OP/ED

Living in the real world isn't your father's job

A JMU alumnus comes back from the other side to share his advice about life after college

Breeze *Reader's View*

— Gabe Uhr

After graduating from JMU last May as an English major and with no real experience, I asked my dad to help me to prepare to find a job. He said, "Repeat after me; Would you like fries with that?" But seriously, as an aspiring writer in college, I wanted to write the great American novel, direct the respectable American film or forge a new consciousness for our race. Instead, after a summer of sitting on my backside, I sold out.

Your parents and professors are probably already trying to help prepare you for the working world, but the truth is your parents probably interviewed for jobs in polyester suits and your teachers never actually found work. In other words, this isn't your father's workplace.

This summer I heard from a reliable source (television) that in some parts of Virginia unemployment is as low as one percent.

For economically oblivious students, this means you can show up to any interview dressed as Batman and land a job. It also means that, if you don't like that job after a few months, you can quit and try your luck elsewhere with a Darth Vader costume.

Where else but in America, or possibly Canada, could you find such opportunity?

Here's something else your parents and teachers probably didn't mention: Your degree might have nothing to do with your next job. In fact, with unemployment so low, you don't necessarily need a degree to get a good job.

Every year I was in school, an alumni would send a letter to *The Breeze* complaining about the "real world" and telling kids to stay away from it for as long as possible. But I'm telling you to come out and get paid as soon as possible.

The money sure beats being a student, unless maybe you're a very successful drug dealer or bookie or something.

Anyway, my first step to finding a good job was signing up with a headhunter, which is a lot more legal than it sounds. Headhunters are like sports agents for the proletariat. They get you tons of interviews and it costs you nothing. If a company wants you, they pay the headhunter. I wish someone had told me all this stuff when I was a stupid college kid.

One skill you have to master is the big-time, real world interview, where interviewers will ask you tricky questions like, "What's your biggest weakness?"

"Well, gee. I'm a workaholic, I'm organized to the point of obsession, and I voted for Bill Clinton, twice."

"Great! You're hired and by the way, nice Batman outfit."

Now I work for a prestigious online corporation. Due to a nondisclosure agreement I signed, I'm not actually supposed to divulge the name, but I'll tell you that the initials are A-O-L. I'm not exactly sure what my title is or what I do (it has something to do with the Internet, I think), but I have half of a cubicle, a snazzy computer and my own phone.

Currently I'm employed on a temporary basis, but if they like me and if I don't steal anything, then I think this will turn into my first real job.

As a temp, I'm regarded slightly higher than than a sweatshop employee and I get better benefits, including free parking, free coffee and as many of those AOL 100 Hours Free disks as I can fit in my trunk.

Like I said, this isn't your father's workplace. My dad told me to get a haircut and buy some ties, but I work with a lot of young people and there is no dress code. The guy I work next to has dreadlocks and my mom was giving me a hard time for not tucking in my shirt? I tried to tell her that the work environment here is a lot like high school, although people smoke cigarettes outside instead of inside the bathroom.

Speaking of the bathrooms, they're much nicer than the ones at JMU. The stalls are clean, and there's even soap and urinal cakes. You know, they call them urinal cakes, but they don't taste like any cake I've ever eaten.

The one downside to working is commuting, which I could write an entire article about, but I'll sum up in two words: Traffic sucks.

I know this is a lot of radical new information and you probably have some concerns like, "I hate the Internet and Abercrombie and Fitch and I'm never gonna sell out to the man," but relax. Our parents all sold out. Better people than you have taken their checks and shut their mouths.

Some day soon you will see a Phish sticker on the back of a Lexus while commuting to an interview wearing a toga.

Gabe Uhr is a JMU alumnus who lives at home, in his parents' basement.