

JOHN KING

COMMENCING AGAIN

I hold the graduation program above my face, and use it to shade my eyes from the sun as it comes slowly out from behind the clouds. For just a moment, I regret my impulsive agreement to "walk" with my classmates, but then I tune in again to the start of Commencement.

This is my third time to graduate from Rice University. The first had been as an undergraduate back in 1967, the second was when I received my MBA in 2006, and now I am receiving a Master of Liberal Studies degree. I would have skipped this graduation ceremony, except for one detail: the MLS Program is trying to grow, and wants to show its presence as the newest degree on campus. Even though I presented my Capstone and completed my graduation requirements back in November, when the emails started coming in from my classmates, pointing out to me that there were only eleven of us graduating and two would be out of the country, I quickly made my decision to send in my money, buy the cap and gown, and fly up from South Texas for graduation.

The one thing you can count on for a graduation ceremony on a Saturday in May in Houston is it will be hot. After a hundred and two of these ceremonies, the school has finally figured it out, and graduation started at 8:30 in the morning. This is fine by me, because it means I can sit here, listen to the speaker, have my degree conferred, and still get back to the apartment and change clothes in time for Liz and me to make the brunch service over at Local Foods.

Another thing different about this graduation is only Liz and I have come up to Houston. No kids, no parents, no friends, just a "being here, doing that" kind of a day.

The president of the university, Dr. LeBron, completes his introductory remarks, and then says: