**#4. "Sports, Presidents and Public Relations"**

**The Question:** "What are the reasons you wish to pursue the graduate program and how does it relate to your career goals?"

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--Master of Arts in Strategic Public Relations   
University of Southern California

**The Catalyst** A burst blood vessel in the brain of my former university president provided the tragic high and low point in my young public relations career.

It began with a jarring call at six A.M. on a Sunday morning. The president of George Fox University-where I serve as assistant director of public information-had suffered a life-threatening stroke caused by a brain tumor. I was called in to deal with the news media. I served as the university spokesperson, doing all media interviews, writing press releases, and recording a daily voicemail line with health updates. The situation was made even more hectic by the fact that two of my university relations colleagues were out of the office.

I found myself hurting for our president and his family but caught up in the action. Even when the director of public information returned, I remained as the media spokesperson. A year later cancer claimed the life of our president, and I was asked to summarize the personality of this remarkable man in our alumni newspaper. (See writing sample.)

That was one experience which has led me to apply to University of Southern California for further training in public relations.

**Beyond Age 30** Although I am assistant director of public information, much of my time is consumed by my work as sports information director for George Fox's athletic program.

Not long ago, a co-worker asked me, "Are you going to be a sports information director when you're 65?" My instinctive reply surprised even myself: "I don't plan to be one when I'm 30." Since I'm 28 today, I've got two years to engineer a career change.

I feel I've gone about as far as I can in small-college sports information. Since 1992-when I moved from a 20-hour-a-week student position to a full-time employee-I've elevated the coverage of non- revenue sports by improving their publications and press releases.

When I began, media guides were produced only for men's basketball. Now all 13 varsity sports have a media guide. Many guides have received national honors. My women's basketball guide is perhaps my favorite. Created from scratch, it has been honored as the second best in the nation among colleges at our level of athletic competition. (I've enclosed the recent copy.)

With the assistance of student assistants, I produce weekly news releases for each sport. They often are used verbatim by local newspapers. While speaking about athletic media relations at a recent conference, a sports reporter from a Portland radio station declared George Fox the "King of News Releases."

At George Fox we strive to stand above the crowd. While most schools at our level photocopy their basketball programs, my office puts together a 12-page program that generates about $7,000 in advertising revenue.

This year, I supervise a staff of up to seven students who assist me in stat keeping, ticket selling, ad selling, news release writing and office work. I also recruit and manage about a dozen volunteers to staff games during basketball season.

I enjoy my job. I like working with my student assistants and seeing them mature as writers and as persons. It's fun to be part of the "team" with coaches and student-athletes. I still find my palms sweaty in the ninth inning of a tight baseball game, but the amount of coverage available to small colleges is frustratingly small. So much work for so little return.

**Stepping Outside the Sports Arena** Although I often find myself consumed with the promotion of my athletic department, I don't want to be pigeon-holed as a sports fanatic.

After earning a number of state awards as a high school trumpet player, I received a music scholarship at George Fox. I (OVER) continue to play occasionally at weddings and church services and teach lessons.

The death of a college roommate from leukemia led me to volunteer at a camp for kids with cancer run by the American Cancer Society. For the past six summers, I've been known as the bugle-blowing counselor "Mr. Toad."

**My Destination** I still tell people I don't know what I want to be when I grow up, but I'd like it to be in the public relations field. I believe I have the talent for it.

I was recently honored with the "Rising Star" award in the field of communications by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District VIII. It's an award given to professionals in their first five years in the field. The district is made up of development, alumni and public relations professionals at educational institutions in five states and six Canadian provinces. George Fox University-with 2,300 students-is one of the smallest colleges in CASE.

I take an active role in George Fox's weekly university relations meetings where we discuss potential news stories and a wide variety of PR issues. Topics have ranged from: "How can we improve internal communication on our campus intra net system?" to "What do we put in our alumni newspaper when one of our newly admitted freshmen has been arrested for a double homicide?"

I get a thrill out of trying to capture the interest of the news media with a story tip and have achieved local and national success. U.S. News & World Report magazine used one of my submissions about a unique George Fox campus tradition in its annual college ranking guide.

Although I don't believe I want to be a full-time writer, I consider writing one of my strengths. My story about a record-setting female pole vaulter this summer was used by the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAJA) in the inaugural edition of its Internet magazine NAJA News. (See writing sample.) Another feature about a women's basketball senior citizen fan club received a national award from the College Sports Information Directors Association.

An Itch to Explore: After 11 years as a student and administrator at George Fox, I feel very comfortable here, but I want to broaden my horizons. It's an itch. Perhaps I picked it up from my father, who packed my family up when I was 12 and took us to live in Brazil for a year. Twenty countries later, I'm still hungry to explore. In the last three summers, I've had coffee at the home of a Bosnian war widow; seen Belfast, Northern Ireland, during Protestant marching season; and crossed from Hong Kong to China with a relief worker to see her work on an island inhabited by lepers. Travel has opened my eyes to a world larger than a basketball game.

I enjoy the academic environment. Going back to school excites me. Education always has been a part of my life. My parents are both teachers. Since I have an interest in possibly following in their footsteps later in life, I would appreciate being considered for a teaching assistantship. (See separate application packet.) I believe I would be an excellent candidate since I have spent the last seven years editing sports and general news releases written by college students.

Why USC? I believe USC would provide me with excellent training in my profession. After finding its high ranking in the Gourman Report, I visited the school's Web site for more information. The idea of receiving hands-on training from L.A.'s PR professionals is extremely attractive. I contacted Alan MacDonald, who earned his master's degree in PR from USC, and current journalism graduate student Jennifer Prosser, to ask about their experiences. Both gave the school and the professors high marks.

Although I could see myself returning to a public relations position at George Fox, I'm intrigued by the variety of options that would be available to me after graduation. Alan MacDonald told me that USC stood for University of Social Connections. In addition to my current experience, a degree from USC would give me additional credibility. During my January visit to USC, I met with Tim Burgess and was impressed that the Annenberg School of Communications had its own career advising office.

I have done quite a bit of research on master's degrees in communications, but USC's public relations program was the first and only one to excite me. I am applying to no other program.

I do not go into this application process halfheartedly. This has been my passionate intention for over a year. In preparation for the cost of full-time graduate school, I became frugal. I decided to continue driving my 12-year-old car, and I moved out of a house where I rented alone to save costs in a shared duplex with four roommates. I feel that I am ready to perform in your program-mentally, financially, academically-and that I have honed the skills necessary to excel. I would like the opportunity to fulfill my capacity at USC

Thank you for considering my application.