

When Debbie called and asked me to speak today, I wasn't quite sure what to say. It wasn't long ago that I was sitting where you are today.

What could I, a mere photographer, have to say that might be insightful to you? I haven't cured cancer, I haven't been nominated for a Pulitzer, or even discovered a magical mathematical theory to pull Mississippi from its economic slump. I can only share with you some thoughts on my experiences in today's workforce.

The experiences began when I first exercised what most of us do at some time in our lives – making our skills seem much greater than they actually are.

As a freshman, I went to Bill Sorrells and told him I wanted to work at *The Spectator*. I didn't know what I wanted to do; I just wanted to work at the paper.

He asked me if I knew how to take pictures... I told him yes. He sent me home with a Pentax K1000, and I spent the night learning how to use it. At any rate, I quickly learned what I wanted to do for a living – and the W helped me get there.

I graduated from the W 1998 with a diploma – a BS in communications – in my left hand, and a new 35mm camera in the right (a graduation gift to myself).

As far as I was concerned, I was ready for the world. I was confident in my ability as a photographer, and I was confident my professors here at the W had done their best to prepare me for my life as a journalist.

I spent the first six months doing just that – being a journalist. I was covering daily news, sports and feature assignments life was as I had imagined it. My first job out of school was with the *Starkville Daily News*, as a staff photographer and writer.

After three and a half months, I moved to the *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal* – a move from the third smallest paper in the state to the third largest.

It was in Tupelo that I had my first experience with the digital age. My managing editor handed me a digital camera (that was worth almost as much as my yearly salary), and told me to get comfortable with the camera. It was like *The Spectator* all over again. With this new technology, I was told to create a workflow and archive method for it – whatever that meant.

I thought to myself, I wasn't hired for this; I was hired to shoot pictures. They must be insane if they think I can pull this off.

This was my first lesson about the ever-changing job market.

I had a choice: I could sit there and complain that I wasn't hired for this. Or, I could take the bull by the horns, explore this emerging technology with enthusiasm and see where it could lead.

Within a few weeks I had made the conversion to digital photography and I haven't looked back since.

Then came the opportunity of a lifetime.

After volunteering some time as a photographer for the campaign of then Lieutenant Governor Ronnie Musgrove, I was offered a job as his staff photographer.

This offer came in January 2000, following his election to the office of Governor by the House of Representatives, in one of the closest elections in history.

Now, I had always admired the work of photographers such as P. F. Bentley and Diana Walker. Their focus, if you will, was on photographic essays and especially on the “behind-the-scenes” looks at government and politics. I saw my chance to do some of the same type of work.

And as one photographer friend of mine put it, “Wow! The ultimate long-term project!”

The position I hold now in Governor Musgrove's office affords me the luxury of creating some great photography. In many cases, the people or the places offer tremendous opportunities. When the USS Cole arrived in Pascagoula after being bombed in Yemen, I was there, on board, recording Musgrove's visit.

I photographed the King and Queen of Spain during their visit to Jackson last year (*hand signals w/ Musgrove*). I've photographed Al Gore, Morgan Freeman, Steven Ambrose, and Bob Dole. The subject matter offered by the job is never-ending.

But, like that first job in Tupelo, the expectations Governor Musgrove held for me went beyond simply taking pictures. Within a short time, the technical age caught up with me again and I became a webmaster and in-house graphic designer.

Our office maintains a website, which contains biographical information on the Governor, press releases, a public calendar, a photo gallery and links to other state websites. I update the website, usually on a daily basis, depending on the media flow from our office.

Along with the design of the website, any design pieces produced by our office, and sometimes from other executive agencies, start at my desk. The creative process is constantly challenging me, and the pressure behind the process drives me on a daily basis.

So, in addition to the photography skills I learned at the W, I'm constantly building new skills as well.

Governor Musgrove often comments that today's economy is seamless, borderless and global. No longer does an entire business unit have to be contained in one complex to function.

With increased digital technology, we now have the ability to do just about any job from any location.

The workplace is changing faster now than in any other time. Technology that was new when I graduated four years ago is now, for the most part, completely outdated. For many of you, that isn't necessarily a problem – you have grown up with technology and are comfortable in keeping pace with the advancements.

The bottom line is this – if you're caught standing still in today's workplace, you're going to find yourself standing behind.

Every day, there's something new to learn.
Take every opportunity to make the most of
what's offered to you, because it will pay off
down the line.

The W is a great school, but everything you
learn here won't last you throughout life.
Someone once wrote that "the world is so fast,
there are days when the person who says it can't
be done is interrupted by the person doing it."
Don't be the one who gets interrupted.

I've been very fortunate in my work since
leaving the W. I'm able to do something I
trained for here, something I truly love and
something I believe I do well.

Find the thing you love and do well, train for it, and work hard to make it happen.

It's a tight job market out there. The national recession and the events of September 11 have changed, in many ways, the dynamics of the job market. But, that's still no reason not to pursue your dreams. Life's too short for anything else.