

The Importance of Being Frank

by Julian Salazar

There's these two guys, Rich and Ernest, and they were both Harvard students. Now, dear audience, I have one question for you today, one to keep in mind: who would you rather be? Rich or Ernest? Who would you rather be?

Let's start with Rich. Rich's full name is actually Richardson Spencer-Churchill the III, Junior. He comes from a long line of Richardson Spencer-Churchills, starting with the distinguished Richardson Spencer-Churchill the I, Esq. Like a good son, he tells his father that he'd love to study government and law, so that he may follow in the family's footsteps. His father asks him, "Oxford or Cambridge?" Rich says, "Cambridge. Massachusetts."

His father grudgingly accepts. Rich is elated. Rich becomes a student at Harvard, studying government. He takes three easy classes every semester and is a member of the Porcellian—but he never hangs out there. He's always out at night, especially during the weekends. His classmates thought he was a well-connected slacker. His friends thought he was partying with cooler, wealthier people than them. Have I sufficiently stereotyped him yet?

Well, let me finish. In his free afternoons, Rich, under the alias Frank, takes classes at the Berklee College of Music. On weekend nights, he is the lead guitarist of the post-punk, neo-nu-metal band Sklaärgshden (that's with an umlaut on the second 'a'). Frank lives in fear that his father will find out he's not partying or networking like all college students of good stock were supposed to.

Sklaärgshden's first single, "Drunk in the Valley of Death," earns them a cult following in Europe. Rich, that is, Frank, silently takes the semester off to go on tour, a tour financed by his father's "tuition payments." One of their shows is in a dingy Lancashire pub. His father, a closet, post-punk, neo-nu-metal fan, is in the crowd. Rich and his father are astounded to see each other.

Richardson Spencer-Churchill the III, Senior, is angry, not about Sklaärgshden, but about being deceived. He revokes Rich's trust fund. The dream is over.

Now, let's talk about Ernest. Ernest is a hard-working, intense student. International Math Olympiad champion, published cancer researcher, and spelling bee winner. He sees that his fellow math competitors, high school scientistas, and spelling bee finalists were all going to Harvard, so he thinks he should too.

Ernest takes Math 56, a class they'd offered his year, just for him. He takes hard courses, graduate courses, six courses, under the support and pressure of his friend group of former academic competition winners. Scoffing at athletes and history majors alike, he is the bedrock of a pretentious, academic mini-elite. Have I sufficiently stereotyped him yet?

Well, let me finish. Secretly, all Ernest wants to do is curling. Since Harvard doesn't have a curling club, he uses his Intel prize money to buy a car and drive to Broomstone's Curling every night, in Wayland, Massachusetts. Under the name Frank, he plays and trains from 5pm to 2am, after which he returns to campus and works on p-sets until dawn, helping out his friends in the substantially easier Math 55. If you're ever in Lowell D-Hall at 3am, he's probably there.

See, Ernest, I mean Frank, is really good. He can mathematically account for the coefficients of friction and restitution on the fly, with the precision of a math competitor and the lookup time of a spelling bee champion. He is Olympic-level; after all, he's just competing for a

spot on *America's* curling team (and I can say that because I'm Canadian). But the qualifiers for the upcoming Winter Olympics are in freshman May, in Seattle. Ernest, I mean, Frank, has finals. He can't just back out from acing the Math 56 test, or the tests for the other classes he'd been duped into taking, or take time off. What would his friends think if he wasn't in the exam room? He is a stone's throw away, literally, from being an Olympian. But he doesn't go.

Now he's just a software engineer. At Yahoo. He never curls again. The dream is over.

So, here's that question again: who or what, would you rather be? Rich or Ernest?

Now I'll give you my perspective. I've been Rich. You've all been Rich. We often forget the extraordinary privilege we hold. Making big shows about the price of this or that, forgetting that it's a minute fraction of what it costs to go here. If I choose to go partying every weekend, or let my grade slide in one or two or seven classes, I know the word Harvard in my degree will assure me a life of relative comfort that some Americans will never have.

I've also been Ernest. You've all been Ernest. Working with intense conviction on difficult, oddball things to impress friends and further self-serving agendas. As a math/CS major, I've complained about the big tech companies I didn't get offers from, and even suggested that my peers are more able than the students in other disciplines.

I'm sorry, everyone. For all this, and because I've lied. I don't *really* care who you'd rather be. Instead, I want to know: who would *I* rather be? Rich or Ernest?

The answer is: neither. I'd rather be Frank.

I'd rather be Frank.

To others. And to myself.