

Memorial, Korea and Back

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My experience as a graduate of Memorial University of Newfoundland has been varied but mostly positive. In 2006 I completed a BA in Political Science/English with hopes of getting a job with the Newfoundland and Labrador or Canadian government. I was pretty open minded about future employment prospects and applied for jobs in organizations ranging from Canadian Border Services to The Rooms. For about two years after graduation I applied for job after job and wrote entrance test after entrance test with absolutely no calls or interviews. In the meantime I did what many recent arts graduate are forced to do; I found monetary sustenance through working service industry jobs such as bartending or serving tables at restaurants. This disheartening period of my life led me to look outside the province, and indeed the country.

My next step was to apply for a working holiday visa in the UK, which over the course of a few months I was granted. I then moved off to London where I promptly found a bartending job which provided much higher pay than anything I had found in Canada. I did this for six months until I had a satisfactory amount of money to travel throughout western Europe. Once the money was gone I returned to Newfoundland with hopes of going back to further my education.

Throughout the winter of 2008 I completed two certificates at Memorial University, one in Public Administration and another in Criminology. I thought that having those certificates would help me in finding a job within the provincial or federal bureaucracies. As was the case after my undergraduate degree, I still struggled to gain any ground on finding a job through the impersonal channels of applying for such jobs online through the government hiring process. Once again disheartened and this time even further in debt, my eyes once again looked overseas.

In the fall of 2008 I left Newfoundland once again to go teach English as a second language in Seoul, South Korea. I had known several people who had done this after years of struggling to find work at home and I was open to the idea of a new international experience that paid well, had reasonable work hours, and multiple benefits. Over the course of my one-year contract I had one of the best life experiences I have had to date and found that teaching was something that came naturally to me. I would have never been hired as an ESL teacher unless I had a university degree so for the first time I began to feel that there was some value in my MUN education. Once I returned home in the fall of 2009 I knew what my plan was going to be.

In September of 2010 I began my Bachelor of Education (Intermediate/Secondary) at Memorial University. Throughout that year I worked part time in the service industry even while doing my full time unpaid internship. Near the end of the degree I began searching intensely for any teaching job I could find. Unlike most of my classmates that year who were unwilling to leave the St. John's area, I was open to moving to a rural town and applied for such jobs. Eventually in late August I was called for an interview to teach music (which was not my teachable) in Burgeo on the south-west coast. My teachables were actually Social Studies and English but some music experience on my resume landed me the interview which must have gone well given that they offered me the job. In September of 2011 I began my first ever job as a true professional.

I taught on a replacement in Burgeo for my first year teaching classroom music to students in that town but also by video conferencing in the nearby towns of Ramea, Francois, and Grey River. This was a truly unique experience and I generally enjoyed it and felt fulfilled. Once the year was over the woman I was replacing decided not to come back and I was offered the job on a term by term basis. I decided to go back for one more year to get the necessary two years experience to go on and complete my masters degree.

I am now in my first semester of completing my graduate degree in Educational Administration and Leadership at Memorial University and I find myself thinking that this will perhaps be my last degree completed at MUN. That is not to say that I will not pursue further university education throughout my life, but I am confident that five programs at one university is probably enough. My plan once I finish this graduate degree is to look for new opportunities both in and out of the province. I am currently considering Calgary because I have many connections and friends there. However, I will also consider international opportunities.

Though the future is again somewhat uncertain for me I do not feel as hopeless as I did back in the anxiety-filled years directly after my undergraduate degree. Generally, I have no regrets about my time spent at Memorial. However, I do find myself recommending international experiences to recent graduates who are struggling to find work because my year of teaching in Korea seems almost as much a part of my education as my actual degrees. It is unfortunate that many graduates at MUN cannot get the immediate experience they need in Newfoundland and Labrador.