grass to experienced craftswomen for use in their own projects.

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Zambezi has two fuel stations. In the rare event that a truck arrives to fill the supply tanks, cars line up hoping to be one of the few to top off. Most will be out of luck and left to fill their tanks elsewhere or wait for the next tanker. A long-time missionary has an old pump but says he hasn’t ordered fuel for it since before he took his wife to South Africa several years ago for cancer treatment.

Some of those out-of-luck drivers will end up at a pair of squat homes just off the M8 road that connects Zambezi to Solwezi 500 kilometers away. The place is home to 29-year-old Dilis and her younger sister, Precious, 20. Though

Dilis is clearly in charge, Precious is an active part of the operation. They are both present, along with two teenage boys visiting from out of town, one day when a Land Cruiser arrives.

The women charge 150 kwacha for 20 liters of diesel, slightly less than the fuel stations would charge if they had anything to offer. The driver says his fuel indicator doesn't work but figures he needs a hundred liters, and the boys follow Precious into one of the two homes. Dilis retrieves a one-liter plastic bottle that's had the bottom cut off and been wrapped in a length of nylon stocking. Precious and the boys return carrying 20-liter jugs, the original cooking oil labels still clinging to the sides.

The boys insist on hefting the big jugs, tentatively pouring diesel fuel into the liter bottle held as a filtering funnel in the rig's filler neck. This is clearly a show of bravado, and undercut by the deliberate pace of their work, and the overflowed main tank. After that mess is cleaned and the remaining fuel is slowly poured into the auxiliary, the driver asks for another 20 liters.

Dilis, tired of the boys' dallying, goes to the home herself. In seconds she's back at the vehicle, hoisting the jug and draining all 20 liters in one steady stream that takes about 40 seconds. One of the boys makes a quick crack in Lunda and everyone breaks into laughter. The world over, no matter the language, people know when a woman has shamed a proud man.

The sisters keep between 300 and 400 liters of fuel in their home at any given time. As their supply diminishes,

they deposit money into a Zanaco Bank account. A man in Solwezi then arranges to load a lorry with jugs bound for an otherwise indistinct home on the side of a road in Zambezi.

A few days later a driver arrives when Dilis is home alone. She manages the transaction herself without much idle talk, pouring the fuel while the driver handles the funnel. Business and work complete, she says to the driver, “you’ll come wash your hands,” and tenderly pumps soap onto his palms and pours water from a pitcher as he scrubs. When he finishes he reaches for the pitcher to repay this little tenderness.

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The national staple dish of Zambia, *nshima*, is made from a fine maize flour that is stirred as it absorbs water until the resulting mush is scooped with a paddle and shaped into large single-serving ovals. A typical Zambian meal might be *ifisashi*—cassava or sweet potato greens stewed with tomatoes and groundnuts—and *nshima*. A nice alternative might be dried fish, boiled briefly then fried, served on a bed of greens, and *nshima*. If a guest is expected, convention suggests that guest might be eating chicken, lightly fried and presented with a gravy, and *nshima*. The *nshima*, like *garri* and *ugali* and *fufu* and dozens of similar variations across the continent, is formed in the hand and used as an eating utensil.

While *nshima* is often made from pounded cassava in parts of Zambia, the more popular (and many believe the more palatable) version is maize. In the larger cities,

supermarket chains like Spar and Shoprite devote aisles to the maize meal, which is sold in fine, medium, and course grinds, and in specific blends tailored to the mealtime of intended consumption. The FAO estimates that maize, propped up by the consumption of nshima and a popular fermented corn drink, makes up 90% of Zambia's cereal grain production.

Unsurprisingly, most farmers in the North-Western Province with extra land would grow as much maize and cassava as they could sell in the local markets, but the people in Kalundyola know a few things about economic principles of scarcity. The women who tend these fields grow only subsistence quantities of crops so plentiful elsewhere. Instead they tend crops of millet and sorghum, undeterred by the lack of a local market for these commodities in their own province. As harvest time rolls around, the women in the fields of Kalundyola will be confident because trucks from the Democratic Republic of Congo will be rattling their way south, eager to take these staple crops to black market vendors there, and ultimately to eager Congolese women earnestly trying to provide for their own families.

And that's the nib of the grey economy in one of the poorest regions of Zambia. The formal sector is largely controlled by men who compete with the same products sold at the same prices. Frankly, much unregulated trade suffers the same problem. While centuries of economic theory validates specialization and the valuable function of scarcity, poor Zambians around this region sit behind tables of tomatoes or bananas or oranges and next to a poor

neighbor behind a table of tomatoes or bananas or peppers who sits next to a poor neighbor behind a table.... And so on.

However, much of the vibrancy in Zambia's grey economy comes from women who don't necessarily want a documented business and aren't interested in supply chains or production cycles or mimicry. That vibrancy comes from women who are able to see what's uniquely available to them in a given moment or environment and to match it to the markets they can access, from women whose ability to see their lives and work outside of sanction allows them to construct a kind of pied economy. From women who see a pile of orchid tubers and see not just a lunch treat but school for a young son, from women who see in a fuel shortage a way to meet a pressing community need while securing their own livelihood, from women who see a plastic bag and pull from within it a future for their families.

# BE WHAT YOU ARE

*Alex Baker*

There are all kinds of writers in the world. Some research for years and years, studying court cases, animal species, or the layout of a city. I have no idea how they do it. I imagine that if I were like them, I would have a room dedicated to the art of research. My notes would flood the room, climbing up the walls, making homes in stacks on the desk and floor. There are writers who know their ending before their beginning. They are working towards a specific goal. I am sure there are countless more writers that follow similar paths, meticulously fact checking and researching, and diving deep into their experiences to produce a viable story. Then, there is me.

I do not just like to write. I do not just like to tell stories. No. I *am* a writer. I *need* to write. I must share my stories. This desire is found deep within my core. True, I don't write constantly, because I don't always have something to say. When I encourage myself to write based on a forced idea, my work feels contrived and inauthentic. Rather, when I sit and wait for the idea to arrive it presents itself with grace and dignity, holds out its hand to me and asks me to grasp it.

But, mostly, it is not something that I have forced of my own volition. Instead, ideas find me. I'll be daydreaming



about a moment, or driving in the car and glance in the rearview mirror, and the moment will become an image that needs to be more defined until it's no longer my memory but an idea. These ideas, like a poem about the way the light looks on the mountains, or a story about a boy struggling with his father's mortality, come to me and ravage me, pulling the wind out of my lungs, sliding through my heart and piercing my brain. When I don't listen, they send the words into my throat to suffocate me until I get them out. I don't understand why this happens to me, and it sounds insane, but, I feel the words within me. Sometimes they are kind to me and wait. Other times they bubble out of me, and if I don't grasp them, and smash them to paper, they disappear looking for another creative outlet.

My calling to write must be my vocation. It is not something that I have found, nor is it something that presented itself to me. It just was. If I was called to be a writer, then I have begrudgingly—and through much trial and error—answered. When I first began my college career, arguably the beginning of “finding yourself,” I pushed writing to the backburner. Oh, “it is just a passion. A *hobby*. Something I love, but not something that I could build into a career.” So, I avoided it. I doubted the call, the power, and the existence of such a passion. Because, for me, I didn't understand that passions and hobbies could translate into careers. It seemed too easy.

How do we translate our passions and hobbies into careers? Are we designed to avoid the crossover, to categorize

our talents and skills into ones set for self-pleasure and others for societal contributions? I love writing; yet, it feels like I can only love it, call it a hobby or a passion but not a career. How can writing become more than just for me? If it cannot translate to society, then I must abandon it and look toward another way to serve. That is how searching for a career feels, as though I have to abandon what I love and cash in on what I am good at, a viable skill that lends itself to a successful career. But, how much longer can I ignore being called to write, to contribute and thrive within a community that will, hopefully, benefit from my gifts, my sharing, from me answering the call?

What is vocation but a form of our passions? Vocation encompasses the malleable skills we cultivate by constantly committing to and accepting our talents, by pressuring ourselves to be better, by continuing what makes us feel good, and by doing what makes us who we are destined to be. Our careers—future, past, and present—are nothing more than a melting pot of revelations, watching and waiting to be recognized in their value and worth.

Do we dare argue against such facts? Yes. It is easy to brush our passions off as nothing more than frivolous activities to satisfy ourselves. But, if we refuse to give our passions the credit they deserve, we would not be recognizing and accepting our true calling: to follow the natural inclination we feel to entertain, to satisfy, to enjoy the life that breathes into us and asks us to be better. For me, it is writing. I am a writer. I have found that calling, and now I must go forth and utilize it, bribe my skills, cultivate

my wonders, and share it with the world. For you, whatever it may be, know that you already have it. It is there waiting to be discovered, to flourish. So, step forward, and thrive.

# I CHANGED MY MIND

*Meg Arnold*

Family gatherings always lead to the same dreaded conversations that make every college-aged adult cringe: “So, when are you going to be done with school? What’s your major now? What are you going to do with that?” Nearing the end of five years of higher education, I finally have some answers: I’m graduating in May, with a B.A. in English, and I want to write. Eyebrows always rise higher and higher with each answer. “Are you sure about that? Do you have a backup plan?” And, always the underlying, unasked question: “Are you sure you’re not going to change your mind again?”

The answer to these questions is that I’m not sure. I’m not sure about my future, and I never have been. When I was 18, I was told to pick a career path and choose a university that would train me for that path. I picked music. To friends and family, it seemed as though I deliberately turned to community college to pursue a music tech degree. Internally, I had panicked and put my finger on my current interest of music recording, a field that sounded wildly interesting, but one I knew nothing about. As I explained to friends and family what my next two years at Shoreline Community College would look like, I found myself excited but unattached. I had a plan, but I could not

envision myself at the end goal. I told myself that was okay, and that I would see myself there as I got closer.

An Associates of Arts is intended to take two years to complete. I took three. I changed my mind on a yearly, sometimes twice yearly basis as I found myself increasingly dissatisfied with what my future was going to look like.

I discovered early on that the music recording life was not my cup of tea: too many computers, too many cables, and not enough making of music. I joined the school choir on a whim, and rediscovered my love of singing. Music had seemed like an obvious choice to me. Despite having not taken many music classes in high school, I was a decent singer, and with two years of voice lessons and choir under my belt, I became a good one. I admired our choral director, and thought that my love of music and singing in a choir might count as a calling. But, even as I progressed in my ability, reading and writing music never came easily to me. I was constantly fatigued by the mental work I put myself through to keep up with my music theory classes, and still only barely passed.

I told myself that I could do it though, and, in my third and final year of community college, I applied to multiple universities with a music education degree in mind. Gonzaga University became my first choice, and I still count opening my acceptance letter as one of the best moments in my life.

My last quarter at SCC flew by, except for one class: short story writing.

I left Shoreline Community College with an A.A.

degree and an awakened passion for writing, and a future in music that I suddenly wasn't sure I wanted. I spent the summer dithering, torn between finally reaching a decision and exploring an exciting new path. Right before classes started, I drove six hours from Seattle to Spokane, walked into the advising office, and requested a degree change. I still wonder if it was luck or fate that I chose a school with both the music education degree I thought I needed and the writing concentration that I truly wanted. Yet, I was still reluctant to settle. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, I still told everyone that I was planning on doing something with music, or education, or maybe English, never stating one solid preference. It wasn't until my second semester in a creative non-fiction class that I really felt like I had made the right decision.

It was by no means an immediate realization. I never woke up suddenly, knowing in my heart where I belonged. I settled into it slowly, one tiny inch at a time, until I was finally able to relax. I don't feel called or driven to write; I just feel a warm sense of contentment when I pick up a pen or edit through my drafts. And, at Thanksgiving this year, when the conversation turned to me and inevitably came around to life after graduation, I smiled at my family confidently and told them, "I'm going to write."

# DEFINING VOCATION

*Kailee Haong*

Vocation is defined as “a strong desire to spend your life doing a certain kind of work.” Nevertheless, it is also important to note that this definition does include, in parentheses, a religious connotation to the word. Perhaps for those who are practicing a religion, or perhaps for those who were raised in a religion, but maybe only slightly follow it today, vocation could be considered God’s “calling” for what you or anyone else should do.

Growing up in a religious home, I was indoctrinated with that monotonous mantra “God’s got a plan for you!” usually sang in upbeat worship music, chanted like some sort of battle cry, or repeated over and over again by an overly cheery Sunday-school teacher. While this refrain was often used to reassure me that it’s okay to not know where I’m going in life, the utter ambiguity and lack of direction I felt could not be stifled by this supposedly calming phrase. For me, repeating “God’s got a plan for you” every day most certainly did *not* show me the plan. This is where I first began to disassociate the idea of vocation with the idea of religion.

## **Gettin' lost, figuring it out, and realism**

While the Sunday-school teachers kept on week after week, I had to have something a little bit more concrete. More tangible. Less vague and lofty and religious and hopeful. I figured it was high time I made a plan for myself, rather than wandering around aimlessly hoping that I might be fulfilling the plan that was supposedly already laid out for me that I had no idea about. I stopped practicing religion. I did so not solely because I was irritated with not having access to God's "plan" for me, but also because of the volatility of some figures in my church, my newly acquired scientific knowledge, and personal opinion. Most of the time, you hear of people feeling lost and then finding themselves in a religion. I was lost in religion and have thus found myself in individualism and realism.

### **So, what's your calling, then?**

I entered my freshman year of college as a biology major. Throughout high school, I felt strongly swayed by the sciences and the idea of helping people, curing diseases, and preventing other illness, but what was the likelihood of that happening, honestly? Don't worry, I figure that out later in my story, so let's backtrack for now. Science fascinated me; it captivated me and pulled my attention, because in high school, dissecting things was just a little bit more interesting than learning about World War II for the thirteenth time.

I'm an easily inspired person. Many of my science



teachers in high school had accomplished great things—or at least had cool stories to tell—and that’s what I believe drove some of my desires to study science. I saw real people doing real, interesting things, and I wanted to follow suit. And, that’s what I did, at least for a while. I went through the motions, I struggled through my introductory science classes—and I managed to pull Bs and Cs. Hey, at least those are passing grades.

### **Sounds like a decent plan, what happened?**

Two words: organic chemistry. Cue scary movie music. While many of my friends also struggled through it, I gave it about a week and a half before deciding I never wanted to see another diagram of a molecule again.

When I decided to change my major to English, I had a moment that was very similar to the moment I had when I decided to stop practicing religion. A moment of clarity or realism, if you will. I felt once again that my life had a little bit more direction, and that I actually understood (or realized) my plan. The Fs on my quizzes in organic chemistry were definitely a sign that science wasn’t my calling, but that’s okay. I know the rest of my friends who have successfully completed all of the organic chemistry requirements will do absolutely incredible out there. It just isn’t for me. Not my “calling.”

## **Moving forward, looking up**

I come bearing good news: I'm still an English major. And, since I'm in my third year, I'm pretty confident it's going to stay that way. It's enlightening, allowing yourself to pursue something you wouldn't allow yourself to pursue before. It's a breath of fresh air, really. I feel completely at home in my English courses, and though they have been some of the hardest courses I've taken, the challenge is worth the extensive knowledge I'm gaining on such a wide array of subjects. Nerdy excitement aside, I'm pretty certain I'm in the right place. I'm pretty certain English is my vocation, my "calling."

## **Redefining the concept**

Vocational callings need not be religiously affiliated. Your calling can come from God, it can come from fate, karma, family, friends, yourself—anything. While the vast array of options may seem daunting or intimidating, it's important to always stay curious, stay open, and to never close yourself off to the myriad options out there. Your calling could come as a child, it could come as a teen, a young adult, in the midst of your mid-life crisis, maybe not even until you're much too old to change the course of your life. Regardless of this, I say always go with your gut. It usually will lead you in the right direction. And, if it doesn't? Roll with it. You can't possibly get *everything* in life perfect.



# CHARTER

***Gonzaga's Journal of Scholarship & Opinion***

Thank you to the faculty, staff, students, and alumni who have supported the Charter Staff in this year's endeavor of discussing vocation. We express the greatest gratitude and appreciation.

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