

# 'Let's not be a nation of spectators'

BY DAVID MCCULLOUGH, 2002 COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER

President Marshall, distinguished trustees, distinguished members of the faculty, parents, friends of Wheaton College, members of the Class of 2002. The great Class of 2002.

I am not, alas, speechless. I'm Irish, and we are not known for being speechless. You and I and all of us live in a land abundant with choices. No people in history have ever had so many choices in everything. In what we read, in what we eat, what we do, where we go, what we think, how we worship, what we plan and build for the future.

Do you realize, for example, that every time you go into a grocery store—a modern supermarket—there are 30,000 items to choose from. The ultimate cornucopia, if you will. There are 318 models of light trucks and cars to choose from when you decide how you are going to get around. Go into any one of the giant bookstores that are everywhere today and there are about 150,000 titles on the shelves. You choose.

Turn on the television set and in most households everywhere in the country there are an average of no less than 74 channels to choose from. And how about the ways that you can pick to make a living? Had you lived in the old times, had you lived, let's say, in the crucial year of 1776, you would have had the choice, if you were educated, of maybe being a lawyer, a doctor or a preacher. If



uneducated, a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker.

All told, there were 80 vocations to choose from, if you were a man.

Today, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, there are no less than 822 specific vocations to choose from in this land and that's just the beginning, because all these definitions of voca-

tion include a substrate of various elements within the discipline within the vocation. You have a choice of work, you have a choice in the way that you love. You can choose work you love, you can choose a partner you love, you can choose where you go, how you go, when you go.

In a way you might say that life is the ultimate multiple-choice test. At Wheaton you have had 25 departments of study to choose from. That's hardly a patch on what's in store for you now.

I would like to suggest some choices. I suggest you choose to do work you love. I suggest you remain students all your lives. If there is a highway, if there is a road to take in the pursuit of happiness, that's the one. From all that I have experienced, from all that I know, that's the path to follow. If you have 74 channels to choose from, there is another choice you have, and that's the choice to turn the thing off.

Let's not be a nation of spectators. Let's be builders. Let's build your own library, for example. Read, read, read history. By all the surveys, alas, you know too little history, but you can begin now.

At my graduation my aunt gave me a book about the Civil War, a book by Bruce Catton called *A Stillness at Appomattox*. I never read a book like that and it changed me. Books can change you and the book that will change you the most, if I'm any judge, you haven't read yet. Let's choose to help those who haven't gotten the choice you have, those who have little or no choice.

Let's not forget all we have been given and that obligations go with the privilege of education and advantage. Let's choose to help the sick and the aged and the afflicted and the illiterate. How much choice does one have who's dying of AIDS? How much choice does an uneducated, single mother of two children working in a convenience store have? How much choice does anyone have who can't read? And the illiteracy rate in Massachusetts today, disgracefully, is higher than it was in the 18th century.

Let's not forget we are at war and that our

