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Graduated: 1994**

I attended QHS for my entire time in high school, from 1989-1994. I remember QHS as a place that did a very good job of educating us despite being under-resourced, and a staff who (for the most part) did everything they could to ensure that the students didn't notice that. I remember getting particularly sage advice on a number of occasions, particularly when my friend Gary MacDougall and I were encouraged to mount a campaign for Head Boy after being denied permission to campaign for an anonymous satirical candidate (as we believed that we had no chance of winning) – and Gary did indeed win! This led to what is probably my best memory from my years at QHS, which is what our student council achieved during my Secondary 5 year. We managed to deliver on a campaign promise to offer students exemptions from final exams in certain subjects if they performed well enough during the year; as well as establish the Class of '94 Award for the non-graduating student who contributed most to the school during that year. I am thrilled to see it is still being awarded.

I attended Champlain-St. Lawrence for CEGEP, and then moved to Montreal, where I got my BSc in Biochemistry from McGill. I applied to several universities throughout the country, but decided that a larger, research-intensive one like McGill was probably my best bet for what I wanted to do. In addition, attending McGill was more affordable than studying out of province would have been.

I hoped to go to the USA to do my doctoral research, but unfortunately I didn't get in to the graduate program that I was hoping to in San Francisco, so I stayed at McGill, where I pursued my doctoral studies in Neurological Sciences. Purely by accident, I started working on research that was relevant to multiple sclerosis (MS), and decided that I wanted to stay in this field. After getting my PhD, I knew that I wanted to do my postdoctoral research abroad, and because there were several research groups in the MS field in the United Kingdom, I focused my applications there. During my interviews, the best fit professionally was in Cambridge but I absolutely fell in love with Edinburgh. As fate would have it, I ended up in Edinburgh anyway. JK Rowling's mother died of MS, so Rowling donated a sizable sum of money to the MS Society and the University of Edinburgh to start a Multiple Sclerosis Research Centre there. My supervisor in Cambridge was hired to head up the Centre in Edinburgh, so our group moved up there.

I hate to name just one teacher because there were several who I was quite fond of, but Steve Andrea comes to mind in particular. In addition to being the aforementioned teacher who encouraged my foray into student politics, I recall a particularly memorable conversation that we had near the end of my secondary 5 year following what was probably my lowest point during my time at QHS, which is when I finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the vote for valedictorian/salutatorian. I was crushed; it was something that I had wanted to win very badly at the time but had campaigned for rather awkwardly. He encouraged me to not dwell on this setback, and to use it as a learning experience to help me to become both more self-aware and considerate.

Where I think it probably helped is that because the school was so small, the students and teachers did get to know each other more than we might have done in a larger school, and the staff was less intimidating because of it. I suspect that this helped me to not be afraid to approach my professors in university, which led to opportunities like working in a neuroscience

laboratory during the summer. This laboratory experience ended up being advantageous when I was looking for a graduate supervisor.

I figured out fairly early on during my undergraduate studies that I wanted to be a neuroscientist, both to learn more about how the brain works and develop novel approaches to treating neurological diseases. I always expected that I would end up as a university professor, and while I am very proud of what I accomplished during my doctoral and postdoctoral work (including being part of a team whose discovery led to an ongoing clinical trial for a multiple sclerosis drug), unfortunately that career path didn't work out for me. The competition for faculty positions is extraordinarily fierce, and while I got painfully close to getting one on three occasions, a combination of bad luck and what was, in hindsight, a poor strategic decision earlier in my career ended up being too much to overcome.

After experiencing some uncertainty about what I would do next during my last few years in Edinburgh, I landed on my feet with a position with a pharmaceutical company called MSD (who trade as Merck & Co. in Canada). The timing couldn't have been better, as just when I decided that I should make the transition from academia to industry, MSD announced that they were opening a Discovery Centre in London where they would be developing novel therapeutic to neurodegenerative diseases associated with aging. I applied, got the job, and now I'm leading a small team of scientists who are researching new ways to keep the brain healthy as it ages. What I find exciting about this position is that I still get to be creative, something that I had feared wouldn't be the case in industry. I'm also looking forward to developing new skills as I learn more about the drug discovery process.

I'm looking forward to exploring new areas of neuroscience and, I hope, ultimately playing a part in helping us all to age more healthily. More personally, I hope to eventually progress to a point where I'll be able to help make strategic decisions with regards to the therapeutic approaches and/or therapy areas that my employer will focus on.

As I understand it, QHS has changed quite a bit since I was there. Mine was perhaps the last generation that attended the school where many students had parents who both spoke English as their mother tongue. From what I hear, QHS students are now more likely to speak French at home and with each other, which means that helping its students be proficient in both of Canada's official languages is even more important part of the school's mission than it was before. But QHS has evolved as its students have, and this is very much to the school's credit; perhaps having less institutional inertia is a virtue of being a smaller school. The world will continue to change and QHS must continue to do what it has always done, and not be afraid to change along with it.

My advice to students would strike a similar tone: Be tenacious in pursuing your goals, but always have a plan B so that you're prepared to change direction if needed. Careers don't progress in as neat or linear a fashion as they once did, and you're likely to have several jobs during your adult life. A bit of self-awareness goes a long way, too. If you can figure out early in your career what aspects of your work keep you engaged and motivated, it'll help you to know what to look for when you make your next move.