

Alexander Karadjian
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"The Art of Being Yourself"

Good evening, everybody!

Let me begin with a favorite quote by the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne: "The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to yourself."

Since my freshman year at Harvard I have always wondered how and why does it happen that so many undergraduates here study Government and Economics. Out of about 1 600 graduating in 2009, 1 165 concentrated in one of these fields, while the number in 2008 was 1 219. What were these people thinking? My question is whether the academic choices of these students were personal or there were additional factors that influenced them. I am sure that a small part of these students chose what they really wanted to do and I congratulate them on their choice, but what about the rest? I realize that many parents have very ambitious expectations about their children at Harvard and always direct them to disciplines guaranteeing higher profits and social status. This is wise, but in way sad. Aren't we living our own lives? And can't a biologist or an artist also be a well-off and respected professional? It is also true that for many students it is hard to decide what they really want to study. And when there is no clear solution, they choose the path of least resistance. They simply do what the majority does – in most cases they concentrate in Government or Economics. It seems difficult to know what you really want to do. It is even harder to really do it. Yet, I believe it is worth doing it!

I want to be an architect. My passion for that is a result of an encounter with the beauty of the Italian Renaissance architecture combined with a seven-year long art education and deep interest in mathematics and physics. That is why I have already started my Master's degree at the Graduate School of Design. Financially, this is not an easy choice bearing in mind that I have to go through a long and tiring 3.5-year degree and start working for an annual salary of \$ 45 000. It is hard to make such a decision, but I will do it, since I cannot imagine our world without the beauty of various gracious inhabitable built forms. I always pay attention to the ornaments embellishing every column or freeze of the Victorian houses in Cambridge. Last but not least, I am intrigued by questions such as how Michelangelo, Raphael and Bernini dared to create the masterpiece of St. Peter's in Rome at a time when there were no cranes or reinforced concrete. This is who I am and that is how I see the world. You probably see it in another way and find different questions compelling. That is why you have chosen different career paths.

It is probably too idealistic, but I really believe that I can be of greatest benefit to society as an architect. At the same time, however, I will be of greatest benefit to myself as an architect, because I will devote my time to what I enjoy doing for the rest of my life. The idea of doing something that you do not enjoy for years is really frightening, even if this thing is highly profitable. Many people believe that they could become rich until the age of 35, and then they could do what they are really passionate about. But what is to be gained by postponing our passions? At the age of 35 very few of us will return to school for a Master's in a field unrelated to what we have been doing, and none of us will ever return as a student to the intellectually provoking atmosphere at Harvard College. At the end, may be no further education would be necessary, but still, would we have the skills necessary at 35 to compete

with those who have become masters in their respective fields? Probably not, and this would be quite discouraging, especially for a rich person who has been successful in his previous career endeavors. Then what's the solution?

I believe that we should try and work what we enjoy now, since later may be too late. At the end, we were accepted to Harvard since we have been passionate about and almost exceptional at doing at least one thing, which means that this one thing is always a career option. I know that most of us here are smart enough to be as good professors in Classics as political leaders, but what is really the thing we could be best at? During the communist regime back in Bulgaria my grandparents were invited to join the party, which would have ensured them a wealthy life, but they knew that they wanted to work as pharmacists and did not renounce their professional choices. Now the communist regime is over, the past members of the communist party are socially neglected, while my grandparents still work in their pharmacies and enjoy what they are doing. Times change, statuses of professions also do, more so than our passions. My grandparents were brave enough to follow their hearts and to be themselves, and I will follow their example.

We all have passions and we should realize how fortunate we are to have them. Think about this and do not forget that "The greatest thing in the world is to know how to belong to yourself."